

The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research

Stephen D. Krashen, Copyright © 2004
2nd edition, Libraries Unlimited, Connecticut and London
Reviewed by Flo Martin, March 2009

Dr. Stephen D. Krashen, Professor Emeritus of Education, University of Southern California, is an internationally known researcher/author. His theories of second language acquisition—comprehensible input, input plus 1, the affective filter, just to name a few—drive many a language education program.

Dr. Krashen is the co-founder, along with Dr. Tracy Terrell (deceased) of the University of California, Irvine, of the **Natural Approach** to Second Language teaching. Krashen is also the inventor of **sheltered subject matter teaching**. After decades of research and publication, Krashen concludes, in *The Power of Reading*, that reading is one of the most effective ways for language learners to acquire language skills in context.

This reading, contrary to what many educators might suggest, needs to be “free” and “voluntary.” (**FVR = Free Voluntary Reading**)

Krashen provides plentiful and convincing evidence of a myriad of studies conducted all over the world that establish support for FVR. Students who consistently participated in FVR in their schools increased their reading comprehension, their writing style, their vocabulary, their spelling and their grammatical development. Test scores indicate that FVR is superior to explicit or direct (skill-based) grammar, spelling and reading skills instruction—not to mention that FVR is a lot more fun.

Krashen cites a study (Ivey and Broaddus, 2001) of 1,765 sixth graders in 23 schools. The students rated FVR versus traditional language arts. FVR and teacher-reading-aloud ranked over sixty percent Very Interesting.

The students ranked Traditional Language Arts as Neutral or Boring.

Krashen affirms that children whose teachers read to them or whose parents read to them at home show better literacy development. A study of university students cited by Pitts, 1986, indicates that even college students read more when they are read to.

Another cited study indicates that readers pass vocabulary tests and non-readers fail. Krashen states, “The case against direct instruction is overwhelming.” (p. 18) **“Teaching vocabulary lists is not efficient. The time is better spent reading.”** (p. 19)

Krashen suggests that parents and teachers provide access to light reading, such as comic books, graphic novels, children’s series, magazines and teen romances.

He shows that current comic books have about 2,000 words each. A student who reads one comic book per day will read about 500,000 words yearly. More research shows that comic book readers read as much as if not more than those who don’t read comics. Also, reading comics usually leads to more serious reading.

Krashen recommends: Parents and teachers need to provide a regular time and a pleasant environment for reading. They need to participate or model FVR. In other words, reading needs to become a structured class or family activity.

Krashen also provides a variety of research which asserts that reading affects our ability to write. He concludes that we do not learn to write by writing, but rather by reading. We acquire writing skills via exposure to written language—reading.

IN CONCLUSION

“Language acquisition comes from input, not output; from comprehension, not production.” (p. 136)

“When second language acquirers read for pleasure, they can continue to improve in their second language without classes, without teachers, without study, and even without people to converse with.” (p. 147)

“Reading for meaning, reading about things that matter to us, is the cause of literate language development.” (p. 150)

“When teachers are reading to students, and when teachers are relaxing with a good book during sustained silent reading sessions, teachers are doing their jobs.” (p. 151)

“Parents need to know that children will get far more benefit from being read to, from seeing parents read for pleasure, and from reading comics, graphic novels, magazines and books than they will from working through workbooks on sale at the local drug store.” (p. 151)