

Teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of a whole-school reading for pleasure programme

Vanessa J. Collins, Isaac W. Dargan, Rosalind L. Walsh & Margaret K. Merga

Corresponding Author: Rosalind Walsh - email: lindywalsh@gmail.com

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Abstract

A whole school (K-12) Reading for Pleasure programme was implemented at an independent girls school in Sydney, Australia. This paper reports on the results of a teacher survey conducted one year into the implementation of the programme. Qualitative data was collected from 105 teachers on the perceived benefits and challenges of the programme. Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits, which included increased skill development, not only in literacy, but also in learning dispositions and 21st century skills, such as creativity and imagination. Other benefits included student engagement and wellbeing. Teachers identified challenges with implementing the programme, including student disengagement, and organisational and structural concerns. Advice for implementing a whole school RfP programme is given based on the experiences of the Project team and results of the survey.

Keywords: reading for pleasure, silent sustained reading, whole-school reading

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Introduction

Reading for Pleasure (RfP) is a practice associated with benefits for students' literacy skills and their reading engagement. Reading engagement in young people is conceptualised in diverse ways but can be simplistically understood as relating to young people's attitudes toward reading as well as their frequency of engagement in the practice, which is potentially influenced by a vast body of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (see Merga, 2018 for a comprehensive review). There is a relationship between students' reading skills and their attitudes toward reading (Petscher, 2010), and attitudes toward reading are related to frequency of engagement in the practice (Becker, McElvany, Kortenbruck, 2010), and frequency of reading and time spent reading are associated with literacy gains (Rogiers et al., 2020; Taylor, Frye & Maruyama, 1990; Van Bergen, Vasalmpi & Torrpa, 2020). RfP may also confer benefits for subjects such as mathematics (Clavel & Mediavilla, 2020; Sullivan & Brown, 2015). RfP is known by numerous other titles such as Free Voluntary Reading and Sustained Silent Reading, and it differs from reading for learning in that it refers to volitional reading of self-selected materials (Krashen, 1993; Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020). As noted by Burnett and Merchant (2018), "the conjunction of reading and pleasure carries important messages that serve to undercut the idea that reading is simply about gathering information, self-improvement or employability" (p. 62). Given the current focus on reading for purposes of assessment in schools, providing students with opportunities for RfP can help to foster life-long reader ideation in them through foregrounding that reading can be enjoyable, and giving them exposure to reading models (Merga, 2016).

It is not a given that students will be able to access opportunities to engage in RfP with regularity in their schooling experience. In recent times, RfP has experienced varying support in school learning contexts, and students may not have regular opportunities to engage in the beneficial practice of volitional reading. While there is a paucity of current literature exploring the frequency of young people's opportunities to have time for RfP at school, the extant research suggests that opportunities may be limited, vulnerable to competing curricular interests, and reducing as students move through the years of schooling (Merga, 2013, 2018). Acceptance that fostering reading engagement in young people is the responsibility of all teachers, not just those in literacy-focussed subjects, may be lacking (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2018), and strategies to foster RfP may be absent from many school literacy policies, perhaps because it is deemphasised in curriculum (Merga & Gardiner, 2018). Given that literacy skills are associated with academic, vocational and social benefits (as reviewed in Merga, 2018), and that concerns are commonly articulated around declining student reading literacy skills in Australian students (Thomson, DeBortoli, Underwood & Schmid, 2019) and attitudes toward reading (Darmawan, 2020), in recent times, some schools have considered increasing students' opportunities for RfP within the school day.

Given the potential educational benefits of increasing student exposure to opportunities to engage in RfP, a research-informed programme was devised for implementation at an Australian school (hereafter the School) which sought to enhance the quality and quantity of students'

opportunities to engage in RfP. The *Building Readers for Life* project (hereafter the Project) was developed by a committee within the school who, in consultation with an academic mentor, drew on the extant literature for best practice in implementation of a whole-school RfP programme (hereafter the Programme) within the school. We identified the following key practices and orientations in the literature which informed our approach. Teacher modelling was a vital component with strong research support for the importance of teachers not only supporting the programme, but also engaging with the RfP practice with their students (Merga, 2017). Parent engagement and involvement was considered critical to ensure that the benefits of recreational reading was supported in the home. An emphasis on pleasure was a key focus, which in turn meant that there were no requirements for analysis of texts by students. There was an expectation that students would continue reading for pleasure at home as well as during the school time set aside for this. We also wanted to encourage students to talk with their peers and teachers about the books that they had read in an informal manner. We provide a comprehensive explanation of the pragmatic details of the Programme further within the Methods section, and how it sat within the overall goals of the Project.

