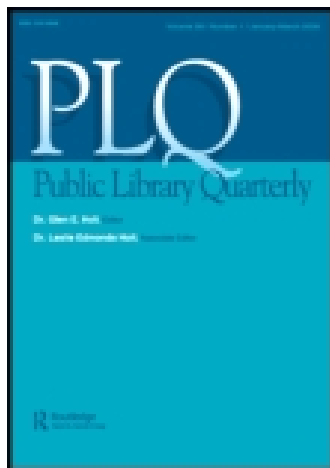


This article was downloaded by: [University of North Carolina]

On: 07 October 2014, At: 16:28

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Public Library Quarterly

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wplq20>

Summer Reading and the Potential Contribution of the Public Library in Improving Reading for Children of Poverty

Stephen Krashen^a & Fay Shin^b

^a Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California , E-mail:

^b Teacher Education program , California State University , Long Beach E-mail:

Published online: 12 Oct 2012.

To cite this article: Stephen Krashen & Fay Shin (2004) Summer Reading and the Potential Contribution of the Public Library in Improving Reading for Children of Poverty, Public Library Quarterly, 23:3-4, 99-109, DOI: [10.1300/J118v23n03_15](https://doi.org/10.1300/J118v23n03_15)

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J118v23n03_15

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Summer Reading and the Potential Contribution of the Public Library in Improving Reading for Children of Poverty

Stephen Krashen
Fay Shin

ABSTRACT. Research indicates that there is surprisingly little difference in reading gains between children from high- and low-income families during the school year. Rather, the difference is what happens in the summer. Children from high-income families make better progress in reading over the summer, and over time the summer advantage can account for social-class differences in reading achievement. There is a simple explanation for this difference: Children from high-income families read more over the summer, and they read more because they have more access to books, not only at home but outside the home as well. Studies show that public libraries offer inferior collections and services to children of poverty. An obvious way to increase access to books over the summer is to improve public library services. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

Stephen Krashen is Professor Emeritus, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California (E-mail: krashen@usc.edu).

Fay Shin is Associate Professor, Teacher Education program, California State University, Long Beach (E-mail: fshin@csulb.edu).

Address correspondence to: Stephen Krashen, 23852 Pacific Coast Highway, PMB 919, Malibu, CA 90265-4879.

Public Library Quarterly, Vol. 23(3/4) 2004
<http://www.haworthpress.com/web/PLQ>
© 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.
Digital Object Identifier: 10.1300/J118v23n03_13

KEYWORDS. Free voluntary reading, poverty, summer reading, access to books

The potential role of voluntary summer reading in closing the reading achievement gap has been neglected too long by educators, researchers, and policymakers. (Allington and McGill-Franzon, 2003)

***A STARTLING FINDING:
CHILDREN OF POVERTY GET WORSE IN READING
OVER THE SUMMER, NOT DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR***

It is well-known that children from high-income families do better in school than children from low-income families. In research studies Socio-Economic-Status (SES), whether measured by family income, parent education, or parent occupation, is usually the most powerful predictor of achievement, sometimes swamping all other factors (White, 1982).

Data reported in several studies lead, however, to a startling conclusion: children from high and low-income families appear to make similar gains during the academic year: The difference is what happens during the summer.

Table 1 below is based on data appearing in Barbara Heyns' book, *Summer Learning and the Effects of School*, published nearly thirty years ago. The children in her study lived in Atlanta and were seventh graders in the spring of 1972. A look at Table 1 shows that high and low SES children made similar gains during the academic year in word knowledge (vocabulary): the lowest SES white children gained eight months from Fall 1971 to Spring 1972 (.8 gain in Table 1), the high SES white children gained slightly less, 7.6 months. The results for African-American children are similar: the lowest SES group gained six months; the highest gained somewhat more, a little less than nine months, but the difference is not huge.

But now consider what happened during the summer, from Spring, 1971 to Fall, 1971. The lowest SES groups both did poorly compared to the high SES groups. The low-income white children actually lost three months during the summer, while the high-income white children gained nearly four months. In fact, this data shows that about half of the total gain made by the high SES group took place during the summer!

