

# **The Joy of Reading and Intermediate Students**

**By Angela Jackmann**

## **Inquiry Question:**

What strategies can the teacher-librarian (TL) use to encourage the joy of reading for pleasure with intermediate students and teachers, and why is it important?

## **Introduction**

The significance of fostering a love for reading among intermediate students is paramount as reading impacts academics in many ways. This paper explores strategies that teacher-librarians (TLs) can utilize to encourage reading for pleasure among intermediate students and teachers and underscores the importance of such initiatives. It also suggests where robust funding might be applied, how a policy of protected time for reading for pleasure could be employed, and how equity of access can impact student reading.

## **The Problem**

In the previous academic year, an analysis of Library Learning Commons (LLC) statistics at one school in southern Ontario revealed that intermediate students were scarcely checking out books (see Figure 1). In one example, a student in Grade 8 had checked out a book during orientation at the beginning of the school year and the same book was overdue in June at the end of the school year. Efforts to engage intermediate teachers in collaborative ventures have been made and continue; however, there remains a notable decline in student participation in open book exchanges. This phenomenon necessitates an investigation into underlying causes and potential interventions.

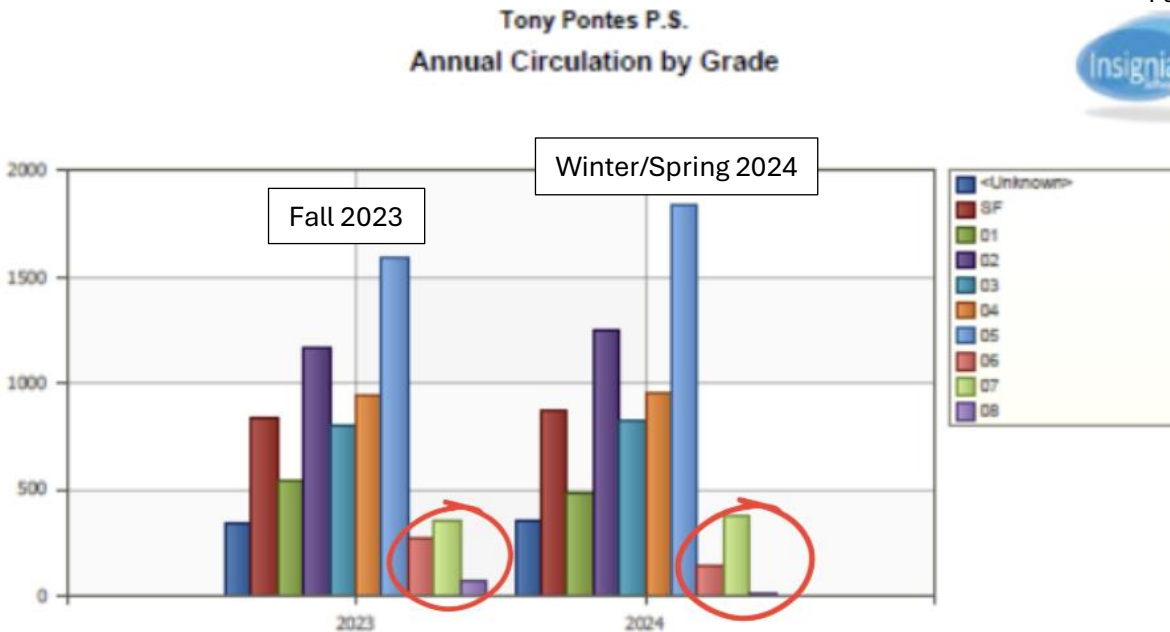


Figure 1: Circulation by grade for the 2023-2024 school year at Tony Pontes Public School.

## Literature Review

### Decline in Reading for Pleasure

Research indicates that the propensity for reading, particularly for pleasure, diminishes as students advance in age (Henning & Crow, 2023; Cullinan, 2000). The use of LLCs is closely tied to teacher attitudes towards reading; teachers who regularly bring their classes to the library tend to have students who are more engaged in reading for pleasure (Bertland, 1988, as cited in Cullinan, 2000). Wilhelm & Smith (2016), argue for the integration of the profound effects of pleasure reading into educational practices.