While the Project explored a number of different research gaps, one of its key contributions relates to the data collected on teachers' perceptions of implementation of the Programme, as schools seeking to implement RfP programmes need to do so with teachers as learning partners. We encouraged teacher acceptance of the programme through additional professional development initiatives, such as a seminar and workshop with the academic mentor on the project, as successful implementation of programmes and other substantial changes in schooling environment can be influenced by diverse factors such as teacher commitment as key stakeholders (e.g. Stanhope & Corn, 2014). However, at the inception of the Project, we discovered that there is a paucity of extant research which focuses on teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of implementing a whole-school RfP programme. Further insights into these can help schools to avoid barriers in implementation in other contexts, as well as potentially enhancing teacher support and commitment to such programmes. To this end, we wanted to capture teachers' retrospective reflections on the benefits and challenges of the Programme, and the paper focuses on the following research questions:

What benefits do teachers perceive that a whole-school RfP programme confers for students?

What challenges do teachers perceive in supporting a whole-school RfP programme?

Method

The Programme within the Project

In 2018 the school-based literacy committee conducted a pilot RfP programme to gauge initial staff and student acceptance of the concept. In 2019, a full RfP programme was rolled out throughout the school (K-12) with two 15 minute blocks being offered in the primary school; K-2 read from 8:20-8:35am, Years 3-6 read from 2:45-3:00pm, and Years 7-11 in the secondary school reading from 12:05-12:25pm four days per week. This equated to 75 minutes per week in

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the primary school, and 80 minutes per week in the secondary school. Students were required to bring a physical, English language, fiction book. This could not be their current English text. Teaching staff were required to also read a book of their choice. Teachers, executive and administrative staff were required to read for this period of time.

Setting

The research was conducted in an independent K-12 girls school located in a high SES suburb in Sydney. The school population at the time of the research was 896 students, spread over a junior school (K-6) and senior school (7-12) campus, and 118 teaching staff and executive.

Participants

Participants were all teachers and/or executive at the school, for the purposes of the research project administration staff were not included as they did not interact with students while reading. Twenty six percent of participants worked mainly in the junior school campus, while 74% were located on the senior school campus. Forty percent of the respondents had roles as pastoral care tutors. This meant that they had additional contact with the students in the senior school and facilitated the book talks that students delivered in pastoral care periods.

Only teachers who had been at the school for the full 10 months of the Programme were asked to complete the survey so that the data and findings relate only to those teachers who had undergone the same training and period of engagement with the Programme.

Materials

Teaching staff and executive at the school completed two online surveys. The surveys were based on previous work by Merga and Ledger (2019) and adapted in collaboration with the Project team during a workshop held at the school. Surveys were piloted with a small number of staff members and revisions were made.

Procedures

Ethics approval to administer the two surveys was obtained from Edith Cowan University. The first survey was administered in November 2019, the year before the RfP programme was due to commence in order to ensure that responses were not contaminated by the professional learning around the benefits of RfP which was planned for the first week of school the following year. A link to the survey was emailed to all staff from the Director of Curriculum and two follow-up emails were sent. The survey was anonymous to avoid satisficing by staff (Barge & Gehlbach, 2012). The post-survey was sent to staff in November 2020 after the programme had been operational for 10 months. The results of the post-survey only are reported in this paper. Members of the Project team did not take part in either survey.

As reflective practitioners we wanted to be able to reflect on teacher practice to inform our own practice in our own context. Although the survey data served a dual purpose to inform the Project and to benefit the greater school and research communities, the members of the Project did not access the survey data until mid-2021 when they met for a writing week with the academic mentor.

The data explored in this paper are in response to the following survey questions, as detailed below in relation to the related research questions:

What benefits for students do teachers perceive that a whole-school RfP programme confers?

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1. I feel that my students are benefiting from regular silent reading at school. (Likert Scale Strongly Agree-Strongly Disagree)
2. Why do you agree/disagree? (Open field text box, only agreeing and disagreeing respondents on the previous item exposed)

What challenges do teachers perceive in supporting a whole-school RfP programme?

1. Have you experienced any issues with implementation of the silent reading programme throughout this trial? (Dichotomous Yes/No)
2. Please describe these issues. (Open field text box, only affirmative respondents on the previous item exposed)

The data were coded using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. As a first step, a group of three of the authors read through the data individually and developed initial codes for the first research question. The group then worked collaboratively to code the data. The researchers then worked to individually code the other two data sets. The group then collaboratively coded these data sets to ensure inter-coder reliability.

