

The Role of Whole-school Literacy Policies Supporting Reading Engagement in Australian Schools

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Abstract: The Australian Curriculum positions literacy as a general capability to be taught across all subject areas. While schools may design agreements and policies to formalise the position of literacy as a whole-school priority, there is relatively limited research guiding the structure and content of these planning documents. We contend that reading engagement should have an important place in such planning documentation, despite the Australian Curriculum's relative silence on this aspect of literacy learning, as it is a valuable facet of literacy promotion, with research strongly supportive of the relationship between reading skills and will. We conducted a content analysis to determine if available whole-school literacy policy plans, agreements and policies were supportive of fostering reading engagement at school, and the extent to which they fostered home and school partnerships around reading engagement. Mirroring absences in the curriculum, we found that few schools promoted reading engagement strategies as a whole-school priority, and where strategies did feature, these varied widely.

Introduction

Since 2014, all Australian states and territories have used the new Australian Curriculum (AC) as set by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). While this has led to numerous changes in teaching and learning in Australia, which have differed between states and territories, the positioning of General Capabilities was perhaps one of the most significant shifts, with literacy positioned as one of seven General Capabilities to be taught in every subject area. While the notion that literacy should be a priority outside of subject English is not new (Humphrey & Robinson, 2012a), national recognition of its importance across all areas, mandated in a cohesive curriculum, was a significant development. As such, all teachers across all disciplines and years of schooling must take responsibility for building their students' capacities in both literacy as conceived more generally, and the specific literacy needs of their learning area(s).

The establishment of literacy as a general capability (ACARA, 2017a) was a culmination of various forces and educational trends. The whole-school approach to literacy in part originates from the 1980s Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) movement, which 'spread from the United Kingdom to New Zealand, Australia and other countries and promoted a student-centred, language learning focus in all discipline areas' (Alford & Windeyer, 2014, p. 75). Parker (1985) contends that for practical purposes the LAC movement originated 'in London in 1966 when a group of secondary English teachers met to consider the role of talk in English lessons' (p. 173), with that conversation broadening to consider the role of language across the whole curriculum. The LAC movement in both Canada and Australia grew during the 1970s, fuelled by theory development and classroom-focused research. In the 1980s the LAC movement was additionally bolstered due to intellectual innovations, 'with knowledge

increasingly constructed as the result of a complex interaction between individuals and their environments and textual exposure' (p. 173). For around two decades, educational policies have valued the explicit teaching of literacy across the disciplines (Humphrey & Robinson, 2012a). The positioning of literacy as a general capability to be expressed as an underpinning facet of all disciplinary learning in the AC can be seen as part of this broader shift in understandings around language, disciplinary literacy and the value of literacy as a gateway skill for learning in other areas.

Schools may design and enact plans, agreements and policies to formalise the position of literacy as a whole school priority and guide how this priority is to be enacted in daily practice. However, there is limited research literature exploring or detailing best practice in designing or enacting a whole school approach to literacy in peer-reviewed research sources, and no available comprehensive meta-analysis, though the extant literature contains hints about what it can constitute and encompass, and how it can best be achieved. For instance, research suggests that non-native speakers can be key beneficiaries, as a whole school approach to literacy can raise expectations of a cross-curricular approach to supporting the needs of second language learners, as ACARA has 'made it explicit that all teachers will be required to provide pedagogy that responds to the language learning needs of students whose first language is not English, regardless of whether these teachers have had formal language teacher training' (Alford & Windeyer, 2014, p. 76). In addition, the extant research literature tends to suggest that whole school literacy policies need to be responsive to their social, socio-economic and geographic contexts (e.g. Baxter & Sawyer, 2006); knowledgeable of and responsive to the literacy requirements across learning areas as well as the literacy requirements of high stakes testing (e.g. Humphrey & Robinson, 2012a); supported by stable staffing and a collaborative school culture; and spearheaded by strong leadership (e.g. Baxter & Sawyer, 2006). Where specific educational programs are employed as part of the policy, adequate professional development must be provided to staff (e.g. Clary, Feez, Garvey & Partridge, 2015). When formulating such a policy, commencing with a school-wide literacy audit to investigate how literacy is addressed in the curriculum areas and identify teacher preparedness to meet the literacy requirements in their learning area(s) can identify dimensions of practice to be developed (e.g. Clary & Daintith, 2017). Others have

focused on the creation of multi-purpose tools rather than policies, plans or agreements, with Humphrey and Robinson (2012b) describing a metalinguistic 'toolkit' for both teacher and student use across disciplines. Hovelroud (2016) explored a 'whole-school 'common language' approach' (p. iii) in one Australian school.

