Project title

Building Readers for Life: A Sustained Silent Reading Program

Key contact details

Please enter your school and project contact details.

School details

School name	Queenwood
School address	47 Mandolong Rd Mosman 2088
School phone number	89687777
Principal's name	Elizabeth Stone
Principal's email	Elizabeth.stone@queenwood.nsw.edu.au
Principal's approval (signature)	

Project contact details

Contact name	Kim Elith
Contact role/position	Director of Curriculum
Contact email	Kim.elith@queenwood.nsw.edu.au
Contact phone number	89687715
We are interested in participating as a	☒ Single school ☐ Lead school of a cluster of schools

Project outline

The project application should address why your school/cluster has chosen a specific area of focus, why you want to undertake the project, what you would expect to gain and what you hope to contribute.

Applications are assessed based on the following criteria:

- Rationale

- Project design

- Wider contribution: embedded in the rationale and justification for the project

- Organisational capacity: how the applicant school/s are able to support and implement the proposed research project

- Professional response: application presentation, including writing style, formatting and overall appearance.

Rationale

This section should include:

- background: what led to the development of the project? This may include information on the local context of your school, and any concerns or issues identified by your project team — either in your practice or from the literature review

- a brief review of the literature on the topic to show your familiarity with, and the importance of the topic. Where relevant, you might identify gaps that have not been thoroughly investigated in the literature, and which your project is aiming to address

- your aims: what are you going to prove, investigate, or evaluate?

- your intended research question/s, and hypotheses if applicable

- your rationale and justification for the project: why is your project important to your school as well as the wider community? What will it offer in terms of adding to the current knowledge base and/or practice?

Supporting documents

Please attach any supporting documents with your application. Please ensure all included documentation is directly relevant to this section.

Background and Rationale

The aim of this project is to study the impact of sustained silent reading (SSR) on student literacy and on the attitude and motivation of students to engage in reading for pleasure. By using an innovative model informed by current Australian and international research on best practice in SSR implementation, we hope to contribute understandings on how to effectively deliver a model of SSR that can support student learning and engagement in AISNSW schools.

The research question for the study is: *Would engagement in daily timetabled sustained silent reading improve K – 12 students' literacy skills and motivation to read for pleasure?*

Background

Queenwood is an independent, non-denominational girls' school that offers a contemporary liberal education from Kindergarten to Year 12. The school is located across three campuses in Mosman (Junior School) and Balmoral (Mandolong Road and Esther Street, Senior School). It has a student population of approximately 900 students. Queenwood is an academically non-selective school and currently has approximately 14% of students receiving additional learning support to address literacy needs A Literacy Enhancement class for Years 8 was established in 2017 to build the skills of girls who needed targeted intervention in this area. This elective now extends through to Year 10 as of the beginning of 2019. Furthermore, as articulated in our strategic plan, "Towards 2021", our task of guiding and supporting our students in their intellectual and personal growth is shaped by the principles of liberal education, independence, perspective and contribution. As such a range of actions have been taken to build our students' capacities in each of these areas.

The QLiteracy committee was established in 2017 with the following objectives:

- Develop and articulate a school wide vision for ensuring all students acquire the literacy skills necessary for academic and future success, including the motivation to read (policy)
- Develop and refine a consistent set of literacy strategies and practices used across campuses, classrooms, disciplines and year groups (resources)
- Refine the processes used to track the progress of students and the sharing of that information for instructional purposes (tracking)
- Provide staff with relevant and practical professional development or support to execute these strategies confidently, to the point that they become embedded and sustainable (support)

As part of its longer term strategy, the QLiteracy Committee identified the need for Queenwood to provide adequate time allocation and mentoring to support students to develop and maintain a habit of reading. Staff, in particular the K-12 library staff and Senior School English Department staff, had noticed that student engagement with fiction appeared to decrease once the girls entered upper primary school and high school and the culture of reading of the school was at risk.

Following staff and student consultation, a trial of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) was conducted in Term 4, 2018. Students were given a 15 minute SSR period each Wednesday. Student surveys of Year 7 and 9 prior to the trial indicated that 28% of girls were reading for pleasure less than once a week, or never. Of concern, 10% of the girls surveyed were not currently reading anything and most of these were from the Year 9 cohort, supporting research findings that reading for pleasure decreases as students get older.

Staff feedback indicated that in the Junior School most teachers were already implementing SSR in some form or another, but the approach was inconsistent. In the high school years, students in Year 7-10 were allocated one period (1 hour) per 2 week cycle for SSR as part of the English KLA. However, when surveyed about their reading habits, most students cited their current English text as

the book they were reading, indicating a lack of autonomous engagement with a broader body of literature.