A list of all codes was then compiled for each research question on a whiteboard and the group worked collaboratively to group the codes into themes. The group then followed step 4 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework and re-read the data to ensure that the data matched the themes that had been developed.

The data analysis team conferred regularly with the academic mentor to clarify the process and seek her input on the process. The academic mentor did not take part in the coding process, nor did she offer any themes. This ensured that the generation of themes was iterative and inductive as the data analysis team were not as familiar with the research literature as the academic mentor and did not commence the analysis with preconceptions about the themes that could exist within the data.

In some instances there was a degree of ambiguity in responses, for example the phrase "switching off" was interpreted as "relaxation" in some of the responses, but in other contexts it referred to students lacking focus and not engaging with the reading process. In these cases the data analysis team re-read and discussed the coding until consensus was reached.

Results and Discussion

Survey Response

A total of 105 teachers and executive staff completed the survey, representing a response rate of 89% of the staff employed at the school at the time.

Perceived Benefits

Eighty five percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their students were benefiting from regular silent reading. Less than 2% of the respondents believed that there were no benefits for their students. The following three themes were identified as benefits; skill development, engagement, and wellbeing.

Skill Development. Many of the teacher respondents commented on their perception that the RfP programme had impacted on the skills of the students. In some cases these were skills that appeared to have a direct connection to literacy, for example, students' reading and comprehension skills improved. In other cases, teachers saw a link with more general classroom skills. The types of skills that the teachers identified were extensive: reading ability, writing, comprehension, general knowledge, verbal and social skills. Research has identified links between increased amounts of reading and the benefits to students' literacy development, especially in adolescence, after fluent reading has been established (Van Bergen, Vasalmpi & Torrpa, 2020). Skills such as reading comprehension (Rogiers et al., 2020) and more general level of reading achievement (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1998; Taylor, Frye & Maruyama, 1990), have all been found to be associated with increased reading practice. Teachers in the study also noted the link between the literacy skills: "They are reading a greater number of texts and a wider variety of stories which has led to increased vocabulary. This has been evident in their written work." The relationship between reading and writing is well documented (Yildirim, Demir, & Kutlu, 2020) and it became clear through the analysis of the survey responses that teachers viewed the development and expansion of reading to have an effect well beyond the development of reading skills.

Teachers identified that soft skills, also referred to as 21st Century skills, such as creativity and imagination, had improved during the course of the Programme. Some researchers have found a link between high levels of reading ability and creativity and imagination (Mourgues, Preiss & Grigorenko, 2014). However, there was little evidence of a direct connection between reading and increases in imaginative or creative thinking. It could be that discussions about stories that the students read gave teachers the impression that their overall creativity and imagination had improved, when in fact it was simply more creative and imaginative talk.

Teachers commented on the perceived development of learning dispositions such as preparedness to learn. Teachers wrote about the reading Programme "centring" and "settling" the students to create an environment in which they were more ready to engage with curriculum. This seemed to be a different theme to that of the wellbeing of the students as it was the direct impact that the act of reading had on the students as they transitioned out of the reading and into learning in a different domain, although, it could be argued that reading and literacy crosses all domains of learning.

Engagement. A group of respondents recorded increased student engagement as a key benefit from participating in the Programme. Daniels and Steres (2011) explain that when reading is clearly recognised as a school-wide priority student engagement is significantly influenced in a positive way. A respondent confirmed the "students sense the value in the Programme" and this was supported by another who stated the Programme "makes reading a priority".

Student engagement is a vital component of a successful RfP programme. According to Baumann and Duffy (1997), the engagement perspective involves students developing a desire to read and use literacy, recognise and understand print, obtain ideas from the written word and learn from and with others. Learners need to acquire and develop these complex proficiencies to demonstrate engaged reading. Evidence of these points was found throughout the survey with a

respondent noting they had seen benefits such as “increased engagement with reading, increased enjoyment in reading, increased and improved discussions about what students are reading and increased borrowing from the library”. Additionally, one respondent explained that students were “developing a love for fiction and discussing it with each other”.

