



The Joy of Reading Doesn't Just Happen—But Schools Can Help Make It Possible

By Lynne Kulich, Ph.D.



Most educators agree on the goal: **students who can read well and want to read often.**

But in many schools across Canada, the challenge extends beyond helping students “crack the code.” It also includes building the habits, confidence, and motivation that turn reading into a lifelong skill.

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That’s where the joy of reading matters — not as a nice-to-have, but as an important driver of reading volume, stamina, and long-term growth.

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Reading is both a skill and an experience

Reading is a multidimensional process with two equally important purposes.

- **Efferent reading** focuses on extracting information — reading to learn, understand, and apply knowledge.
- **Aesthetic reading** focuses on the experience — reading to feel, connect, reflect, and engage.

Strong literacy instruction supports both.

Students need to develop the foundational skills required to read successfully, but they also need opportunities to experience reading as something enjoyable and worth returning to.

Even the most engaging classroom library cannot build confident readers without a strong foundation in fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and language development.



What it takes to create joyful, capable readers

Many schools and districts still treat reading achievement and reading engagement as separate goals, when in reality, one depends on the other.

Without strong instruction, reading feels difficult. Without reading volume and engagement, growth slows.

When students struggle to read fluently, reading rarely feels enjoyable. At the same time, even capable readers may choose not to read when distractions and competing demands constantly pull at their attention.

To help students become confident readers who read widely and willingly, schools should focus on three key conditions:



1. Evidence-based literacy instruction that builds automaticity and comprehension

We know reading is not a natural process. It must be taught explicitly and systematically, particularly in the early years. It's a shift Canadian schools are increasingly making: prompted by Ontario's Right to Read inquiry, which called for explicit, systematic instruction in foundational reading skills, a growing number of provinces — including Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia — now mandate early reading screening and structured literacy in the early grades.

Learning to recognize written words by connecting phonemes and graphemes is a critical step toward reading automaticity (Ehri, 1995) and it's the kind of foundational skill that early reading screening, now required in provinces like Ontario and Alberta, is designed to catch and support from the start. Strong decoding instruction supports the foundation described in the Simple View of Reading: reading comprehension depends on both decoding and language comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986).

But decoding alone is not enough.

Students also need intentional support to develop:

- vocabulary and oral language
- background knowledge
- comprehension strategies
- opportunities to discuss, reflect on, and make meaning from texts

As Mark Seidenberg emphasizes, children’s oral language knowledge strongly predicts early reading success. It’s only when schools invest in both sides of the equation — decoding and [language comprehension](#) — that they build readers who can access increasingly complex texts and learn from them.

2. Habits and access that increase time spent reading

Like any skill, reading improves through consistent practice. Skilled reading depends on both decoding and language comprehension, but students also need regular opportunities to apply those skills through meaningful reading experiences.

Independent reading plays an important role, but classroom instructional time must remain protected for the highest-impact practices: explicit phonics instruction, fluency development, vocabulary building, comprehension instruction, and rich classroom discussion (Shanahan, 2016). At the same time, students need access to quality texts and regular opportunities to read beyond direct instruction, both at school and at home.

The challenge becomes even more significant when we recognize that reading for pleasure has declined considerably across North America over the past two decades. In the US, daily reading for pleasure fell from a peak of 28% in 2004 to 16% in 2023 (Bone et al., 2025) — and Canadian reading scores have followed a similar downward trend in PISA results between 2018 and 2022 (CMEC/OECD, PISA 2022). For many students, the issue isn’t motivation alone — it’s that reading no longer naturally fits into their everyday routines.





Schools and districts can help address this by ensuring:

- consistent access to engaging, high-interest texts
- structured routines that support regular independent reading
- encouragement and achievable reading experiences that build confidence rather than making reading feel like just another task

Building lifelong reading habits relies on two equally important pillars: access and opportunity.

3. Less scrolling, more “time in text”

Students need sustained time in text to build vocabulary, knowledge, and the mental frameworks that support strong comprehension. Books and rich nonfiction texts help students build knowledge in connected, meaningful ways — something short-form digital content rarely replicates.