As a result of the trial, the QLiteracy Committee, along with the Director of Curriculum and other members of the school's executive advocated for a roll out of the SSR program K-12. The school's commitment to the program was such that significant adjustments will be made from 2020 to the school's timetable to allow for 20 minutes of SSR each day - a total of 100 minutes per week. Although this amount of time is not uncommon in primary schools, we believe that this time allocation and whole school commitment to changing the reading culture of the school is unusual in a high school setting.

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 needs 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.

Aims of the Program

The aims of the SSR program at Queenwood are to:
- create lifelong habitual readers who are passionate about reading.
- increase student enjoyment of reading.
- increase student reading achievement across literacy indicators.
- build empathy for others and understanding of the world around us.
- test and develop a best-practice model of SSR with high frequency to share with other AISNSW schools.

Project design

Who will be involved?

Stakeholders in the project are:

- Director of Curriculum
- QLiteracy Committee
- Years K – 12 Students
- Junior School and Senior School classroom teachers
- Parents

How will your project's aims be achieved?

A whole-school program of SSR will be implemented on a daily basis at the commencement of the 2020 academic year with teachers modelling SSR with a group of students each day for a period of 20 minutes.

What is needed to succeed?

Engagement and compliance from students and teachers to participate daily in the allocated SSR time is essential to the success of the program. We intend to achieve this through increasing student, teacher and parent knowledge and understanding of the value of SSR and its impact on literacy development and improvement. Teachers will be trained in the best-practice model for SSR that has been developed from the aforementioned literature, to ensure that all students are exposed to a high-quality opportunity for reading. This training will encompass a wide range of facets, from speedy transitioning into reading, to balancing reading modelling with required student monitoring and support.

How will success be measured?

The success of the program will be measured in a variety of ways:

- A positive change in attitudes towards recreational reading as measured by attitudinal surveys of both students and staff.
- An increase in student vocabulary and reading comprehension levels as measured by pre and post testing on ACER's PAT Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension measures during the life of the project, and as a longer term subsidiary measure beyond the two year scope of the project, through analysis of NAPLAN Reading results for the same cohort over a three year period.
- An increase in student borrowing rates from the school libraries, especially among students who would have previously been identified as "reluctant" readers.
- Development of a best-practice framework that can be shared with other AISWA schools, to allow for effective implementation of a high-frequency SSR program at other sites.

What will occur as a consequence of the project?

The school has already committed to making significant changes to the timetable and organisation of the school to implement SSR. AISNSW funding will allow the school to measure the impact of the program, work closely with Specialist Mentor Dr Margaret Merga, and to disseminate the findings which will benefit other schools who may be interested in implementing a similar program if the findings indicate the program is successful across any of the measured dimensions. This data will also contribute to the field of knowledge in this area as there are very few schools, particularly at the high school level, who are implementing such a comprehensive program, and the body of research is limited on a national and international level.

Research Design - methods and data collection approaches

A mixed methods approach will be adopted for this research with the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The project is designed as a two year project with three phases.

Phase 1: Pre-implementation (now-Term 1 2020)

This phase has already begun with the piloting of the SSR project in 2018. A need for the project has been established at the executive level and significant changes to the school's organisation have already begun, including, altering of the school timetable to accommodate a 20 minute daily SSR period, altering the school diary, and allowing staff to plan changes to lesson times which may result in changes to programming.

During the pilot program we identified that some students were not sufficiently prepared for the SSR period precipitating a "flurry" of borrowing from the library. We anticipate that students will be more prepared when SSR becomes a daily activity, and these transitional periods are managed through the aforementioned professional development opportunities for staff. However, we intend to provide portable libraries of short stories which are visually appealing and have strong engagement for students who may forget to bring their daily reading material. These portable libraries will be set up in Term 4 2019 and made widely available in classrooms to support adequate resourcing of the project.

As staff commitment is vital for the success of the program, sessions will be run during regular professional learning time for staff to understand the researched value of reading and in self-selecting their own reading material. A weekly book recommendation will be added into the regular Monday morning staff briefing and staff libraries of quality fiction will be established in the staffrooms at the school.

Interest in the program will be created by the use of "Currently reading…" posters which will highlight books staff are currently reading. This will also serve to demonstrate to students that staff are active readers. Wellbeing sessions will incorporate activities involving student voice through "book talks".

During Term 4 2019 the attitudinal survey for staff and students will be developed in conjunction with Dr Margaret Merga.