Throughout the thematic coding process terms that aligned with engagement were enjoyment, love of reading and enthusiasm. One respondent stated that “reading enjoyment has reached even the most resistant readers. They are reading more and exploring new genres”. Another teacher mentioned “the enthusiasm for reading is palpable in all levels of ability”. It is clear that students participating in the Programme were enthused about reading and demonstrated enjoyment when reading a range of fictional texts. Clark and Teravainen (2017) completed a UK based study that found more students who enjoy reading, read daily and from a wider selection of books compared with those who do not enjoy reading.

Sub themes that were found to contribute to reading engagement were increased volume and variety of books read, increased borrowing and increased reading at home. These terms all interlink and emphasise that students were accessing a wider selection of fiction texts which is evident in the amount they were borrowing and therefore reading at school and at home. Loh, Ellis, Paculdar and Wan (2017) specify that school libraries play a pivotal role in cultivating a reading culture and developing students' enjoyment of reading.

Students receiving the time and opportunity to read for an uninterrupted period of the day was also noted as a benefit of the Programme. According to one respondent, “students have the opportunity to read literature of their choice and this promotes a love of reading for pleasure”. Another respondent commented that students “develop a lifelong love of reading”. One of the goals of the Programme was to create lifelong, habitual readers and it is evident that some teachers were recognising these behaviours.

Wellbeing. Many teachers mentioned that the wellbeing of students was positively impacted by the RfP Programme, reflecting recent findings from Clark and Picton (2020) which link reading during COVID-19 related lockdowns and student wellbeing. A school wide focus on wellbeing, including “wellbeing time” may account for the consistent use of the word “wellbeing” in the responses. For the teachers, wellbeing was conceived of in terms of “switching off” and “calming down”: “it also provides the girls some time to switch off and relax a little which helps to calm them down”, but also in terms of “having a break” and “refocusing”.

For some teachers the wellbeing effects were primary with the literacy benefits a secondary by-product: “I feel silent reading gives them an opportunity to maintain their focus in a way that is pleasurable, so it helps the students mental health and has the added bonus of improving their reading skills, including their vocabulary.” And “Silent reading is the best form of relaxation for the girls and added bonus of providing time to acquire new vocabulary and develop life long love of reading.”

Wellbeing and reading research (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018) suggests a weak link between reading levels and wellbeing, but that reading attitudes were the strongest predictors of wellbeing: “Children and young people who enjoy reading very much and who think positively

about reading have, on average, higher mental wellbeing scores than their peers who don't enjoy reading at all and who hold negative attitudes towards reading" (p.3).

Issues with implementation

Although 59% of respondents did not indicate there were any issues with the implementation of RfP, 41% identified issues with the implementation of the programme. The issues centred around the following themes: disengagement, organisation and structure. It is worth noting that the impact of COVID was minimal in the responses given that the school experienced a lockdown period of 6 weeks during which time students were not on campus but were encouraged to continue to read at home (Collins, 2021). This could be indicative of the fact that at the time the survey was completed COVID cases had dropped significantly in NSW and teachers reported that the Programme had continued to be implemented successfully after the students returned to school.

Disengagement. It is evident that teachers perceive disengagement as one of the challenges of supporting the Programme. Avoidance techniques that lead to disengagement include students interacting with their peers, time wasting, using mobile phones and pretending to read. In regards to students interacting with their peers, one respondent observed "disengaged students" who were "disrupting others during reading time". Other respondents stated that students were "chatting during the allowed time" and "some students needed reminding not to talk". Kelley, Wilson and Koss (2012) explain that disengaged readers often display avoidance behaviours or use coping mechanisms that allow them to deliver minimal effort when completing reading tasks. An example of this is described by a teacher who noted, "the book is the prop... on the desk... behind which you chat, pull faces and make signals at peers around you".

Interacting with peers was also linked to time wasting with a respondent mentioning they "had to move some students away from their friends so they don't waste time talking to them". One added that "some students don't bring their book which means they are wasting time". According to Reutzler and Juth (2014), negative reading attitudes and behaviours are often the consequence of poor text-selection. The result is time wasted which stems from selection avoidance or the student choosing an unsuitable book. In regards to the Programme, students were demonstrating disengagement through interacting with their peers and not being prepared with a book which led to wasted time. Another avoidance technique connected to wasting time is leaving the classroom to go to the bathroom. A teacher stated that "students who disengage ask to go to the toilet".