When students spend much of their free time scrolling, they may be exposed to constant information, but they are not necessarily developing the same reading stamina, depth of thinking, or background knowledge that longer-form reading supports.

Schools and education systems across Canada are increasingly alert to how device use affects students’ attention and focus, and that concern is now written into policy. For the 2024–25 school year, a wave of provinces — including Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia — introduced or tightened restrictions on cellphones in schools, with several keeping phones out of sight for the entire school day. The goal is not to remove technology altogether — digital tools absolutely have a place in learning — but to ensure students also have protected time for deep reading, thinking, and focused learning experiences.

It's the kind of message that belongs on classroom walls and school banners:

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Less time scrolling. More time in text.

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What school and district leaders can do now

Canadian schools don't necessarily need another literacy initiative to improve reading outcomes. What's often needed instead is a stronger, more coherent approach to instruction, practice, and support across the school.

Consider these practical, high-impact actions that support both achievement and engagement:

- **Protect classroom time** for explicit reading instruction and evidence-based literacy practice
- **Strengthen consistency** across classrooms so students receive aligned foundational instruction from grade to grade
- **Build language comprehension intentionally** through knowledge-rich texts, vocabulary instruction, and meaningful classroom discussion
- **Increase access to texts** that students can read successfully and want to revisit independently
- **Use data to monitor growth, participation, and instructional** needs in ways that are practical and actionable for teachers
- **Support healthy reading habits** by reducing distractions and protecting students' attention and focus

When these conditions are in place, reading engagement becomes far more likely. It develops naturally — not because students are told reading is enjoyable, but because reading becomes accessible, achievable, and rewarding for every learner.

Many schools are already looking for practical ways to implement these conditions consistently across classrooms and year levels.



Where you'll find the "reading class"

If these conditions sound familiar, the next question becomes: how can schools implement them consistently across classrooms and grade levels?

[Reading Eggs](#), an engaging, evidence-based literacy program grounded in the Science of Reading and explicit literacy instruction principles, is designed to support systematic instruction so students develop the skills to decode automatically and comprehend increasingly complex texts.

That impact is something we can measure – and have done so, with positive results. In national reading assessment data, students in schools using Reading Eggspress – the comprehension-focused component of the Reading Eggs suite – scored on average 23.2 points higher than students in non-user schools, a statistically significant difference, with the strongest gains where students completed the most comprehension lessons (Reading Eggspress NAPLAN study, Australia).

Importantly, it's designed to complement classroom instruction — helping schools strengthen literacy outcomes without requiring excessive screen time. Through assessments and actionable reporting, teachers can quickly identify where students may be struggling and respond with targeted instruction and practice.

And because reading engagement is driven partly by access and reading volume, students with access to Reading Eggs can also explore a broad library of fiction and nonfiction texts matched to a wide range of reading levels and interests. Decodable readers (also available in the Reading Eggs Library) can also help reinforce foundational skills while building reading stamina, curiosity, and knowledge over time.



The real gift of reading

Early in my teaching career, I taught Grade 1. One parent shared something I've never forgotten: although she had completed school, she had only learned to read confidently as an adult. When she finished her first novel, she cried. Not because the story was sad, but because she had never experienced what it felt like to become completely immersed in a book.

"I never expected to cry," she told me.
"No one ever told me reading could feel like that."

That is the real gift of reading.

When schools invest in strong instruction, consistent routines, and meaningful access to text, students gain far more than a functional skill. They gain confidence, knowledge, imagination, and a lifelong source of connection and opportunity.

Every student deserves that opportunity.

Learn how schools are using Reading Eggs to support reading confidence, engagement and literacy development across the primary years.



Build confident, joyful readers across your school

Learn how schools are using **Reading Eggs** to support reading confidence, engagement and literacy development across the primary years.

[Explore Reading Eggs](#)



About the author

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A respected literacy leader, keynote speaker, and best-selling author, Dr. Lynne Kulich works with schools, districts, and education organisations to translate the Science of Reading into practical, classroom-ready instruction. Her work focuses on high-quality whole-class literacy instruction, evidence-based intervention, and building sustainable systems that support improved literacy outcomes for all students.

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