

Running Head: SIXTEEN BOOKS WENT HOME TONIGHT

Sixteen Books Went Home Tonight: Fifteen Were Introduced by the Teacher

Danny Brassell

Teacher Education Department

California State University – Dominguez Hills

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Ms. Washington's Reading Dilemma

In a corner of Ms. Washington's third-grade classroom, beside the "time-out" desk for disruptive students, is a bookcase with four cobweb-infested shelves. On the top shelf one can find a couple of worn copies of "Stone Soup" leaning against a set of World Book encyclopedias that is missing volumes for "F," "P" and "W-X-Y-Z." The second shelf leans to the right, as the weight of a couple of dictionaries is too much for it to bear. A few picture books and three-year old newspapers fill the third shelf, while the bottom shelf houses the largest cache of reading materials: a group of fairly new chapter books. Excluding the reference books and newspapers, Ms. Washington's "classroom library" supplies her 20 students with about 50 books.

Ms. Washington wants to create a classroom atmosphere that promotes reading among her third graders without absorbing too much class time. While her school district maintains a comprehensive reading program that often lasts 3-4 hours per day, the district program does not facilitate routine read-alouds or opportunities for students to read self-selected texts. Ms. Washington's students can sound-out letters and identify words, and most are reading near grade-level. Ms. Washington, however, believes her students have grown frustrated by many of the drills and exercises they perform in her class each day. She, too, admits that she is tired of practicing reading skills. "I want to make reading more enjoyable," she says. "Our district's program does a superb job of improving students' reading skills, but my babies never seem to enjoy reading."

A student in one of my evening language acquisition courses, Ms. Washington asks me how she can improve her classroom library. Together, we ask BookEnds

(www.bookends.org), an area non-profit agency that collects books for schools, to donate approximately 350 books to her classroom. In return she agrees to monitor the impact of the books on her students' reading attitudes. Ms. Washington decides to add two components missing from her district's curriculum: (1) she will read aloud to her students at least once a day for approximately 10 minutes and (2) she will provide her students with 10 minutes a day of recreational reading time. By focusing her attention on these two issues, Ms. Washington believes that she can create reading activities that are manageable for a classroom teacher to operate and assess without interfering with her other curricular instructional time. Her hope is that the program will not only work for students but be easy enough for other teachers to duplicate if it proves to be effective.

Increasing Book Access

Krashen (1993) has quoted the adage that "it is certainly true that you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink," but, he has pointed out, "we must make sure the water is there" (p. 33). That being said, it follows that in order to get students to read more, one of the first steps is to ensure that students have something to read.

Elementary schools play a critical role in ensuring access to reading materials.

Cunningham and Stanovich (1988) have argued that students who are exposed to reading at a younger age are more likely to make reading a lifetime habit, which, they have argued, inevitably improves students' reading abilities.

A number of recent studies (e.g., Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1993; Brassell, 2000; Neuman, 1999; Purcell-Gates, McIntyre & Freepon, 1995) have found that increased book access positively affects students' reading habits. One of the best ways to promote book access is in the classroom. Palmer, Codling and Gambrell (1994), in fact,

found that when asked where they obtain the majority of the books they read, third and fifth graders in the study overwhelmingly reported that they relied on their classroom libraries for such materials. In effect, the greater access students have to reading materials, the more they will read (McQuillan, 1998).

Promoting Reading Beyond Access

While providing students with increased access to books has been shown to be a pivotal and necessary step in motivating students to read, it has also been shown not to be a sufficient measure in promoting greater literacy skills (Krashen, 1993). Beyond access to books, Trelease (1995) has argued that reading aloud to children is one of the best ways to promote reading to them. In addition, reading aloud to children has been considered by many researchers to be the single-most important activity in developing a child's literacy (Routman, 1991; Wells, 1986).