While these works explore a range of dimensions and issues, the literature is not typically concerned with the role of a whole school approach in fostering positive attitudes toward literacy. For example, Hill and Crévola (1999) found 'substantial, measurable improvements in early literacy outcomes can be achieved when schools adopt a whole-school, design approach' (p. 9). Such a design did not tap into engagement, focusing instead on elements such as a literacy block which included explicit instruction, 'the setting of rigorous performance standards', and 'a focus on data-driven instruction with assessment of all students at the beginning and end of each year on a full range of measures' (p. 10). However, Baxter and Sawyer (2006) are an exception, describing a theory-informed approach at the disadvantaged Greenleaf Girls High School, for which the 'first step' involved 'building up a positive attitude to books and reading' (p. 8), amongst an array of other initiatives. This program was highly successful, leading to an 'outstanding performance in literacy' (p. 9).

Reading engagement has been conceptualised in a variety of ways, for instance as a 'multidimensional construct that includes behavioral, cognitive, and affective attributes associated with being deeply involved in an activity such as reading' (Guthrie, Wigfield & You, 2012, p. 602). More recently, Afflerbach and Harrison (2017) juxtapose reading engagement with reading motivation in their argument that the two concepts are not interchangeable.

Motivation is somewhat like a reader's potential energy: It is what you have when you are ready to read, when your reading bike is paused, as it were, at the top of a hill. Engagement is more like a reader with kinetic energy: It is manifest when the reader is zooming down the mountain bike trail of a challenging text, fully absorbed, fully engrossed, totally immersed in the activity of reading (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017, p. 217).

We operationalise reading engagement by drawing on this previous work to develop a simple construct (Figure 1).

Our engaged readers both enjoy reading for pleasure and undertake the practice with frequency.

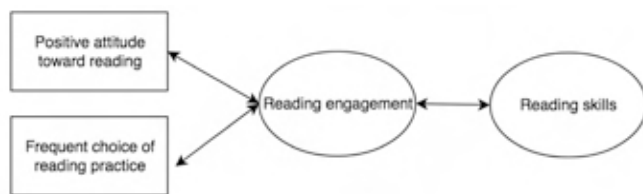


Figure 1. Reading engagement

The paucity of research literature exploring reading engagement as part of a whole-school literacy policy or plan is reflective of curricular silence on this matter. While the AC aims to build literacy skills, it does not recognise the importance of fostering enjoyment of reading, and reading engagement, in order to promote literacy achievement, despite the robust body of evidence supporting the link between the two. Though the AC gives some very brief cursory attention to the role of enjoyment in reading, it is at best positioned as a minor consideration. If a whole school literacy policy, plan or agreement seeks to improve whole school literacy performance, this link needs to be understood. Research suggests that one of the most influential factors impacting literacy development is reading engagement (Guthrie et al., 2012; OECD, 2011b), with a recent Australian investigation of children's reading finding that reading attitude is a strong predictor of reading frequency (Merga & Mat Roni, in press). International research indicates that reading engagement can counter disadvantage:

levels of interest in and attitudes toward reading, the amount of time students spend on reading in their free time and the diversity of materials they read are closely associated with performance in reading literacy. Furthermore, while the degree of engagement in reading varies considerably from country to county, 15-year-olds whose parents have the lowest occupational status but who are highly engaged in reading obtain higher average reading scores in PISA than students whose parents have high or medium occupational status but who report to be poorly engaged in reading. This suggests that finding ways to engage students in reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change. (Kirsch et al., 2002, p. 3)

