

Making Time for Reading

Summer Reading: Program and Evidence

Shin, F. H. & Krashen, S. D. (2008), New York: Pearson Allyn and Bacon
113 pg. ISBN 978-0-205-50489-3 Price: \$26.99

The title of this book is as refreshing as the months it refers to. Generally speaking, school-aged children think of summer as a time devoted to resting, relaxing, and enjoying a well-deserved break. However, these months constitute a threat for many children from low socioeconomic environments because their lack of access to books during this time may result in "backsliding," or losing their gains in reading during the regular school year. In an effort to help teachers alleviate this problem Shin and Krashen have written a short yet engaging volume describing a Summer Reading Program aimed at helping struggling readers improve their reading ability by providing them with two simple remedies: access to books and time to read them. Treating the program as a "scientific experiment" (p. 28), the authors used standardized pre- and post-tests to gather empirical evidence of students' progress and compare their performance with (a researcher's dream) that of other students in a comparison group. In chapter 1 Shin and Krashen review pre-

vious studies examining students' gains in reading before and after the summer months. Not surprisingly, the results of these investigations show that children from low-income families' gains in reading during the school year evaporated during the summer, something the authors attribute to children's lack of reading caused by lack of access to books. To illustrate these contentions Shin and Krashen describe the results of research studies investigating the average number of books available to children both in their homes as well as in the public libraries of various cities. The outcomes reveal startling discrepancies. For example, while children in Beverly Hills had an average of 200 books at home, children in Watts owned a mere 0.4 volumes.


Chapter 2 describes the inner workings of the Summer Reading Program. Essentially, its goal was to provide struggling readers "with a desire to read and with the ability to read more" (p. 35). To accomplish this purpose, participants were provided with large numbers of "compelling" (p. 33) books and a schedule

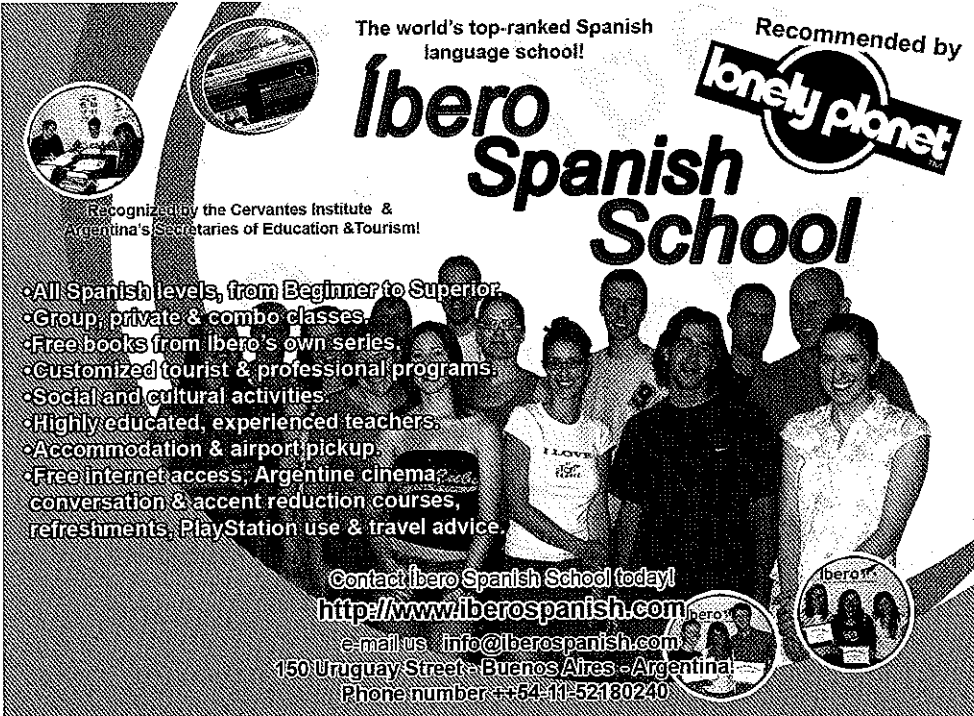
that offered them numerous and varied opportunities to engage in reading, such as library time, recreational reading, literature-based instruction, project activities, and read-alouds. Instruction received by students in the comparison group, on the other hand, revolved around skills and workbooks. Needless to say, gains made by children in the Program clearly surpassed those of children in the comparison group, thereby confirming the expectations of the authors.

"What we learned," the title of chapter 3, summarizes Shin and Krashen's reflections on the implementation and results of the Summer Program. Among them, that access to books may not be enough for certain students (who may require more encouragement), or that what adults think may be appropriate for children may not necessarily be what the latter want to read. These reflections are followed by some conclusions, such as the importance of providing students with interesting reading materials, that gains in reading are possible without direct instruction, or that access to libraries is crucial for students' reading development.

Finally, the appendices contain students' individual conference and reading log templates, a recommended checklist and a description of the components of a good independent reading program. They also include an interesting case study of a Taiwanese student exemplifying the benefits of summer reading.

This book is an excellent guide for teachers interested in establishing a program that provides students with an enjoyable reading experience. While its critics may point to the absence of "hard" and elaborated research which included complicated statistical analyses comparing the results of Free Voluntary and Sustained Silent Reading with those of other bottom-up approaches, Shin and Krashen concentrated on the outcomes of simple yet revealing studies examining students' real interests regarding reading preferences and selection of books. Their attempt at giving students the opportunity to regain the pleasurable aspect of reading would have had the approval of none other than Marcel Proust, for whom the days of our childhood most plentifully lived were those we devoted to reading our favorite books.

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