Worthy (1996) has found that many low-SES students, in particular, do not have reading materials at home that interest them. Educators, therefore, need to play an important role in providing high-interest materials (Madrigal, Cubillas, Yaden, Tam & Brassell, 1999; Neuman, 1999; Worthy, 1996). Unfortunately, Allington (1994) has found that most classrooms do not offer the types of books students are curious about reading. This is a mistake, Worthy (1996) has argued, as many librarians agree that one of the single greatest ways to improve students' reading habits is by allowing them to read books that interest them. In addition, while it has been argued that allowing students to read materials that interest them impedes their exposure to more "academic literature," research (Krashen, 1993) has indicated the contrary: increased exposure to high-interest

reading materials (what are often considered to be “light-reading”) assists students in developing the skills to read more complicated, academic-oriented texts.

Finally, the importance of allowing students time to read, Trelease (1995) has argued, cannot be understated. For example, Anderson (1996) found that the number of minutes students are allowed to read each day is an important predictor of their future reading achievement. The findings of Cunningham and Stanovich (1988) also supported this premise. Flippo (1998) surveyed reading experts and found that there was universal agreement on the importance of giving students time to read. By providing class time (Sanacore, 1990) for reading self-selected resources, the teacher increases the potential for generating habitual reading among both poor and good readers.

The 20-Minute Reading Workout

Ms. Washington is a second-year teacher in an inner-city area of southern California where the majority of students are low-SES, second language learners who qualify for free breakfast and lunch programs. Her elementary school houses over 1200 students attending kindergarten to fifth grade. While her school tests among the lowest in her district, Ms. Washington teaches 20 students who all read at or near grade-level.

With the help of BookEnds, Ms. Washington creates a more inviting classroom library by: (1) installing a new carpet in her “library corner;” (2) adding colorful shelves and stuffed animals; and, most importantly, (3) providing approximately 400 books ranging from basic picture books to more complicated chapter texts. At the end of a painted rainbow shelf, a large, stuffed Paddington Bear holds a poster board with all of Ms. Washington’s students’ names. Each student’s name is on a library pouch so that they may place the library card of the book they check-out in the pouch. A nearby milk

crate houses individual folders students use to track their reading progress by writing the names of each book they read in class and at home.

Each day Ms. Washington reads aloud a picture book or a chapter from a longer book to students for approximately 10-15 minutes after their lunch recess. She believes that is the ideal time for reading to her students, as it might calm them down for the afternoon. Some days she manages to read more than one book to the class, and often she reads aloud to students at additional times throughout the day. Before and after her read alouds, the students and Ms. Washington discuss what they like and dislike about various books. In addition, after the first month of her intervention, Ms. Washington begins to offer additional “reading time” and “teacher read-aloud time” as incentives to her class for good behavior, punctual attendance and 100 percent completed daily homework. At a minimum, Ms. Washington reads aloud to students for 10 minutes a day and permits her students to read on their own for 10 minutes a day.

To determine what effect, if any, the number of books made available to students has on their recreational reading, Ms. Washington gradually introduces books to her classroom library. A total of 50 books are available to students for the first month, then 200 books for weeks 5 and 6, 300 books for weeks 7 and 8 and 400 books for the final two weeks of the study. Similarly, Ms. Washington wants to observe what impact, if any, her daily read-alouds have on students’ recreational reading. Therefore, she does not read aloud to her students for the first two weeks of her reading program, but then she tries to read at least five books (or chapters from different books) a week to students and make those books available in her classroom library. She places blue stickers on the library cards of the books she reads aloud to her class and tabulates the total number of

books students check-out each day and the total number of library cards that boast blue stickers. Table I displays the total number of books Ms. Washington makes available to her students in her classroom library each week and the total number of those books she reads aloud to her class.

(INSERT TABLE I HERE)

Students are required to keep a “reading log” of the books they read during “free reading time” every day. On most days free reading time takes place during the last ten minutes of class. After their 10 minutes of free reading time, Ms. Washington asks students to write the title of the book they read and the date they read it. In addition, if students wish to take a book home, they simply remove the library card from the book, write their name and the date on the card and place it in their pouch on Paddington Bear’s lap. The “student of the day” then delivers the poster to Ms. Washington’s desk. Students keep separate reading logs for books they check-out from the classroom (they are permitted to check-out one book per day), and Ms. Washington tallies the number of cards with and without blue stickers.