TABLE 1. Test of Word Knowledge

	Spring '71	Fall '71	Spring '72	school year gain	summer gain
National avg	5.8	6.1	6.8	0.7	0.3
Atlanta	4.95	5	5.64	0.64	0.05
White					
lowest SES	5.8	5.47	6.27	0.8	-.33
highest SES	6.87	7.24	8	0.76	0.37
Black					
lowest SES	3.93	3.89	4.44	0.61	-.02
highest SES	5.2	5.57	6.45	0.88	0.37

Adapted from: Heyns (1975); data from Table 3.2, p. 46

The data for African-American children is similar: low SES children were stagnant over the summer, while higher SES gained nearly four months, the same gain the higher SES white children made. Again, nearly half the gain made by the higher SES children occurred during the summer.

The Cumulative Effect

The summer advantage is cumulative, that is, it happens every summer and over time it gets larger and larger. Table 2 is from Entwistle, Alexander and Olson's book, *Children, Schools and Inequality*. The top part of the table presents data similar to Heyns': There is little difference among groups with respect to gains made during the school year in literacy development. The bottom half shows, first of all, that Heyns' discovery was correct: High SES children gain more during the summer. It also shows the cumulative effect: after five years, the high SES children are far ahead, due primarily to what happened during the summer.¹

What Causes the Difference over the Summer? READING

There is a simple explanation for the differences between high and low SES children in reading during the summer: High SES children read more. And they read more because they have more access to books.

Heyns (1975) provided early support for this explanation, reporting that for the students she studied, the number of books they said they read over the summer was a significant predictor of fall reading scores, even when other important factors were taken into consideration, such as the

TABLE 2. The Cumulative Difference: Reading Comprehension: Baltimore City Schools

School year	Low SES	Mid SES	High SES
year 1	56.7	68.6	60.8
year 2	48	45.4	40.1
year 3	31.2	35.6	33.7
year 4	33.1	41	31.7
year 5	24.3	29.1	24.6
total gain	193.3	219.7	190.9
summer			
year 1	-3.7	-2.1	15
year 2	-3.5	1.8	8.5
year 3	1.6	2.5	14.9
year 4	4.5	1.6	10.4
year 5	1.9	-4.1	-2.2
total gain	0.8	-.3	46.6

SES: Low = mean mother's schooling = 10 years (n = 327); Mid = 12 years (n = 165); High = 14.6 years (n = 161) Year 1 = end of first grade
Adapted from: Entwistle, D., Alexander, K. and Olson, L. (1997) (Page 34, Table 3.1)

spring reading score (the strongest predictor) and factors reflecting SES (family income, parent education).

J. Kim (2003) found similar results with sixth graders more than twenty-five years later, reporting that those who read more over the summer did better on a reading test given in the fall. Like Heyns, Kim also controlled for a number of other factors (gender, poverty, ethnicity, attitude/motivation, whether child was emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, speaker of ESL).

Kim estimated that reading five books over the summer results in a gain of about three normal curve equivalents points on standardized reading tests. That's a lot. Consider what would happen with an additional ten books over the summer, continued for seven years: a gain of 42 points, easily enough to account for social class differences.

Other Research on Reading

The idea that reading more over the summer results in better reading achievement is of course not an exotic idea. It agrees not only with common sense but also with a vast research literature: One of the best-estab-

lished findings in all of educational research is that recreational reading, sometimes known as “free voluntary reading” is good for literacy development. There is very strong evidence, in fact, that free voluntary reading is responsible for much of our reading comprehension ability, our writing style, our vocabulary, our spelling ability and our ability to handle complex grammatical constructions.