A Student Advisory Committee will be established by the QLiteracy Committee. These committees will work together to plan the program launch for students.

Phase 2: Implementation (Term 1, 2020 – Term 4, 2020)

Data collection:
<u>Pre-project data</u> will be collected via a number of sources;
- Administration of a student attitudinal survey focusing on leisure reading (reading at home, reading apart from their set English text, no. of books read the year prior) (Term 1, 2020)
- PAT (Progressive Achievement Test) vocabulary test and reading comprehension test for Yrs 5 – 10 students.
- Pre borrowing rates from school libraries
- Staff pre-implementation attitudinal survey to identify issues relating to the introduction of SSR in the classroom.

Program launch (early Term 1, 2020)
The program will be launched with students on day 1 2020. The benefits and organisation will be explained to students by the Student Advisory Committee and QLiteracy Committee. A parent

information session will be held early in Term 1 to explain the benefits and organisation to the parents and how they can support the program.

Early Term 1, 2020 data
- SSR observation log: QLiteracy committee members to randomly visit classrooms to measure visible student and staff engagement (Term 1, 2020); common observable features to be measured.
- Staff implementation survey to measure unresolved issues relating to the SSR in the classroom (end Term 1, 2020)

Mid project data will be collected at the end of Term 4, 2020 after 12 months implementation via the same sources;
- Comparison of borrowing rates from school libraries with pre-implementation levels
- Re-administer student attitudinal survey focusing on reading for pleasure
- Re-administer PAT (Progressive Achievement Test) Vocabulary test and Reading Comprehension
- Random visits to classrooms to measure visible student and staff engagement
- Staff mid-implementation survey to measure unresolved or unforeseen issues relating to the SSR in the classroom (Term 4, 2020). Data from these teacher surveys will enhance the transferability of the best-practice framework by drawing on teachers' experiences.

Phase 3 (Term 1 2021 – Term 4 2021)

- The program will continue with adjustments made based on feedback from students, staff and parents. The Student Advisory Committee will provide a student voice in the process. A best-practice framework for SSR will be developed, informed by the findings of this project and the prior informing research.
- A Plain English report will be developed in 2021 to communicate the best-practice framework and to highlight the impact of the program on students who are currently in the Literacy Enhancement Class (students requiring additional support with literacy). This will include recognition of any barriers or unresolved issues that warrant further consideration.
- Further analysis of data and preparation of academic papers and conference presentations will be developed, submitted and disseminated.
- Data Collection points will continue, with post-data collected at the end of Term 4 2021 and pre-data for students entering Year 7 in 2021. As aforementioned, the long term objective of exploring impact on NAPLAN scores will be explored beyond this point.

Ethical considerations: We have reviewed the AISNSW Ethical Guidelines, and intend to inform and seek consent from all parties involved (staff, parents and students) about the research to be undertaken and its intended purpose; the parent body will be asked to consent to their child's participation in testing and surveying, and consent will also be sought from the students, who will have the project explained to them in Plain English. Dr Merga will advise on seeking ethics approval from Edith Cowan University so that findings from the research can be disseminated in peer-reviewed journals. This is a low-risk project.

Dissemination: Our intention is to share the findings of the research widely with the school sector (i.e., AIS Research Symposium, School Library Association of NSW conference presentation). Our Specialist Mentor, Dr Margaret Merga, has agreed to work with the project team on the preparation of publications for academic and professional journals.

Data Analysis

Attitudinal Data

Changes in attitudes will be measured using an attitudinal survey instrument designed in consultation with our Specialist Mentor Dr Margaret Merga. This instrument will be administered online to students and staff. Analysis will evaluate changes in attitudes towards recreational reading, and look at relationships between student-level factors (such as age, year group and gender) and attitudes.

PAT Data

ACER's PAT-Vocabulary and PAT-Reading Comprehension tests will be administered pre- and post-intervention to determine if the SSR has measurable effects on vocabulary development and reading comprehension. Effect size will be used to calculate differences between pre- and post-test data. The use of ACER PAT testing allows the school to compare gains to an Australian normed sample.

Borrowing Rates

Overall borrowing rates pre-and post-implementation will be compared. Analysis of students who have been previously identified as reluctant or non-readers will also be used to identify any changes in borrowing behaviour.

Teacher/staff training and support needed

As teacher engagement is a critical element of the program, a full day Professional Learning session will be scheduled with Dr Margaret Merga prior to the commencement of Term 1 2020. This will focus on the benefits of SSR to all KLAs, and developing understanding of a common, research-supported approach to SSR so that all students in the school are exposed to a similar experience. Time will also be allocated for teachers to develop strategies to engage students in book talk.