Ten Weeks Later

Reflecting on her new “reading workout routine,” Ms. Washington admits that her improved classroom library has improved her students’ views of reading.

“At first, some of the kids would talk or sleep or mess around whenever I read to the class,” she said. “But after the kids became accustomed to me reading after recess, they began to settle down and pay attention.”

Ms. Washington also says she has seen a change in how her students behave during read-alouds. For example, her students have turned from whining about reading

to asking when she will read to them. In some cases she has even had to play referee and determine which students can take particular books home on a given night. She observes that students will often argue over who gets to take the book home that night that she reads to them that day.

“I have found that the books that kids asked a lot of questions about during my readings are usually the most popular to take home,” she says. “It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see that the books I read to the class are the most popular titles, and those are the ones the kids are anxious to show their families.”

Table II looks at the number of books students have checked-out from their classroom library. Students at the beginning of Ms. Washington’s reading intervention had only 50 books to choose from, and nearly 40 percent of the students (8.2 out of 20) opted to check-out books to take home. By the tenth week of the intervention, however, the students have 400 books to choose from, and nearly twice as many (15.6 out of 20) are checking-out titles.

(INSERT TABLE II HERE)

Table II also suggests that Ms. Washington’s daily read-alouds have gradually impacted what titles the students are choosing to read. While approximately three out of the 9 students who checked-out books in Week 3 were taking home books that Ms. Washington had read to the class, nearly all of the students (14.8 out of 15.6) are checking-out “read aloud” books by the final week of the intervention. Table III lists the titles of books that were checked-out by at least four different students during the course of the ten-week study. While students display a variety of tastes, Table III shows that the most popular titles in the library were those introduced by the teacher.

(INSERT TABLE III HERE)

A New Dilemma

Ms. Washington wanted to create a reading intervention in her classroom that promoted increased recreational reading among her students and was simple enough for a busy teacher like her to monitor. She has found that providing students with increased access to books is an important first step in improving student interest, but she has also observed a variety of other behaviors.

Ms. Washington's students have responded well to her reading workout because she believes in it. She feels that her determination to provide a better classroom library can be sensed by her students, and – therefore – they have taken a more significant interest in it. Her read-alouds and book discussions form an important bonding time between Ms. Washington and her students, as teacher and students can share their own experiences and relate them to the books they are reading. Finally, by viewing reading time as a reward rather than a punishment, Ms. Washington's students have learned to value reading as an activity all on its own. All of these observations are consistent with previous research that documents the importance of activities such as reading aloud to students, discussing books, providing high-interest books and allowing students the time to read self-selected books for themselves (Krashen, 1993; McQuillan, 1998).

Ms. Washington considers herself very fortunate to have received so much support from BookEnds, but she feels that it is a shame that schools do not provide teachers and students with higher-quality resources. Access to high-quality reading materials is the key to a high-quality reading program.

“I hope that other teachers can take advantage of local community organizations and other agencies so that they can provide their students with adequate classroom libraries,” she said. “The easiest way to get kids to read is to have lots of nice books around.”

Ms. Washington has shown again that access to books is a crucial precursor to her students’ reading. While this may seem to be obvious, her elementary school and school district do not provide adequate reading resources to classroom teachers. As Ms. Washington points out, her classroom library is only made possible through the support of a local non-profit agency whose support she solicited on her own.

In addition, Ms. Washington has also shown that classroom teachers can support a positive reading environment by: (1) routinely reading aloud to students and (2) providing students time to choose and read books for themselves. While several books have been written that are dedicated to these premises (see Krashen, 1993; Trelease, 1995), neither Ms. Washington’s elementary school nor school district requires teachers to spend time reading aloud to their students or allow students to read on their own. In fact, Ms. Washington’s school mandates 30 minutes a day of “test preparation” time for students in order to boost their standardized test scores in reading. As Ms. Washington has discovered, more time devoted to boosting students’ interest in reading might have a more positive effect on their reading attitude and aptitude.