Students were observed disengaging from reading by using mobile phones. One respondent "caught students looking at their mobile phones whilst pretending to read". Use of mobile phones in the classroom was mentioned by a very small number of respondents as a challenge for the Programme. The school has a strict mobile phone policy which ensures that students cannot access their phones during the school day. However, after returning to school after COVID it was determined that students would be allowed to carry their phone with them around the school, provided that they did not use them during the school day. It is suggested that mobile phones might be a greater source of disengagement in schools where students are allowed to interact with phones.

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It is interesting to note the somewhat paradoxical fact that engagement was identified as one of the primary benefits of the Programme and disengagement was a significant challenge for implementation. It is suggested that a few disruptive or disengaged students in a classroom can colour a teacher's perception of the success of a programme, particularly in a school, such as the setting for the Project where there are generally very few issues with disengagement or negative behaviour.

Organisation. When analysing the data we referred to issues related to the internal/classroom implementation of the Programme as organisation. Issues related to external to the classroom factors were coded as "structure" which is discussed later.

The major issue, which many teachers identified as a key challenge, was students forgetting to bring their books. Although the Programme provided many opportunities (eg. corridor libraries, library borrowing sessions etc.) for students to be guided in choosing an appropriate book to read for pleasure, teachers still found that a small percentage of students did not bring books. The impact of COVID on the School meant that corridor libraries which had been provided at the commencement of the Programme had to be removed due to contamination concerns. A tension existed between the desire to make books readily available, but also to ensure that students were not just grabbing a book from an easily accessible place without making an informed choice about what they were reading. Teachers observed that: "The removal of the corridor libraries due to COVID19 has meant that students can't grab a book quickly if they have forgotten their own."

The issue of inconsistent classroom implementation was raised by a number of teachers. Although it appeared that they were uncomfortable directly stating that some teachers were not consistent in their adherence to the programme: "Some teachers must let students do other things during Just Read, as some students are constantly asking 'do we have to read today?'" Some teacher respondents implied that the issue of forgetting books was in part due to the teachers' expectations with regards to reading: "Students not bringing books to lessons. These issues have only occurred on classes that I have been covering."

Other organisational issues that teachers highlighted related to students arriving late to class which interrupted other students' reading (this occurred in the Junior School only where the K-2 classes read only in the morning); students over-reliance on the classroom library (again, only in the Junior School where the students were in the same classroom for the Programme each day); and students being unable to borrow books from the school library.

Structure. Issues that related to the external organisation of the Programme were coded as "structure". In this theme no one sub-theme dominated and instead a series of small, but nonetheless annoying details of the Programme, which related mainly to the setting, were raised. These included challenges with the timetable, noise around the school when the RfP Programme was taking place at different times, and the physical classroom environment.

One particular issue that arose in the context of the School was the number of campuses across which the School operates. Not only did the respondents identify issues about the differences between the K-6 and 7-12 campuses, but timetabling issues meant that on the junior school campus the reading time was conducted at two different times, which meant that while the

Infants section of the school was engaged in reading in the morning, the Primary classes were moving around the campus and participating in lessons. In the afternoon, the reverse occurred with infants' lessons and activities disturbing the Primary reading time. The two session structure was disruptive and presented a challenge for effective implementation of the Programme. In contrast, the senior school had a dedicated time across the three senior campuses and therefore a single time for teachers and students to engage in the process. It also became very apparent when a class in the senior school were not reading. This finding would support our recommendation that schools ensure that the same time is maintained for all students across all campuses to avoid teachers and administrative staff unintentionally interrupting reading time or being timetabled in such a way as to make reading time difficult to implement.

Some teachers commented on the lack of comfort for some students when reading. Reading in spaces not designed for reading, for example, science labs or art rooms with high stools meant that some teachers either supported, or were reluctant to allow students to read outside or on the floor. This desire to create a “reading environment” is supported in the literature (Kuzmičová, et al., 2018) which suggests that readers actively seek comfortable settings for reading. In ensuring that the reading environment enhanced the pleasure aspect of the Programme, this issue may have been more important than the Project team initially thought.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study was that as the survey was anonymous, and the school size was relatively small, we were not able to separate the data between the junior and senior schools sites without possibly identifying respondents. This meant that analysis at a campus level was not able to take place and some issues which related specifically to one context, such as the split reading times, or noise generated from the other classes, were not able to be analysed separately.