The evidence comes from a variety of sources. A number of studies confirm that students who participate in in-school free-choice recreational reading programs, such as sustained silent reading, make at least as much progress in reading as those in regular language arts programs, and usually do better, especially if the programs last for an academic year or longer (Krashen, 2001). There are also compelling case histories of people who made remarkable gains in literacy through self-selected reading alone (Krashen, 1993). In addition, several studies show that readers can gain a small but reliable amount of vocabulary and spelling knowledge by reading an unfamiliar word in a comprehensible context only one time. Given enough reading, this small increment can account for adult vocabulary size (Nagy, Herman, and Anderson, 1985; Swanborn and de Glopper, 1999).

Finally, correlational studies similar to those carried out by Heyns and Kim also show that those who read more, read better (Krashen, 1988).

WHY SOME CHILDREN READ MORE: ACCESS TO BOOKS

There is a clear reason why children from higher-income families read more over the summer: They have far more access to books, and more access to books means more reading.

Poor Children Have Far Less Access to Books

This statement has been confirmed in several studies, studies that show enormous differences between the amount of print available to low and high poverty children. It is well-established that children of poverty have much less to read at home (McQuillan, 1998). After a review of books available in bookstores, school libraries, and public libraries, Neuman and Celano (2001) concluded that “. . . children in middle-income neighborhoods were likely to be deluged with a wide variety of reading materials. However, children from poor neighborhoods would have to aggressively and persistently seek them out” (p. 15).

The lack of access to books in public libraries is especially important and relevant to this discussion. In addition to Neuman and Celano's work, several other studies have confirmed the depressing fact that public libraries in the United States offer inferior collections and services to children of poverty. Di Loreto and Tse (1999) found substantial differences in the children's section of public libraries in high-income Beverly Hills and working class Santa Fe Springs. The Beverly Hills library contained far more children's books and magazines, and had an impressive number of staff members dedicated to children's literature, while the Santa Fe Springs library had no staff dedicated exclusively to the children's section (Table 3). Smith, Constantino, and Krashen (1999) also reported that children living in low-income areas had public libraries with inferior book collections.

More Access to Books Results in More Reading

Access to books does not guarantee reading, but there is no question that more access to books is related to more reading. It is certainly true that "you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink." But first we must make sure the water is there. And when it is, horses always eventually drink.

Children who read more have more books in the home (Morrow, 1983; Neuman, 1986; Greaney and Hagarty, 1987; McQuillan, 1998a; Kim, 2003; Lao, 2003). The presence of more books in classroom libraries (Morrow and Weinstein, 1982, Morrow, 1982), and in school libraries (Cleary, 1939, Gaver, 1963, McQuillan, 1998; Houle and Montmarquette, 1984) is related to greater amounts of recreational reading.

For children from low-income families, public libraries are the only obvious source of books during the summer, and research confirms that more access to books in public libraries results in more reading. Heyns (1978) reported that children who live closer to public libraries read more. Kim (2003) reported a strong relationship between the amount of reading done over the summer by fifth graders and whether students said it was easy to access books at a library.

One of Lao's reluctant readers ("Eileen," in Lao, 2003, described above) who had grown up in a print-poor environment at home ("books were scarce at home . . . practically non-existent," p. 15), became a reader thanks to the public library. In the fourth grade, she discovered Judy Blume's books, and her reading "took off from there" (p. 16).

TABLE 3. Comparison of Children's Sections of Public Libraries in Two Communities

	population	books	children's magazines	staff in children's section
Beverly Hills	32,000	60,000	30	12
Santa Fe Springs	16,000	13,000	20	0

Adapted from: Di Loreto and Tse 1999

IMPLICATIONS

So far, we see that:

1. The difference between high and low poverty achievement may be what takes place during the summer. It is not yet clear that summer fully accounts for differences in achievement, but it is clear that summer contributes a great deal to it.
2. The crucial activity that occurs during the summer, the activity that causes the difference in growth in literacy, is recreational reading.
3. Children read more when they have more access to books. Children of poverty have far less access to books.