### Importance of Reading for Pleasure

- Pleasure reading facilitates problem-solving through character experiences (Sandell, 2020, as cited in Henning & Crow, 2023).
- Students who engage in frequent reading for enjoyment perform better in standardized reading tests (Schaeffer, 2021, as cited in Henning & Crow, 2023).
- Reading for pleasure assists in emotional regulation (Onwubiko, 2022, as cited in Henning & Crow, 2023).
- It enhances reading engagement and development, although its importance is often undervalued in schools (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016).
- There is a positive correlation between pleasure reading and math performance (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016).
- Independent reading enriches background knowledge, familiarity with text structures, and vocabulary, aiding overall comprehension (Cullinan, 2000).

- Joyful reading benefits even struggling readers (Miller & Lesesne, 2022).
- Experiencing joy in reading increases overall reading frequency (Miller & Lesesne, 2022).

### **Characteristics of Reading for Pleasure**

Reading for pleasure involves voluntary reading based on personal choice, at a convenient time and place, without any requirements for reporting or teacher assessment (Cullinan, 2000). Funding for the curation of a wide variety of reading materials in the LLC and in classrooms is required. While it is clear LLC's need funding, there is no formula for funding, that the author is aware of, for robust classroom libraries, which are just as important and may promote greater equity when it comes to accessing reading materials. Effective school and library programs allow students the freedom to choose their reading materials and provide ample time for reading without assessing it, thereby positively impacting learning and academic achievement (Cullinan, 2000). Dr. Daniel Fader's research in the 1950s demonstrated that time, choice, access, and encouragement from adults are crucial for fostering enthusiastic readers (Miller & Lesesne, 2022).

### **Strategies for Encouraging Reading for Pleasure (Miller & Lesesne, 2022)**

#### **1. Abundant Access**

- Implementing fine-free policies and allowing unlimited checkouts.
- Ensuring access to books during the summer.
- Improving classroom libraries.

#### **2. Abundant Time**

- Allocating an average of 20 minutes daily for in-school reading, along with additional time at home.

#### **3. Choice**

- Providing reading options without adult biases.
- Conducting interest surveys.
- Reading aloud to students of all ages.

#### **4. Honoring Reader Responses**

- Encouraging students to recommend texts to peers instead of traditional book reports or tests.

#### **5. Supportive Community**

- Building reading communities within schools and classrooms.

- Avoiding extrinsic reward programs.
- Including families and enthusiastic mentors in reading activities.

### **Consequences of Neglecting Pleasure Reading**

If every book a student reads is integrated into a lesson, students may develop a dislike for reading, even for books intended for pleasure for their age group (Lesesne, 2006). Students who do not enjoy reading are less motivated, spend more time watching TV, make poorer decisions, and perform poorly academically (Chidiebere et al., 2013, as cited in Henning & Crow, 2023). “The only time I liked reading was third grade. Our teacher took us to the library once every week and the librarian read to us on the rug” (Miller & Lesene, 2022, p. 28).

### **Recommendations for Teachers and TLs**

- Encouraging families to read together and model reading habits (Henning & Crow, 2023).
- TLs should be well-versed in their collections and passionate about books to address student inquiries (Moyer, 2007, as cited in Henning & Crow, 2023).
- Establishing designated reading times and advocating for them (Lee, 2020, as cited in Henning & Crow, 2023). Perhaps educational policy should mandate this within the school day, just as Daily Physical Activity (DPA) has been.
- Emphasizing the personal value of reading through student self-identification with book characters and themes (Milne, 2024).
- Building solid classroom libraries to encourage in-class reading (Lesesne, 2006), as well as offering improved access to reading materials.
- Guiding students to improve their reading for joy through reading ladders and personalized recommendations (Lesesne, 2006).

“The silver bullet that educators have been looking for to make students successful in school and in life, may be the very thing that so many have cutout of their schools--a culture that values, encourages, and makes time for reading just for the joy of reading” (Henning & Crow, 2023, p. 33).

