

# **Got Books: How Librarians and Teachers Can Collaborate to Increase Reading Achievement Through Access to Books**

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## **BENEFITS OF CLASSROOM LIBRARIES: WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS**

*Large classroom and school libraries that provide ample collections of instructional-level books play a key role in literacy learning* (Mosenthal, et.al., 2001).

According to the International Reading Association's position statement (1999) entitled *Providing Books and Other Print Materials for Classroom and School Libraries*, a strong research base supports the need for books in the classroom. According to the research...

- access to an abundance of books within the classroom results in increased reading motivation and increased reading achievement (Guthrie, et al., 2000).
- an abundance of interesting books in the classroom promotes the use of comprehension strategies (Guthrie et.al.,1999).
- students in classrooms with [classroom] libraries read 50% more books than students in classrooms without them. (Morrow, 2003).
- students in classrooms with well-designed classroom libraries: 1) interact more with books, 2) spend more time reading, 3) demonstrate more positive attitudes toward reading, and 4) exhibit higher levels of reading achievement (NAEP, 2002).
- when classrooms provide access to a rich literacy environment, including books that represent a wide range of difficulty and genres, they can compensate for less-than-ideal home environments (Snow, et.al., 1991).
- books are a vital component of a print-rich classroom environment (Wolferberger, Reutzel, Sudweeks, & Fawson, 2004).
- students who have access to classroom collections and a centralized school library media center read more than students who have access to only a centralized school library media center or a classroom collection (Shoham, 2000).
- students exposed to real texts – books and stories – rather than short passages in basal readers perform better in reading comprehension (Wenglinsky, 2003).

The amount of print exposure and reading volume can account for cognitive differences among children and significant differences in their reading achievement (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998, 2003). When children have access to a rich and robust assortment of books, they read more frequently and widely, both for enjoyment and information. By reading widely and frequently, children...

- build their vocabulary and enhance their word recognition skills.
- develop familiarity with complex syntactic structures.
- expand their general background knowledge and domain specific knowledge.
- increase fluency.
- deepen their comprehension skills.
- develop positive reading attitudes.



## SCHOOL LIBRARY AND CLASSROOM ROOM COLLECTIONS

Research demonstrates that both school libraries and classroom libraries are needed to support literacy learning (Mosenthal, et.al., 2001). The classroom collection never supplants the school library collection, nor does the school library collection replace the classroom collection. Both share common purposes and goals:

- To promote reading for a variety of purposes: enjoyment, information, and exploration
- To develop and enhance language skills
- To support independent reading
- To foster and support life-long learning
- To enrich and support the curriculum and content standards

Although each type of collection works in similar ways to achieve these goals, important differences do exist.

<b>Classroom Collection</b>	←→	<b>School Library Collection</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students &amp; teacher in a specific classroom</li> </ul>	<b>USERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All staff and students of the school</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support reading &amp; writing instruction</li> <li>▪ Support instruction in other areas</li> </ul>	<b>USES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research/Inquiry</li> <li>▪ Support content-area instruction</li> <li>▪ Independent reading</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Materials to accommodate the span of reading levels represented in a specific classroom</li> <li>▪ Materials to support grade-specific content standards &amp; curricula</li> <li>▪ Books &amp; print materials predominate</li> <li>▪ Sets of titles for small group instruction/literature circles</li> <li>▪ Leveled readers &amp; trade books</li> <li>▪ Paperback books predominate</li> </ul>	<b>SCOPE OF COLLECTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Materials to accommodate the reading levels of all students</li> <li>▪ Materials to support the curricula and content standards for all grade levels represented</li> <li>▪ Wide range of materials: books, magazines, software, videos, CDs, multimedia, etc.</li> <li>▪ Diversity of formats: media and print</li> <li>▪ Hardback books predominate</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supports curricular &amp; instructional needs for a specific class of students</li> <li>▪ Supports independent reading practice</li> </ul>	<b>FOCUS OF COLLECTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supports curricular and instructional needs for the entire school</li> <li>▪ Supports students' personal interests</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Selected by teacher</li> <li>▪ Selection criteria based on curricular needs, student reading levels, reader appeal, and intended use</li> <li>▪ Acquired through non-school approved channels: book clubs, book fairs, bookstores, warehouse sales, donations, etc.</li> <li>▪ Purchased with personal funds rather than school/district funds – no budget provided</li> </ul>	<b>SELECTION AND ACQUISITION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Selected by school library media specialist in conjunction with teacher &amp; student recommendations.</li> <li>▪ Selections guided by professional reviews and school library media selection policy</li> <li>▪ Acquired through school approved channels: distributors and vendors</li> <li>▪ Purchased through district or school funds – budget provided</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Limited to students within the classroom</li> <li>▪ Immediate access</li> </ul>	<b>ACCESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Available to all students &amp; teachers</li> <li>▪ Circulation policy</li> <li>▪ Availability dependent on school library schedule</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Arrangement varies: tubs, bookshelves</li> <li>▪ Organization varies</li> <li>▪ Informal circulation procedures</li> <li>▪ Updated/weeded irregularly</li> <li>▪ No formal inventory process</li> </ul>	<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Established organizational system (Dewey Decimal System) for accessibility</li> <li>▪ Structured circulation policies</li> <li>▪ Updated/weeded regularly</li> <li>▪ Formal inventory procedures</li> </ul>