A clear implication is that we need to increase access to books, especially for children of poverty and especially over the summer. *The obvious way to do this is to improve public library services. And the most obvious aspect is simply to make sure libraries are open when children can use them, filled with good books, with user-friendly policies.*

Some public libraries are making efforts to encourage summer reading, but are, in our opinion, not doing the obvious. Instead of increasing access to good books, they promote "summer reading clubs," offering recognition and prizes to children who read a certain number of books and complete book reports.

Goosebumps Summer

If we are interested in "summer programs," they should, we suggest, provide a book flood over the summer directed at students who otherwise have little access to books. This has been attempted only once, to our knowledge.

Shin (2001) examined the impact of a six-week self-selected reading experience among 200 sixth graders who had to attend summer school because of low reading proficiency. About 30% of each group was limited English proficient. Students attended class four hours per day; during this time, approximately two hours were devoted to self-selected reading, including 25 minutes in the school library. The district invested \$25 per student on popular paperbacks and magazines, with most books purchased from the *Goosebumps* series. In addition, about 45 minutes per day was devoted to reading and discussing novels such as *Where the Red Fern Grows* and *The Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Comparison children followed a standard language arts curriculum during the summer.

The readers gained approximately five months on the Altos test of reading comprehension and vocabulary over the six-week period, while comparisons declined. On the Nelson-Denny reading comprehension test, the summer readers grew well over one year. On the vocabulary section of the Nelson-Denny, however, the groups showed equivalent gains.

In view of the many recent moves to force less proficient readers to go to summer school to increase their reading ability, Shin's program clearly offers a more pleasant and more effective alternative to the usual diet of drills and exercises.

In addition to the practical implications, the summer learning research also confirms that recreational reading is highly effective in promoting growth in literacy. This may seem obvious to many readers, but it apparently is not to decision-makers. We hear pious pronouncements about the need for improved literacy among low-income children, but there is little or no effort to make sure they have access to books.

POSTSCRIPT: IS ACCESS ENOUGH?

They Like to Read

Access to books in any of the sources mentioned above (home, school, public library) will be extremely helpful, and will be enough to guarantee the establishment of a reading habit for most children. Children like to read (Krashen and Von Sprecken, 2000; Von Sprecken and Krashen, 1998; Krashen, 2001), and given the chance, they will. "Reluctant readers" are, most of time, children with little access to books. Worthy and McKool (1997) studied eleven sixth graders who "hated to read." Nine of the eleven had little access to interesting reading material

at home, in the school library, in their classroom libraries, and none had visited the public library in the year before the interview. The two students who had access to interesting reading were the only two “who read with any degree of regularity” (p. 252). Ironically, even though all were described as reluctant readers, all appeared to be quite enthusiastic about some kinds of reading, especially “light reading,” (e.g., comics and *Goosebumps*).

A few children, however, will not read, even if surrounded by books. In a study of children’s after-school activities, Pack (2000) identified a group of children he labeled “library latch-key kids,” children whose parents used the public library as a “free source of after-school care” from one to six hours per day. Pack reported that the children did “little more than ‘hang out’ at the library” (p. 166). They did not read, but passed the entire time in socializing with other children and playing on the computer. Providing access to books is thus a necessary, but not sufficient condition for encouraging reading.

There has been surprisingly little research on methods of encouraging reading, but some generalizations can be made: children read more when they see others reading, and when they are read to, and when they have access to truly interesting reading material (Krashen, 1993). There are, in addition, times when active encouragement to read is effective: when students have the ability to read, but may not realize it, or may not realize what is available to them and how interesting it is (Shin, in press).

NOTE

1. Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay and Greathouse (1996) reviewed a number of studies on summer vacation learning; their results are in the same direction as those of Entwistle et al. and Heyns, but appear to be less spectacular. Cooper et al. reported that middle class children lost 1.4 months over the summer (based on 14 studies) and children from low-income families lost 2.7 months (based on 10 studies) in reading comprehension. This is a difference of only .7 months, less than one month. In word identification, the difference was larger, with students from middle-income families gaining 1.3 months and students from low-income families losing 1.2 months, a difference of 2.5 months, which is substantial. The studies used in the Cooper et al. review, however, did not directly compare high and low-income children: Some were studies of high-income children and some were studies of low-income children. The Entwistle et al. and Heyns studies are the only ones available to us that compared different levels of poverty directly. Methodological differences and difference in locations make it more difficult to compare results across studies.