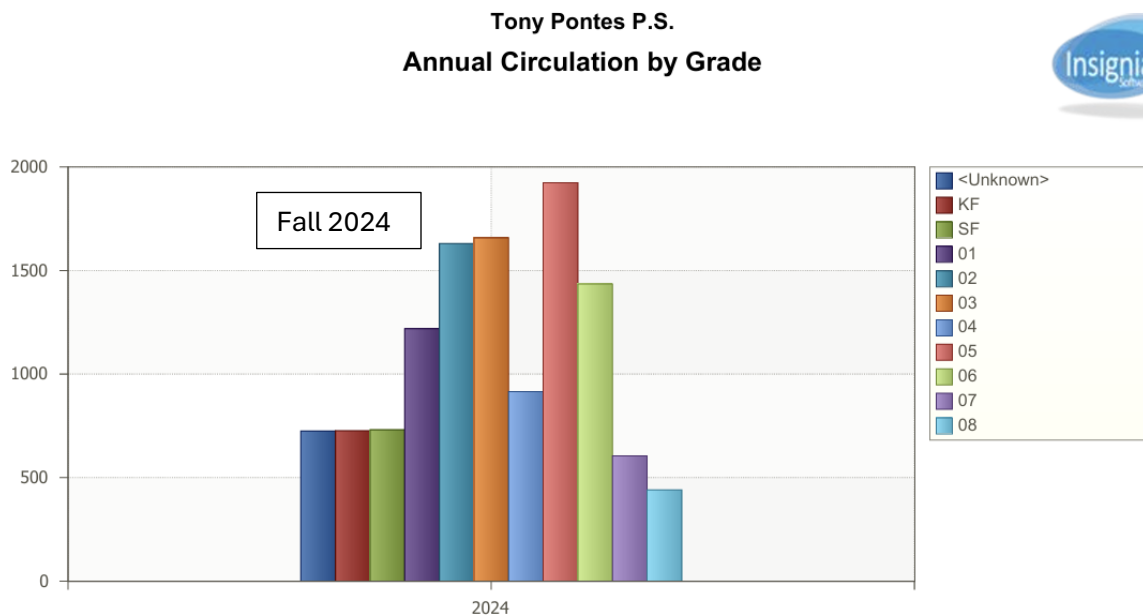
### **Strategies Employed in Fall of 2024**

The TL approached each intermediate teacher at the beginning of the school year and shared the research gathered for this paper including ideas on access, choice, time and teacher attitude. The TL asked all intermediate classroom teachers to book a twenty minute book exchange time per week to encourage more frequent book exchange, instead of relying on independent use of the LLC. Outside the classroom, intermediate students were provided with several other opportunities including “Books for Breakfast”, “Book Club”, “Avid Readers’ Club” and the “Legacy Book Buying Club”. As well, the TL

increased sign outs limits from 2 to 4 books (the school is already fine-free), began genrefying the LLC collection, and worked with the classroom teachers to create better classroom libraries using LLC books and encouraging the use of the board's digital library.

### Impact of Implemented Strategies

These initiatives have led to a notable increase in book exchanges, with a 480% rise in circulation for Grade 8 and 550% for Grade 6 students (see Figure 2). However, Grade 7 showed a smaller increase of 22%. Sharing the research on reading for pleasure with teachers and new staff and advocating for scheduled LLC access, dedicated reading time in the classroom, choice and teacher valuation of reading, has significantly influenced these outcomes at this school. If the Ministry of Education only implemented a policy of protected "reading for joy" time within the school day and funded LLC's and individual classroom libraries, the effect it could have on student achievement and well-being across the country would be significant.



*Figure 2: Circulation by grade for the first half of the 2024-2025 school year at Tony Pontes Public School, after interventions.*

### Conclusion

Encouraging reading for pleasure among intermediate students is crucial for their academic and personal development. By implementing strategies that provide access, time, choice, and community support, TLs and educators can create an environment that fosters a lifelong love of reading, affecting students' academics and well-being.

## **Future Directions**

Continued efforts should focus on enhancing access to a wide variety of books, student choice in reading materials, guarded time for “reading for joy” within the school day and building supportive communities including TL’s, educators, administrators and families. Ministry support including a daily, protected time for “reading for joy” policy, robust funding for LLC’s and classroom libraries which will promote more equitable access for students, and education for teachers about the importance of reading for pleasure is required. Endorsing reading for pleasure will ensure students develop a lasting relationship with literature, positively effecting their time in the academic world and beyond.

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