The following extract is from: Braunger, J. & Lewis, J.P. (2006). *Building a Knowledge Base in Reading* (Second Edition). USA: International Reading Association & The National Council of Teachers of English.
(Note: Although the entire article has suggestions to improve students' literacy, the statements highlighted in red text are vital to success.)

Students need many opportunities to read, read, read

What is critical is that students do read-lots, for sustained periods, for meaning, and for real and authentic purposes.

Opportunity to read has an effect on various measures of reading skill or achievement, as described in the following findings:

- "Just plain reading" improves students' comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, ability to monitor their own reading for sense, disposition to read independently, English grammar skills and writing style into more sophisticated forms.

- A consistently positive relationship occurs between the amount of voluntary reading completed at home or at school and gains on standardised reading achievement tests.

- Even fifteen minutes a day of independent, recreational reading significantly increases students' reading abilities. Average and below-average readers experience the greatest gains. For struggling readers in particular, even more time for real reading is imperative if we are to ever narrow the achievement gap.

- When adolescents increase their pleasure reading, performance also increases in academic work.

- Middle school students want to read on their own in order to make an otherwise difficult text interesting and comprehensible.

One focus of reading instruction is to develop the lifelong habit of reading. However, some schools or programs spend a great deal of time teaching skills then leave little room for students to practise those skills by really reading.

Successful school experiences help to motivate students to read voluntarily. Effective instruction must ensure that all students engage in extensive, high-success reading throughout the school day and enhance the volume of voluntary reading students do outside of the school day. When students are held accountable for a wide variety of reading experiences (e.g. compiling reading logs, participating in sustained reading and documenting reading-at-home experiences) positive attitudes toward reading will develop.

Making the Choice to Read

Poor readers often lack the self-confidence and self-efficacy to choose to read on their own but students who feel confident in reading will read more challenging materials and for higher level purposes and less efficacious readers **will** do just

the opposite. In particular, in the case of increased computer access in libraries, students from middle-income families are more likely to spend computer time on applications with more print; students from lower income families tend to spend more time playing computer games that contain little print.

Access to Quality Reading Materials

The prevailing assumption seems to be that books and other literacy-related resources are easily and equally accessible for all students and their families. However, recent studies have found this is not the case.

It has been found that low-income students have consistently less access to quality reading materials than do middle-income students. This includes access to places selling children's and young adult reading resources, signage and public spaces for reading (coffee shops and restaurants, local preschools, school libraries and public libraries).

Advocates of secondary school reform concur that all students need multiple opportunities for engaged, sustained print encounters in the classroom every day particularly if they do not have this access in their home environment. The easier the access is to interesting print materials, the more frequently adolescents read.

The Summer Lag

Summer reading setback is a key element in closing the achievement gap between low-income and more advantaged students. Students in both high-poverty and low-poverty schools made substantially similar gains when school was in session. However, the effects of summer vacation on reading achievement looked very different; they calculate that the differential progress made during the four summers between second and sixth grade accounts for upward of 80% of the achievement difference between the two groups.

A critical support for low-income learners is easy - literally fingertip access to books that provide engaging, successful reading experiences throughout the calendar year if we want them to read in volume.

Libraries

There is a critical relationship between access to books via public and school libraries and reading achievement indicators of school library quality and public library use were found to be significant predictors of reading comprehension scores.

To best support students, books need to be available through both classroom collections and school wide libraries. Classroom libraries give students immediate access, a factor likely to increase the amount of voluntary reading students do in and out of school. Students in classrooms without literature collections read 50% less than do students in classrooms with such collections.

Schools serving many at-risk students need particularly good collections in both classrooms and libraries because these students typically have much less access

out of school; public libraries need increased resources and programming to support students and families throughout the calendar year.

Libraries and librarians are vital to the development of literacy skills of children and young adults. It is interesting to note, however, several critical differences in different socio-economic neighbourhoods: Low-income families do not check out as many books (for fear of loss, overdue fines, damage), and low-income students tend to read at or below their grade level, in contrast to middle-income students who read at or above their grade level when choosing library materials. Excellent librarians are critical to the transformation of access in low-income neighborhoods. These librarians pushed students to reach beyond their current abilities, often helping to close the gap caused by poor literacy environments.

Time and Opportunity

Increasing access to books for students with limited access to books increased their literacy achievement, particularly for second-language learners. Increasing 3- and 4-year-old children's access to books in child-care centres serving economically disadvantaged students, as well as training child-care providers to use the books effectively to promote early literacy development, significantly increased the students' emergent literacy development.

The following list describes several ways that teachers can provide children with wide opportunities for extensive reading:

- Schedule at least one block of structured sustained silent reading for students each day. Model your own reading pleasure in various ways in your classroom. Regularly read aloud from the texts you are reading for pleasure, particularly those relevant to content areas. Display the books; give brief book talks about them; connect them to everyday classroom activities.

- Use this time to find out about students' reading – their interests, strengths and needs; how they read and when they read; if they are monitoring their understanding; the range of types of texts they read. Inform students about your observations, help them set goals, provide 'on the spot' teaching, record observations and goals, help students to articulate their strengths and goals. Use the data to plan teaching. Share information across the various teachers working with a group of students.

- Provide a varied collection of print material in your classroom: library books, personal books, student-written books; newspapers (community, city, regional); magazines (for students, community-based); brochures and pamphlets of interest to the students in your class; menus and other environmental print. Content area classrooms need to have available a wide range of texts - fiction and nonfiction, as well as journals, magazines and newspapers – on particular topics and events relevant to topic study.

- Provide opportunities for students to share ideas about reading and to recommend texts and strategies to each other.

- Provide an opportunity for all students to acquire a library card. Many public libraries have programs that work closely with public schools to make their services accessible to all students.

- Provide a wide variety of content area texts linked to the curriculum. Topical literature is especially important as students move into middle and high school.

- Create ways to consistently interact with and support families accessing appropriate, high-quality reading materials for learners.

- Create book bag programs for young students and ESL students to take home classroom or school materials to read with families. These programs usually include opportunities for families and students to respond to the reading in some fashion and to document the reading time spent.

- Establish routines for take-home reading and for students to keep reading logs that are used to review their reading habits.