Infrastructure and capacity within the school to undertake the project

Kim Elith, Director of Curriculum, leads professional learning and curriculum initiatives focused on pedagogical improvement and innovation. She will lead and manage the planning and implementation of all facets of this program and research project, ensuring key stakeholders are engaged, as well as building structural and sustainable changes to curriculum and timetabling at the Senior School. Gabrielle Mace, as Head of Library and Information Services and Head of the QLiteracy Committee will also manage the implementation of the specific operational facets of the program into the school. Ms Mace will work closely with the Director of Curriculum on both staff engagement and professional learning, and with the Director of Academic Operations on changes to the timetable. Dr Rosalind Walsh has significant experience in the collection and analysis of research data. Dr Walsh will co-ordinate the data collection and analysis at the school level and work with Dr Merga and the QLiteracy Committee in the design of the Attitudinal Surveys, which will be based on Dr Merga's previous published research work (e.g. Merga, 2019).

Budget

As a minimum, the proposed project budget needs to identify expenditure in the line items listed below. A **nil** value is acceptable where appropriate.

A. Staffing costs

Item	Amount
Teacher release	$10,000
Staff salary component	$35,704
Specialist mentor	$30,000
Other (please identify in field below)	

Please describe other item/s:

B. Research related Activities

Item	Amount
Purchase of materials ACER Vocabulary & Reading Comprehension Test License (2 years)	$5560
Conducting and/or attending events/activities	NIL
Accessing additional external expertise Assistance with statistical analysis	$5000
Other (please identify in field below)	NIL

Please describe other item/s:

C. Travel

Item	Amount
Visits to other schools or research sites	NIL
Other (please identify in field below)	$7000

Please describe other item/s:

Flights, meals, transport and accommodation for Dr Merga from WA for visits during the 2 years of the project.

D. Other items

	Description	Amount
Item 1		
Item 2		
Item 3		

E. Total funding requested

	Amount
Total of all funding requests (A+B+C+D)	$93,264

F. School contribution (where appropriate)

	Description	Amount
Financial		
In-kind (please identify)	Purchase of library books for students and staff	$7000
Other (please identify)	Purchase of small bookcases for classrooms and staff common rooms	$10,000

	Amount
Total funding requested and school contributions (E+F)	$110, 264

Your team

Please list proposed members of your research team (if known)

Name	Position and school	Research role
Kim Elith	Director of Curriculum	Project and Program Leader
Gabrielle Mace	Head of Library	QLiteracy Committee Co-ordinator; SSR program co-ordinator
Vanessa Collins	Junior School Curriculum Co-ordinator	QLiteracy Committee Member
Isaac Dargan	Junior School Classroom Teacher	QLiteracy Committee Member
Anthony George	Head of English	QLiteracy Committee Member
Merrilyn Lean	Senior School Science Teacher, Teacher Development Team member	QLiteracy Committee Member
Catherine Phoon	Head of Specialised Programs	QLiteracy Committee Member
Karen Seeneevassen	Senior School Teacher Librarian	Research Project consultant
Rosalind Walsh	Catalyst Co-ordinator	QLiteracy Committee Member; Research Project School-based Mentor

Cluster schools – N/A

Please supply contact details of each school in your cluster for the project. If you have more than one additional school in your cluster, copy and paste the two tables below as appropriate.

Cluster school details

Cluster school name	
School website address	
Contact person	

Contact person's email	
Contact person's phone	

Cluster school team – N/A

Please list proposed members of the research team (if known)

Name	Position and school	Research role

Specialist mentor details

Please add details of the specialist mentor (if known at this time).

Participating schools commit to establishing or building on an existing specialist mentor relationship with an academic from an institution such as a university. The specialist mentor will work closely with the school research team for the duration of the project.

The school can identify seek the assistance of the AISNSW in identifying a specialist mentor suitable to the intended field of research if required.

Do you already have Specialist Mentor?

☒ Yes   ☐ No

Mentor's name	Dr Margaret Merga
Organisation (if applicable)	Edith Cowan University
Website address (if applicable)	https://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/education/staff/profiles/senior-lecturers/dr-margaret-merga
Role/Position	Senior Lecturer
Contact email	m.merga@ecu.edu.au
Contact phone number	08 6304 0000

Thank you for completing the AISNSW School Based Research Project Application. If you have any further enquiries please email the Research and Data Division at RandD@aisnsw.edu.au.

References

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