REFERENCES

- Allington, R., & McGill-Franzen, A. (2003). The impact of summer setback on the reading achievement gap. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(1), 68-75.
- Cooper, H. Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. 1996. The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(3), 227-268.
- Di Loreto, C., & Tse, L. (1999). Seeing is believing: Disparity in books in two Los Angeles area public libraries. *School Library Quarterly*, 17(3), 31-36.
- Garan, E. (2002). *Resisting Reading Mandates*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gaver, M. (1963). *Effectiveness of Centralized Library Service in Elementary Schools*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Greaney, V., & M. Hegarty. (1987). Correlations of leisure time reading. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 10, 3-20.
- Houle, R., & C. Montmarquette. (1984). An empirical analysis of loans by school libraries. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 30, 104-114.
- Ivey, G., & K. Broadus. (2001). "Just plain reading": A survey of what makes students want to read in middle school classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly* 36(4): 350-377.
- Kim, J. (2003). Summer reading and the ethnic achievement gap. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, April 21, 2003.
- Krashen, S. (1988). Do we learn to read by reading? The relationship between free reading and reading ability. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Linguistics in Context: Connecting Observation and Understanding*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, pp. 269-298.
- Krashen, S. (1993). *The Power of Reading*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.
- Krashen, S. (2001). More smoke and mirrors: A critique of the National Reading Panel report on fluency. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83, 119-123.
- Krashen, S. & Von Sprecken, D. (2002). Is there a decline in the reading romance? *Knowledge Quest*, 30(3), 11-17.
- Lao, C-Y. (2003). Prospective teachers' journey to becoming readers. *New Mexico Journal of Reading*, 32(2), 14-20.
- McQuillan, J. (1998). *The Literacy Crisis: False Claims and Real Solutions*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Morrow, L. (1983). Home and school correlates of early interest in literature. *Journal of Educational Research*, 75, 339-344.
- Morrow, L., & C. Weinstein. (1982). Increasing children's use of literature through program and physical changes. *Elementary School Journal*, 83, 131-137.
- Nagy, W., P. Herman, & R. Anderson. (1985). Learning words from context. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23, 6-50.
- Neuman, S. (1986). The home environment and fifth-grade students' leisure reading. *Elementary School Journal*, 86, 335-343.
- Neuman, S., & D. Celano. (2001). Access to print in low-income and middle-income communities. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36(1), 8-26.
- Pack, S. (2000). Public library use, school performance, and the parental X-factor: A bio-documentary approach to children's snapshots. *Reading Improvement*, 37, 161-172.

- Shin, F. (2001). Motivating students with Goosebumps and other popular books. *CSLA Journal* (California School Library Association), 25(1), 15-19.
- Shin, F. Should we just tell them to read? The role of direct encouragement in promoting recreational reading. *Knowledge Quest* (in press).
- Smith, C., Constantino, R. & Krashen, S. (1996). Differences in print environment for children in Beverly Hills, Compton and Watts. *Emergency Librarian*, 24(4), 4-5.
- Swanborn, M., & K. de Glopper. (1999). Incidental word learning while reading: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 69(3), 261-285.
- Von Sprecken, D., & S. Krashen. (1998). Do students read during sustained silent reading? *California Reader*, 32(1), 11-13.
- White, K. (1982). The relation between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. *Psychological Bulletin*, 91, 461-481.
- Worthy, J., & S. McKool. (1996). Students who say they hate to read: The importance of opportunity, choice, and access. In D. Leu, C. Kinzer, & K. Hinchman (Eds.), *Literacies for the 21st century: Research and Practice*, Chicago: National Reading Conference, pp. 245-256.

Received: 02/07/04

Revised: 03/31/04

Accepted: 06/09/04