## WHAT MAKES A QUALITY CLASSROOM LIBRARY COLLECTION?

Because books are a vital component of a print-rich classroom environment [Wolfersberger, et.al., 2004; Hoffman et al, 2004], they are as integral to instruction as are textbooks and should not be viewed as optional resources. . But for the classroom library to be an effective tool in promoting literacy development for all students in the classroom, it must meet the following research-based guidelines for a quality classroom library:

### SIZE

While classroom libraries will vary in size and type of books, researchers recommend that the core collection include, at a minimum, 8 to 20 books per student, or 300 to 600 books [Fountas and Pinnell, 2000]. And at least one to two new books per student per year should be added to the core collection to replace lost and damaged books [International Reading Association, 1999]. To keep the library fresh and inviting for students, old and tattered books should be discarded or replaced on a regular basis.

### GENRES

Nonfiction books, including biography, autobiography, poetry, how-to books, concept books, identification books, photo-essays, and content-area informational books should comprise 40% to 60% of the titles. These books should promote inquiry, as well as enhance the curriculum and support content standards.

Reference books should comprise approximately 5% of the collection and include a variety of specialized encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases, almanacs, handbooks, and thesauruses.

The fiction books should represent a wide variety of authors, illustrators, themes, multicultural titles, and genres, including picture books, series books, beginning readers, wordless books, fairy tales, historical fiction, mystery, adventure, memoir, fantasy, science fiction, contemporary realistic fiction, and short stories.

There should be a greater number of picture books, beginning readers, and wordless books in the primary grade collections than in the upper grade collections; however, developmentally appropriate picture books should be included in upper grade collections.

### CONTEMPORARY AND CLASSIC TITLES

One-third to one-half of the books should have been published within the last five to ten years, as today's students prefer to read books that are relevant to their issues and in which they can see themselves and their situations.

### LEVELED BOOKS

There should be a balance of easy-to-read, just right, and challenging books. The reading levels of the books should range two to three grades above and two to three grades below grade level; however, a large portion of the books should be on or below grade level, as most will be read independently.

### BOOK SETS

A book set includes multiple copies of a single title. Book sets are used to support guided reading or to facilitate literature circles, as well as to encourage buddy reading. A book set may also include several individual titles on a specific topic or theme. Research indicates that when students read multiple books on the same topic back-to-back, comprehension is enhanced [Block, 2000].

### FORMATS

While books should comprise the majority of the materials in the collection, other print and non-print materials should also be represented, including magazines, newspapers, catalogs, comic books, posters, audio-books/listening centers, videos/monitor, computers, Internet access, computer software, and art/writing supplies.



## INDICATORS FOR AN EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM LIBRARY

### A. Size of the Collection

- The collection consists of more than 600 books.
- The collection contains more than 20 books per student.
- There is an ample supply of reading materials other than books: magazines, audio books, newspapers, computers with Internet access, software, catalogs, etc.
- There is an abundance of copies of popular titles for independent reading.
- There are numerous book sets on specific themes or topics.
- 50% or more of the books belong to the district and/or school and will remain in the classroom should the teacher leave.