Avid, engaged readers “punch above their weight” across the whole curriculum’ and ‘high reading engagement mitigates 30% of the effect of social class on attainment generally and 70% of the effect of gender’ (Wrigley, 2017, p. 105). To become an effective reader, a child must have both the skill and the will to read (Gambrell, 1996), with enjoyment of reading being positively related with literacy achievement (e.g. Lupo, Jang & McKenna, 2017; OECD 2011a). Engaged readers

are those who are motivated to read and who typically find enjoyment in the practice, and they are also more likely to choose to read book for pleasure (De Naeghel et al., 2014), an activity consistently associated with literacy benefits (e.g. Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; OECD, 2010). These benefits are diverse, including improved syntactic knowledge and word recognition (Stanovich, 1986; Sullivan & Brown, 2013), reading comprehension, spelling and oral language skills (Berns, Blaine, Prietula & Pye, 2013; Mol & Bus, 2011), vocabulary building (Nagy, Herman & Anderson, 1985; Samuels & Wu, 2001), and oral reading fluency (Allington, 2014). As such, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2005) report on teaching children to read notes as a recommendation that ‘whatever method is used in the early stages of teaching children to read, we are convinced that inspiring an enduring enjoyment of reading should be a key objective’ (p. 36).

Our understanding of the relationship between reading engagement and achievement is informed by Expectancy Value Theory (EVT), a motivational theory that posits that young people’s willingness to perform a particular activity is influenced by the importance or value they attribute to that activity (Wigfield, 1997; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), with intrinsic motivation more strongly associated with reading engagement than extrinsic motivation (Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, & Wigfield, 2012). Most importantly, this perspective assumes that ‘motivational decline’ in children ‘is not innate or inevitable’; rather, it is responsive to contexts and influences that teachers and parents can shape (Guthrie & Davis, 2003, p. 65). Increasing student engagement in reading is not beyond our powers.

Reading engagement strategies should form part of a whole school literacy policy, plan or agreement, yet researchers are yet to consider the role of whole school literacy policies supporting reading engagement in Australian schools. We do not know if reading engagement is presented in this planning documentation, and which strategies are recognised as beneficial through inclusion in the documentation. When evaluating the extent to which a literacy program is supportive of reading engagement, one measure could include exploring the inclusion of current best-practice strategies that are ideally research supported, as we explore in detail in our methods outline below. There are a range of strategies and approaches associated with benefit for reading attitudes and engagement in the

research literature, and these strategies will be explored in detail in the discussion in relation to the findings of the study detailed herein.

The project

We wanted to discover if, despite the relative curricular silence on the importance of reading engagement, Australian schools were privileging reading engagement as a core informing principle in their whole school literacy plans, policies and agreement documents (PPADs). As previously mentioned, both teachers and parents can influence young people's reading engagement, therefore schools can play an important role in working with their parent/guardian body to foster positive attitudes toward reading. Therefore, we also wished to know about the extent to which these PPADs involved parents in supporting reading engagement initiatives. And finally, where schools were supportive of fostering reading engagement at school and/or in the home, we investigated which ideas and strategies they endorsed. To this end, we performed a content analysis of 34 Australian PPADs published and currently available online. We conducted this investigation with a view to illuminating the current status of reading engagement as a priority in Australian school cultures.

Method

We undertook a content analysis to explore the following research questions to determine if PPADs are typically supportive of reading engagement and the role of whole school literacy policies in supporting reading engagement in Australian schools:

1. Do whole school literacy policies typically support the fostering of reading engagement at school?
2. Do whole school literacy policies typically support the fostering of reading engagement at home?
3. What strategies and processes are identified to support reading engagement in school and home contexts?

Approach to content analysis

We adopted a content analysis approach that was fit for purpose. While we were concerned with the manifest content (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999), we were ultimately more interested in the deeper meanings and contextual relevance that could be ascribed to the presence or absence of the support indicators and strategies that we sought (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314), referred to as the latent content. Latent content analysis

can be defined as 'analysis of what the text talks about', and this 'involves an interpretation of the underlying meaning of the text' (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 106). We analysed the manifest content to find research engagement supportive strategies in order to draw conclusions about the latent content, in relation to the extent to which PPADs are supportive of reading engagement.

We contend that even though we quantise, our analysis is ultimately qualitative in nature. Krippendorff (2004) makes a strong argument for avoiding the dichotomising of content analysis into qualitative and quantitative approaches, because as he contends, 'ultimately, all reading of texts is qualitative, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers' (p. 16). We primarily use a *directed content analysis* approach, as we use previous research in reading engagement as a guide to uncover any research-supported strategies and processes endorsed within PPADs, while at the same time we retain an exploratory, *conventional* stance of flexibility, ready to identify any other strategies which appear as endorsed on the basis of improving students' attitudes toward or enjoyment of reading and their frequency of engagement in reading for pleasure (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As such, the approach was deductive, in the sense that we drew on background expertise in relation to reading engagement, but also inductive in that we treated relationships in the data as emergent.

