

The Case For Libraries and Librarians
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Stephen Krashen

"When I read about the way in which library funds are being cut and cut, I can only think that American society has found one more way to destroy itself." (Isaac Asimov, from his autobiography I Asimov)

The case for libraries is very strong.

Research shows that better public and school libraries are related to better reading achievement. The reason for this is obvious: Children become better readers by reading more (Krashen, 2004), and the library is a major source of books for children. ¹

Better Libraries > Better Reading Achievement

Study after study has shown that library quality (number of books available or books per student) is related to reading achievement at the state level (Lance, 1994), national level (McQuillan, 1998), and international level (Elley, 1992; Krashen, Lee and McQuillan, 2008), even when researchers control for the effects of poverty.

The library is especially important for children of poverty, because they have very little access to books at home (Feitelson and Goldstein, 1986), at school, and in their communities. The library is often their only source of books. Unfortunately, children of poverty are the least likely to have access to quality libraries (Smith, Constantino, and Krashen, 1996; De Loreto and Tse, 1999; Duke, 2000; Neuman and Celano, 2001).

Librarians

Providing access to books is necessary but is not sufficient: Not all children who have access to libraries take full advantage of them (Peck, 2000, Celano and Neuman, 2008). Keith Curry Lance's studies confirm that the presence of librarians and overall staffing contributes to reading achievement independent of other measures of library quality. The most obvious way librarians contribute is helping children find books, in addition to selecting books and other materials for the library, and collaborating with teachers. ²

Children of poverty are less likely to attend schools that have libraries with credentialed librarians (Celano and Neuman, 2001).

If America can increase funding for libraries and librarians, I can only think that America has found one important way to rebuild itself.

NOTES

(1) There is consistent evidence that children and adolescents get a substantial percentage of the books they read (from 30 to 99%) from classroom, school or public libraries (studies reviewed in Krashen, 2004).

(2) According to the recent Scholastic's 2008 Kids and Family Reading Report, when asked who gave them ideas about what books to read, forty-eight percent of the youngsters polled (ages 5 to 17) mentioned librarians. (Teachers, 57%, moms, 65%, dads, 43% and friends, 61%, were mentioned more frequently, and TV shows, the internet, other family members, and magazines were mentioned less frequently.) For a recent case history, see Adriance and Linder, 2008)

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