At several key points throughout the Programme, project presentations outlining the goals of the Programme were made to all staff. These presentations were essential to ensure teacher buy-in to the RfP programme. It is important to acknowledge that such presentations may have influenced staff responses to the survey. This was evident to some extent by some statements about the perceived benefits of RfP where it would appear that teachers were simply restating the research that had been initially shared with them. For example, statements such as “reading actively improves literacy levels” in response to a question asking teachers to outline how they know that their students are benefiting from the Programme, suggest that the teacher has understood the aims and research, but does not really indicate the behaviours that the teacher has observed in the students that suggests that this is something the teacher themselves has concluded. In this case, it may simply be that the teacher is restating a belief that the Project team sought to embed with the participants.

Implications for Implementing a RfP Programme

Clearly state the expected benefits. The Project team were explicit with teachers and other staff about the goals for the Programme and the benefits that research had suggested were possible to gain. The perceived benefits that the teachers saw in the programme to some degree reflected what we had suggested the benefits would be. Therefore, we would recommend that

teachers are given substantial professional learning about any RfP programme before implementation. Teacher buy-in is critical and when schools put substantial effort into programme development and implementation, then the success of the programme is more likely as teachers view it as a school priority.

Expect the unexpected. The Project team could never have predicted the extent that the global pandemic would have on schooling. The fact that we were able to continue with the Programme and the research project was testament to both the flexibility and engagement of teachers and students with the Programme which had been established in 6 weeks.

A certain amount of resistance to any new initiative is always expected. The Project team were pleasantly surprised when reading the survey comments at the end of the first year of the Programme at the level of support from the staff. It is easy to be discouraged and lose sight of the bigger picture when you are embedded within a project.

Context is vital. Challenges identified by the survey respondents are, in some cases, due to setting and require careful planning when schools engage with a whole school RfP programme.

Conclusion

Teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of a whole-school reading for pleasure programme can offer key insights for researchers and schools. We found that within one school where such a programme had been established, 85% of teacher respondents supported the contention that their students benefited from regular silent reading. We were interested to find that while these perceived benefits encompassed skill development and related engagement as expected, there were also felt to be benefits for student wellbeing. Given the many wellbeing related challenges currently faced by young people at present, educative experiences that offer benefit for both literacy learning and student wellbeing are likely to appeal to schools, and our findings support previous work that has identified a link between reading for pleasure and wellbeing (e.g. Clark & Picton, 2020; Levine et al., 2020).

Furthermore, challenges for implementation identified in this paper warrant the consideration of schools with current whole-school reading programmes, as well as those schools wishing to implement them. Attention should be given to how to manage student disengagement, to prevent students from encouraging peers into joining them in off-task behaviours. Rather than adopting punitive measures, we feel that a closer focus on working with these disengaged students to support them to find books they enjoy would be a more appropriate strategy for mitigation, as our findings reflect previous work that implicate text selection as a possible key factor at play. Organisation factors such as book supply issues and structural issues such as timetabling consistency issues and reading environment issues should also be closely considered, and where feasible, attended to prior to programme implementation. In this vein, a whole-school reading for pleasure programme can become a successful key feature of schools wishing to enhance their students' literacy and wellbeing through implementation of research-supported literacy practices that promote enjoyment as well as learning.

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Author Biographies

Vanessa Collins is the Curriculum Coordinator at Queenwood Junior School, an independent girls' school on Sydney's Lower North Shore. She is highly experienced in curriculum implementation and is passionate about program design to support student engagement. Vanessa leads professional development initiatives in teaching, learning, assessment and reporting. She has extensive knowledge around data analysis to inform classroom practice. Vanessa is an advocate for literacy and the benefits of reading for pleasure.

Isaac Dargan currently teaches Year 3 at Queenwood, a K - 12 all girls' school based in Sydney's Lower North Shore. Previously, he has taught at schools in London and the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney. For the past 3 years, Isaac has been a member of the QLiteracy Committee at Queenwood and one of their greatest achievements has been establishing the Just Read project. Isaac is passionate about improving students' literacy skills and one way to achieve this is through sustained silent reading.

Dr Rosalind Walsh completed a PhD examining gifted children's responses to higher order questioning during story book reading at Macquarie University and was awarded the Vice Chancellor's Award for Research Excellence, as well as the Australasian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented's John Geake Outstanding Thesis Award. She was the coordinator of gifted students (K-12) at Queenwood School from 2017-2021.

Dr Margaret Merga conducts research in literacy, libraries, higher education and wellbeing. She is currently working on projects related to the role of teacher librarians in fostering literacy in schools, supporting struggling literacy learners, libraries and student wellbeing, early career researchers' experiences of producing diverse research outputs, representation and use of metrics in higher education, and handwriting and keyboarding skills in young children.