Sampling

We decided to source PPADs that were published online, rather than approach schools to request policies. We felt that those documents that were freely available would typically be final versions open to public consideration. We also did not want schools to retrospectively manipulate their PPADs after being approached, in an attempt to conform to our perceived research agenda. This finessing was considered a real risk, as we are known for our research in the reading engagement space. We aimed to source every Australian PPAD freely available online through Google searching within our search period.

We searched for schools with Whole-School Literacy Policies using the following keyword search terms, from 3 November to 1 December, 2017:

Whole school literacy plan; whole school literacy policy; whole school literacy agreement; whole school literacy approach Australia; whole school literacy policy Australia; whole school literacy policy Australia high

school; whole school literacy policy Australia secondary school; secondary college whole school literacy policy Australia; school literacy agreement.

We searched through to page 10 of the search results, after which the search was continued until we reached a whole page with no relevant results. The search was terminated at that point.

This sample recruitment method yielded 27 PPADs from primary schools, 5 PPADs from secondary schools and 2 PPADs from schools spanning all schooling years (K–12). When a greater volume of PPADs can be sourced, there will be considerable utility in ensuring a balanced representation of different types of schools is achieved. At this stage, so few policies were available that this representation could not be accomplished. For example, there is only one PPAD sourced from the Northern Territory. The heterogeneity in the small sample precludes reasonable generalisability.

Instead, we focus on providing foundational exploratory insights. Descriptive details about the 34 schools can be seen in Table 1. Even though these PPADs were freely available in the public domain, we have withheld details that would allow easy deductive disclosure of schools. In this context, deductive disclosure relates to where schools can be identified through traits or details that are either unique when occurring individually, or unique when collectively amassed. Kaiser (2009) notes that

Given that qualitative studies often contain rich descriptions of study participants, confidentiality breaches via deductive disclosure are of particular concern to qualitative researchers. As such, qualitative researchers face a conflict between conveying detailed, accurate accounts of the social world and protecting the identities of the individuals who participated in their research. (p. 1632)

Preventing deductive disclosure was particularly important as the PPADs were publicly available materials sourced online and not from the schools themselves. We would not wish to discourage schools from making their documentation broadly available to the community by providing critical commentary of PPADs that are readily identifiable. This strategy aimed to avoid exposure or stigmatising of schools that did not incorporate reading engagement policies, or any perception that schools are being opened to judgement. Rather, the purpose of this study was to inform and potentially enrich future planning for literacy in schools.

PPADs' names varied widely, and they were only

Table 1. Characteristics of schools within the sample as per My Schools (ACARA, 2017b)

Anonymous number (S#)	State/territory	School sector	Year range	Location
Primary schools (27)				
S1	NSW	Public	K–6	Major cities
S2	VIC	Public	Prep–6	Major cities
S3	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S4	NT	Public	P–6	Remote
S5	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S6	VIC	Public	Prep–6	Major cities
S7	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S8	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S9	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S10	SA	Public	R–7	Major cities
S11	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S12	SA	Public	R–7	Inner regional
S13	ACT	Private	K–6	Major cities
S14	SA	Public	R–7	Major cities
S15	SA	Public	R–7	Inner regional
S16	WA	Public	K–6	Outer regional
S17	SA	Public	R–7	Outer regional
S18	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S19	SA	Public	R–7	Major cities
S20	SA	Public	R–7	Outer regional
S21	WA	Public	K–6	Major cities
S22	SA	Public	U, R–7	Major cities
S23	SA	Public	R–7	Major cities
S24	SA	Public	U, R–7	Major cities
S25	NSW	Private	K–6	Inner regional
S26	QLD	Public	Prep–6	Major cities
S27	VIC	Public	Prep–6	Major cities
Secondary schools (5)				
S28	WA	Public	7–12	Major cities
S29	NSW	Public	U, 7–12	Outer regional
S30	NSW	Private	7–12	Major cities
S31	QLD	Public	7–12	Major cities
S32	VIC	Public	7–12	Major cities
Combined schools (2)				
S33	SA	Public	R–12	Outer regional
S34	WA	Private	PP–8	Very remote

included where a literacy plan was clearly identifiable. The following 17 names were included: Literacy Policy, Whole School Approach to Literacy, Whole School Literacy Plan, Whole School English Plan, Literacy Curriculum Guide, Literacy Plan, Site Plan Literacy, Academic Plan for Literacy and Numeracy, Literacy Agreement, Language Policy, Whole School Literacy Agreement, Business Plan, Annual Operational

