

Reading and writing, they do different things

Stephen Krashen¹

Reading has three roles:

(1) ROLE NUMBER 1: source of language/ literacy.

(a) Input Hypothesis: we acquire language when we understand what hear or read. The best input (1) comprehensible, (2) VERY interesting = compelling (aware of message, not details of form), (3) in large quantities

(b) Speaking and writing ability (output) – the RESULT of language acquisition, not the cause.

(c) Spelling, grammar, vocabulary, writing style from reading.

Krashen, S. 2004.. The Power of Reading. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/books/the_power_of_reading.pdf (second edition)

(d) Evidence from Sophia!

Lin, S-Y, Shin, F., & Krashen, S. 2007. Sophia's choice: Summer reading. Knowledge Quest

¹ skrashen@yahoo.com

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52-55.

http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/articles/sophias_choice_kq.pdf

NOT WELL KNOWN by the public – discovered 40 years ago, accepted by scholars only about ten years ago. It is still assumed that the only way to learn a language is through what we call LEARNING, or STUDY, knowing the rules and thinking about them when you speak or write. But when we acquire language, we have a feel of correctness...

Incident:

A student in Turkey in English medium school is starting at age 12. But she became a reader of English books (British Council, bookstore). By middle school, she was an eager reader.

NEW TEACHER. “I had a new English teacher who assigned us two compositions for homework. She returned them to me ungraded, furious. She wanted to know who had helped me write them. They were my personal work. I had not even used the dictionary. She would not believe me. She pointed at a few underlined sentences and some vocabulary and asked me how I knew them; they were well beyond the level of the class. I was devastated. Many years

later I still could not explain how I knew them. I just did.” (Quoted in Krashen, 2004, pp. 23-24). She had acquired the rules and vocabulary from reading – real acquisition. Even she didn’t know where her competence came from.

(2) ROLE NUMBER 2: Readers know more.

- (a)** NOT only from reading textbooks, but from reading FICTION.
- (b)** The knowledge, like language, is acquired without trying, without study.

Major research study: Stanovich, K. and Cunningham, A. 1993. Where does knowledge come from? *Journal of Educ. Psych.* 85, 2: 211-229. College undergrads tested on we want secondary school grads to know (my interpretation): science, social studies, current events, personal finance, health, “daily living technology,” cultural knowledge, “multicultural literacy.”

e.g. In what part of the body does the infection called pneumonia occur? Where is the Panama Canal? Recognition of Linus Pauling, Isaac Newton, Bertrand Russell.

Best predictor of combined tests of knowledge: “print exposure” = familiarity with current

authors (Stephen King, Maya Angelou),
magazines (Forbes, Ladies Home Journal)

Weak predictors: knowledge of math, reading
comprehension

Insignificant: Knowledge of TV shows, tests of
analytic intelligence, problem-solving ability,
high school grades.

Predictor	Beta
High School GPA	.2
Raven Matrices	.16
Math	.165
Reading Comp	.112
Television	-0.039
Print exposure	.72

Donalyn Miller, The Book Whisperer: sixth
grade, 40 book requirement, self-selected, from
different genres. One student disobeyed the
genre requirement and stuck to only fantasy and

science-fiction, going far beyond the 40-book minimum: read 65 books.

Results: “Talking with Tommy for two minutes revealed the depth of knowledge he acquired about fortresses, armaments, mythology and medieval history from all those fantasy books.”

(3) ROLE NUMBER 3: Readers have deeper understanding of others.

EMPATHY: “.....when you’re learning to read fiction, what you’re learning, in part, is empathy. You’re learning to be somebody else, learning to see the world through their eyes.” Terry Gross of “Fresh Air”.

TOLERANCE FOR VAGUENESS, avoidance of simple solutions.

Barack Obama (interview in The Guardian): "When I think about how I understand my role as citizen, the most important stuff I’ve learned I think is I’ve learned from novels. It has to do with empathy. It has to do with being comfortable with the notion that the world is complicated and full of grays, but there’s still truth there to be found. It’s possible to connect with some [one] else even though they’re very different from you.”

Noam Chomsky: “It is quite possible - overwhelmingly probable...that we will always

learn more about human life and personality from novels than from scientific psychology.”

SELF-SELECTION: makes sure books are interesting

Do we read gift books? (= assigned reading - “how did you like...?”)

ASSIGNED versus SELF-SELECTED: My experience in secondary school in the US-remember nothing about assigned books, remember a great deal from self-selected books.

POWER of LIBRARIES: Keith Curry Lance. If the school library has a large collection of interesting/comprehensible books AND the help of a professional school librarian, reading test scores are better. <http://keithcurrylance.com/school-library-impact-studies/>

Writing (Secrets of Writing)

Secret 1: More writing will not result in better writing form: writing form – result of reading

The effect of increasing writing versus increasing reading.

DeVries (1970): reading over “mere writing” (output); 5th graders:

- (1) 2 themes a week for 9 weeks.
- (2) "...were excused from practically all composition work ... and made use of the time ... for an increased amount of reading, in and out of class."

Results: essays – reading group better in content, mechanics, organization, and grammar.

DeVries, T. 1970. Reading, Writing Frequency and Expository Writing. Reading Improvement, Vol. 7: 14, 15, 19.

Secret 2: Writing helps us solve problems and can make us smarter. "Meaning is what you end up with, not what you start out with." (Peter Elbow)

Secret 3: The power of REVISION. Core of the "composing process".

Neil Simon: "Mediocre writers write, good writers rewrite."

Vonnegut: "... writing allows even a stupid person to seem halfway intelligent, if only that person will write the same thought over and over again, improving it just a little bit each time... like inflating a blimp with a bicycle pump. Anybody can do it. All it takes is time."

Hemingway: "The first draft of anything is shit."

Secret 4: There's nothing wrong with "being wrong". Welcome revision! This is how we get smarter.

Einstein's Mistakes: The Human Failings of Genius (Hans Ohanian). Krashen: “Ohanian makes one big mistake himself: the title of the book. This book tells us a lot more than ‘Einstein’s Mistakes.’ To paraphrase Kepler, it reveals the wondrous and twisted roads that lead to knowledge.”

Secret 5: Delay editing (spelling, punctuation). This draft may not be the final one! Put on our makeup after your shower. Premature editing disturbs the flow, disturbs coming up with the ideas.

Secret 6: Encourage incubation. Problem-solving often requires “an interval free from conscious thought” to allow the free working of the subconscious mind” (Wallas, 1926)

Tolle (1999): “All true artists, whether they know it or not, create from a place of no-mind; from inner stillness ... breakthroughs came at a time of mental quietude.”

Poincare (1924): “There must be a ‘preliminary period’ of conscious work which also precedes all fruitful unconscious labor.”

The Composing Process = write, block, short break/incubate, rewrite. Repeat many times.

Krashen, S. 2021. Secrets of writing, *Research In Language And Education: An International Journal (RILE)* 1, 1.30-34. rile.yyu.edu.tr

Other papers and books - free download, www.sdkrashen.com.