### B. Genres and Types of Material

- 60% of the collection consists of nonfiction books representing a wide range of topics.
- There is a balance among the nonfiction genres: biographies, poetry, folktales, concept books, informational narratives, identification handbooks, photo essays, how-to books, etc.
- 5% of the titles are reference books, including atlases, encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauruses, almanacs, handbooks, etc.
- There is a balance among the types of fiction books: picture books, series books, chapter books, poetry, and wordless books.
- There is a balance among the fiction genres: mystery, historical fiction, fantasy, etc.
- There is a wide selection of non-book materials: magazines, newspapers, CDs, audio books, web sites, computer software, etc.
- The books represent a range of cultural and linguistic diversity.

### C. Condition and Currency of Materials

- 90% of the books are in excellent condition.
- 95% or more of the materials have been purchased new from first-hand sources: publishers, vendors, bookstores, etc.
- Worn, out-dated, unread, and unappealing materials are routinely weeded from the collection and discarded.
- At least 70% of the books have been published within the last 5 to 10 years.
- New materials are continuously added to the collection to keep it fresh and up-to-date.
- 3 books or more per student are added to the library each year.

### D. Reading Levels

- The reading levels span 3 grades above and 3 grades below the target grade level.
- The materials represent such a wide range of reading levels that every student can find multiple books at his/her independent and instructional reading levels.
- Leveled books comprise no more than 30% to 50% of the collection.

### E. Classroom Library Organization

- The space allocated for the classroom library is clearly defined and limited to one specific area of the room.
- The space is larger than 8' by 10' and located out of the traffic flow.
- The space can accommodate 6 or more students simultaneously.
- The space includes an area equipped with comfortable seating for independent reading: pillows, chairs, couches, etc.
- The space includes a variety of storage options (e.g. book shelves, tubs, book racks, magazine racks)
- The space includes multiple areas for book displays (e.g. book and magazine racks, display tables).
- The materials are organized in a logical manner and highly accessible to students.
- The books are clearly labeled and signage assists the students in finding appropriate books.
- Many of the books are shelved with their covers facing outward.

### F. Classroom Library Use

- Students use the classroom library to read for a variety of purposes throughout the school day.
- Students are encouraged to read outside of school and may check out books from the classroom library for this purpose.
- All students have structured time for independent reading during the school day.
- The teacher routinely monitors independent reading through a variety of activities, including book logs, reading conferences, and informal conversations with students about their reading.
- Students are encouraged to recommend books to each other.
- Students are provided with opportunities to talk about their reading in structured and informal activities.
- The teacher is very knowledgeable about children's and young adult literature and makes frequent book recommendations to students based on their interests and reading levels.
- The teacher conducts book talks several times a week.
- The teacher reads aloud daily.
- The teacher frequently uses books from the classroom library to enhance content-area instruction and literacy development.



## THE SCHOOL LIBRARIANS'S ROLE IN INCREASING READING COMPREHENSION

At the heart of inquiry-based learning is reading comprehension. If students cannot read and make sense of the resources they are using to inform their learning, they cannot grow as learners or readers. Reading comprehension impacts almost every aspect of learning in the school library media center. If school librarians are to increase student learning, they must assist students in becoming proficient consumers of text, regardless of the text format.

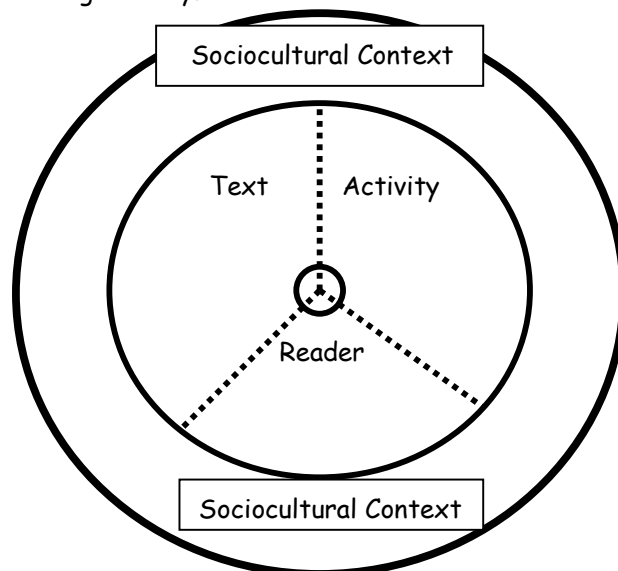
To facilitate reading comprehension in the media center and across the school, school librarians must educate themselves about the comprehension process. They must develop:

1. a deep understanding of the process and the skills necessary to comprehend text,
2. a repertoire of diverse comprehension strategies, and
3. a commitment to modeling and explicitly teaching comprehension strategies in the context of the school library.