In a corner of Ms. Washington’s third-grade classroom is a bright, colorful area with cushions, stuffed animals and plenty of books. One boy changes the cassette in the tape player, while another writes his name on a library card. Two little girls giggle, as they hide their faces behind a large copy of “Curious George.”

Ms. Washington's classroom library is busy.

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Table I

Total Number of Books Made Available in Ms. Washington's Library & The
Total Number of Books She Read Aloud to Her Students

	<u>Total Number of Books in Classroom Library</u>	<u>Total Number of Books Read Aloud by Teacher</u>
Week 1	50	0
Week 2	50	0
Week 3	50	5
Week 4*	50	10
Week 5	200	18
Week 6	200	25
Week 7	300	35
Week 8**	300	40
Week 9	400	50
Week 10	400	60

* 4-day school week.

** 3-day school week.

Table II

Weekly Tabulations of the Number of Books Checked-Out in Ms. Washington's Class (Total vs. Those Introduced by Teacher)

	<u>Total Number of Books Checked-Out</u>	<u>Total Daily Average</u>	<u>Total Number of "Read Alouds" Checked-Out</u>	<u>"Read Alouds" Daily Average</u>
Week 1	41	8.2	0	0
Week 2	40	8	0	0
Week 3	44	8.8	14	2.8
Week 4*	41	10.3	25	6.3
Week 5	65	13	49	9.8
Week 6	68	13.6	49	9.8
Week 7	77	15.4	71	14.2
Week 8**	46	15.3	46	15.3
Week 9	78	15.6	71	14.2
Week 10	78	15.6	74	14.8

Note. There were 20 students in Ms. Washington's class, and each student was allowed to check-out a maximum of one book-per-day. Therefore, the maximum amount of books that could be checked-out during any week was 100. It is important to consider that not all students were in attendance each day, and school was scheduled for less than five days on two weeks during the study.

* 4-day school week.

** 3-day school week.

Table III

Most Popular Books Students Checked-Out *

Aesop's Fables by R. Ash & B. Higton**
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by J. Viorst**
Amelia Bedelia by P. Parish**
Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery**
Bridge to Terabithia by K. Paterson**
Call It Courage by A. Sperry**
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by R. Dahl**
Charlotte's Web by E.B. White**
A Christmas Carol by C. Dickens**
Click, Clack, Moo: Cow That Type by D. Cronin**
Eyewitness: Rocks & Minerals by R.F. Symes & C. Keates
From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by E.L. Konigsburg**
The Giving Tree by S. Silverstein**
Goosebumps: My Best Friend Is Invisible by R.L. Stine
Goosebumps: The Haunted School by R.L. Stine**
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by J.K. Rowling**
If You Give a Mouse a Cookie by L. Numeroff**
Jennifer Lopez (Real-Life Reader Biography Series) by V. Menard
Jumanji by C. Van Allsburg**
The Kids' Question & Answer Book by the editors of OWL Magazine
Kobe Bryant: Jam Session by T. Dougherty
The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles by J. Andrews Edwards**
A Light in the Attic by S. Silverstein**
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis**
The Little Prince by A. de Saint-Exupery**
National Geographic Dinosaurs by P.M. Barrett
Oh, The Places You'll Go! by Dr. Seuss**
Pierre: A Cautionary Tale by M. Sendak**
Shaquille O'Neal by A.R. Schaefer
Sylvester and the Magic Pebble by W. Steig**
The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales by J. Scieszka**
Tuesday by D. Wiesner**
The Twenty-One Balloons by W. Pene du Bois**
We're Going on a Bear Hunt by M. Rosen**
Where the Sidewalk Ends by S. Silverstein**
Where the Wild Things Are by M. Sendak**
Why the Sun and the Moon Live in the Sky by E. Dayrell**

* To be included on list, book must have been checked-out at least once by four different students during the ten-week study.

** Book introduced to class by teacher read-aloud.
