Classroom Libraries

What is a Classroom Library and what is its purpose?

A Classroom Library quite simply is a collection of books and other texts organized for easy access in classrooms. This availability of reading materials greatly impacts children’s literacy development. The most effective reading programs are generally supported by large classroom libraries. (Routman, 2003)

What should be consistent about Classroom Libraries? How will the teacher know when they are effectively and deeply implementing Classroom Libraries?

- Classroom libraries contain 300-500 high quality books.
- The books represent a wide range of reading difficulty.
- The books represent a wide range of topics / interests.
- There is a balance of fiction and non-fiction in the collection.
- The books should represent a variety of well-known authors.
- The collection should be culturally responsive.
- The books are displayed in a variety of locations in the classroom, so as to draw children toward them. Books on display may be a part of a learning or inquiry space in the classroom.
- There may be comfortable seating near the books.
- Some portions of the collection rotate in and out of the classroom fairly regularly based on students’ needs, interests and curriculum. Much of the literature on classroom libraries suggests that books be divided into a “core” collection and a “revising collection.” Just like a public library, the core collection is the permanent collection, available throughout the year. The revising collection changes every few weeks.
- Children love to seek out and read materials found in this collection.
- Books might be organized by topic, author, genre, new books and books that have been read together.
- Student favourites... etc.
- Books should be organized for interest, not by difficulty or level.
- There are many benefits to having students involved in organizing the classroom library.
- Anchor charts, co-constructed with the class, such as those focusing on how to choose a “Just Right” book, should be evident in the classroom.
How is the consistent practice of Classroom Libraries supported in the literature or in research?

- The classroom library not only supports reading, it helps to build community in our classroom. It is here students learn to love to read, to choose their reading, to connect to books, to learn from authors, and to learn from one another. It is in the Classroom Library that students often find their reading voice. (Mere, 2005)
- Because research shows that students need to spend a large amount of time reading in order to improve and hone their reading skills, what better place for children to have access to books than in their own classroom. (Allington, 2009)
- Classroom libraries are a literacy necessity; they are integral to successful teaching and learning and must become a top priority if our students are to become thriving, engaged readers. It is difficult to maintain a strong independent reading program without an excellent classroom library. (Routman, 2003)

What evidence will the teacher have that Classroom Libraries are making a difference in student learning outcomes?

Given that each school has its own unique learning improvement plan, inquiry question and learning targets, the evidence you want to look for will be unique to your context. It is recommended you consider your context and then decide what evidence you will look for to know whether or not you are deeply implementing this consistent practice in your school.

The literature suggests surveys as a way to determine the strengths and shortfalls of your classroom library. Initial use of a survey provides formative assessment and will be useful in developing an improvement plan for both the development and use of the classroom library.

What does the teacher do or who can they talk to for support with Classroom Libraries?

- Other teachers in their school
- Talk to the school’s teacher librarian
- The staff development teams
- The school’s administrative team
- The Literacy for Life Portal
- Professional Reading
- Images for Classroom Libraries