### What Is Reading Comprehension?

Reading comprehension is the interactive process of simultaneously constructing and extracting meaning from written text, with text being defined as a wide range of materials from traditional books to the computer screen. Comprehension occurs in the transaction between the reader and the text (Rand Reading Study Group, 2001). Because comprehension is influenced by the sociocultural context in which it occurs, comprehension is an ever-changing process and contingent on the following factors.

1. the reader's knowledge, skills, and dispositions,
2. the content, structure, and difficulty of the text, and
3. the reading activity.



## **What do Good Readers Do?**

Successful comprehension requires a variety of requisite skills, knowledge, and dispositions.

Good comprehenders:

- have a purpose for reading,
- use what they know to understand what they read,
- become deeply engaged in what they are reading,
- use a variety of reading strategies to increase the likelihood of comprehension,
- adapt their reading strategies to different content and contexts,
- monitor their comprehension as they read,
- use "fix-up" strategies to repair their understanding when meaning breaks down, and
- reflect on their understanding and apply what they read to their own lives (NAEP, 1998).

### **What is the Role of the School Librarian in Improving Reading Comprehension?**

For some students, reading comprehension comes easily. For many others, it is a difficult and often confusing process. The meaning constructed from the same text can vary greatly among students because of the differences in cognitive development, skill level, culture, and motivation they bring to the comprehension process. Given the fact that comprehension can vary among students, school librarians can facilitate reading comprehension for all students through the following activities:

1. Helping students recognize the value of reading and their own potential as engaged readers by explicitly teaching and modeling the skills that engaged readers use. Engaged readers...
  - use prior knowledge to gain information from new material.
  - use a variety of reading strategies in a strategic way to gain information independently.
  - are internally motivated to read for information and pleasure.
  - interact with others to enhance comprehension and make gains in literacy development (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000).
2. Enhancing vocabulary and fluency development by reading aloud to students on a frequent basis.
3. Supporting students' acquisition of word and world knowledge by promoting wide reading for a variety of purposes across the content-areas and throughout the school day.
4. Encouraging students to connect and respond to their reading in a variety of ways that develop their metacognitive skills, including book discussions and writing.
5. Introducing students to various genres and text structures/features, so they can readily identify the characteristics of each genre and the structures of narrative and expository texts.

6. Explicitly teaching the strategies that students need to solve the problems they encounter in constructing meaning from text. These strategies include:
  - inferencing - the process of reaching conclusions based on information within the text combined with the reader's prior knowledge,
  - identifying important information - the process of finding critical facts and details in narrative and expository texts,
  - monitoring - the metacognitive process of identifying when meaning breaks down and using fix-up strategies to overcome comprehension problems while reading.
  - summarizing - the process of synthesizing important information from a long passage of text, and
  - question generating - the process of asking questions the reader wants answered from the text and integrating information as they read to answer the questions (Sweet, 1993).
7. Explicitly modeling the reading strategies and behaviors that proficient readers use to comprehend text before, during, and after reading.
8. Establishing and maintaining a resource-rich environment in the school library media center and in classrooms throughout the school. While effective reading programs are supported by effective school and classroom libraries [Cullian, 2000], research demonstrates that classroom libraries vary in size and quality within the school [Fractor, et.al, 1993]. If school librarians are to play a role in closing the reading achievement gap, they must work to level the playing field for all students by advocating for equitable access to a print rich environment in every classroom, as well as the school library. And they must assist teachers in building and organizing those print-rich classroom environments.
9. Modeling appropriate text selection techniques and strategies, so that all students know how to select texts that are developmentally appropriate for independent reading, whether reading for information, to perform a task, or for pleasure.
10. Creating a shared understanding for collaboration with teachers through a common language. The critical thinking skills of information literacy are the critical thinking skills of reading comprehension; however, the terminology of information literacy is different than the terminology of reading comprehension. When librarians use the terminology of information literacy, they create a disconnect for teachers who are unfamiliar with that terminology. By using the language of reading comprehension rather than the language of information literacy when talking to classroom teachers, librarians promote the likelihood of increased collaboration by making the intersects between information literacy and reading comprehension visible to teachers.
11. Providing professional development for teachers to increase their knowledge and skills to teach reading comprehension effectively to their students.

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