

Literature Review

The benefits of reading for pleasure have been widely researched and include both educational and personal development (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; OECD, 2010; Samuels & Wu, 2001; Thomson et al., 2012). There is a positive relationship between reading frequency, reading enjoyment and attainment (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). The OECD (2002) reported that reading enjoyment was more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status. Reading for pleasure has also been linked to greater text comprehension, grammar, positive reading attitudes and increased general knowledge (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Research suggests that frequent reading is associated with significant benefits across a range of literacy outcomes, such as syntactic knowledge and word recognition, reading comprehension, spelling, vocabulary, and oral reading fluency (Merga & Gardiner, 2019). Reading quality literary fiction has been shown to increase empathy and positive interpersonal characteristics (Comer Kidd & Castano, 2013; Oatley, 2016).

Much of the work on literacy development focuses on the process of learning to read. However, once reading has been established, students are at risk of aliteracy, that is, have acquired the skills needed to decode text but neither the will nor desire to read regularly (Nathanson, Pruslow and Levitt, 2008). In early schooling, parents and teachers work hand in hand to develop reading skills. As students move through the years of school, student engagement in recreational reading declines (Merga, 2015). This can occur when there is a lack of communication between home and school, with neither group actively promoting reading to students. Merga terms this 'orphaned responsibility' (Merga, 2019).

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is defined as a period of uninterrupted silent reading for pleasure. Students are not required to finish their selections and do not have to write book reports or assignments and no grades are given (Krashen, 2006). Regular reading for between 15 - 30 minutes per day is optimal for a SSR program (Pilgreen, 2000). Additionally, daily practice is also more successful when trying to establish stamina, habit and concentration, rather than a short term intensive intervention (Lee, 2011).

Although some may argue that students are reading more than ever given their dependence and proximity to their mobile phones, the evidence indicates that the quality of text types is crucial, with 'graphic novels, internet sources, text messages and comic books not offering equal benefit to book reading' (Merga, 2019). Additionally, fiction books have been found to be more associated with literacy benefits (OECD, 2011), with recent UK findings indicating that encouraging adolescents to consume fiction may offer superior benefits for the development of reading skills (Jerrim & Moss, 2019).

Merga (2017) suggested that the following considerations need to be considered when planning and implementing a SSR program for upper primary and high school students:

- The importance of teachers knowing their students and what they like to read. Just as adults have diverse reading interests, so too do students. This may be implemented by having student led book clubs, student recommendations within

a library context, and letters to the teacher about their interests and reading habits.

- Teacher Modelling – it is vital that teachers model reading for pleasure by being seen to be reading independently. Teachers need to talk about the books that they are reading for pleasure with students.
- Support Access – sending books home for recreational reading should not end in primary school. Parents need to be informed that recreational reading is important. There should be opportunities for students to access the school library in school time.
- Ensuring that pleasure remains the focus – it is important that books be read with no requirement for analysis or testing.
- Expectations – ensuring that it is expected that students will read both at school and at home for pleasure. This includes reminding students of the benefits of reading.
- Allowing time for reading – ensuring that there are times set aside at school for both independent reading and reading aloud to the class, as well as talking about the pleasure derived from book reading.
- Teach and model strategies to choose a book and to know when to give up on a book.
- Encouraging book talk which is led by students and modelled by teachers. This also includes allowing students to have opinions and respectfully dislike characters or books, in a safe space.
- Recruit parent allies – ensuring that parent support and expectations remain after primary school once reading has been learned. Ensure that parents understand benefits and know how they can support the school program.

Staff modelling is an essential component of the success of an SSR program (Pilgreen, 2000; Jensen & Jensen, 2002; Merga, 2013). Pilgreen stated that teachers who are using this time to mark papers, use their mobile or lesson plan are undermining the aims of the program. It is crucial that teachers use this opportunity to model for students 'what an engaged reader looks like' (Pilgreen, 2000). Likewise, Dr Margaret Merga (2013) stated that the teachers should be visibly engaged within the SSR sessions to provide students with an example to emulate.

The Queenwood program intends to address a gap in the literature by implementing a best practice, evidence-based SSR program with measures of vocabulary and reading comprehension development, along with attitudinal data.

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