Plan – Literacy, Whole Site Literacy Agreement, English/Literacy Agreement, School Literacy Agreement, and Literacy and Numeracy Policy. This information on the breadth of titling nomenclature can be used to inform the search scope for future projects in this area.

According to My Schools data for 2016 (ACARA, 2017b), enrolment numbers ranged from a high of 1475 to a low of 22, with an average of 412.2. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) ranged from a high of 1162 to a low of 801 (with one unlisted value), with an average of 1010.6, which is slightly above the Australian average of 1000 (ACARA, 2017b). While schools in major cities dominated the sample, it was interesting to note that the sample included inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote schools.

Analysis

Our aim was to analyse PPADs to find specific strategies and processes that were clearly supportive of reading engagement in young people. The first challenge arose in the lack of uniformity between the planning documents, as the content of and approach to these documents varied widely. The level of detail for implementation varied from the broadly aspirational to the specific; document length also varied, from a one-page *Literacy Agreement*, or a two-page *Whole School Literacy Plan* (S4), to a 119-page *Whole School Literacy Plan* (S34), or a 73-page *Language Policy* (S13). Some of the PPADs were incorporated into larger planning schemas, while most were presented independently. Analysis was therefore challenging due to the diverse nature of the documents' purpose, presentation, scope and depth.

Our approach involved the following process, as 'in the absence of similar research studies to inform the criteria' we needed to devise a rigorous approach with robust inclusion criteria (Merga & Hu, 2016, p. 78). The first author read through all sourced materials, addressing the three research questions through analysis of manifest content. Analysis for research questions one and two was initially coded as *yes* where supporting data were clear, coded as *no* in instances where no supporting data could be found, and coded as *to be decided* in the instances where the first author was genuinely unsure. In order to satisfy the research question and obtain a *yes*, three essential inclusion criteria had to be satisfied.

1. We needed to find at least one instance of an endorsed strategy or approach to support reading

engagement in the school. We needed to see an instance of reading being fostered with pleasure and attitudes given some degree of consideration. Where enjoyment or pleasure was briefly referenced as a goal, but completely absent in the strategies and approaches, a *yes* was not marked. Simply referencing enjoyment briefly and obliquely in the aims, but not mentioning them in any of the subsequent strategies or approaches, would not lead to the PPAD being considered as advocating reading engagement. For example, where 'encouragement' was mentioned aspirationally, but not elaborated in relation to concrete strategies, it was not included.

We discuss some of the nuances that we grappled with further in our results and discussion below, though we reached a point of strong confidence in our shared analysis of the PPADs, as we explain herein.

2. To warrant inclusion, instances could not be ambiguous. Independent reading could not be conflated with silent reading for pleasure; for example, the S32 PPAD states:

Opportunities for independent reading will be created within class time. The English program at Years 7 to 9 will devote at least one period a week of class time for independent reading practice during which reading skills are explicitly taught. (p. 3)

This statement highlights a focus on skill rather than enjoyment in this activity. This is not to suggest that no children enjoyed the practice, rather that engagement was clearly not central to its purpose. Similarly, shared reading such as reading aloud did not have to be an activity related to enjoyment – it could constitute the reading aloud of passages as part of reading comprehension testing.

3. Instances needed to have the potential to be part of recurring practice in order to support the frequency as well as the enjoyment component of our operationalised construct of reading engagement. Thus, we excluded one-off event participation such as Reading Challenges and Book Weeks or Days; these often appeared as cursory mentions in plans that were otherwise devoid of any consideration of reading engagement.

To address research question three, all instances of strategies and processes that were supportive of reading engagement were identified and coded. As few instances were found, the coding opportunities were limited.

Once this iterative process was completed to the satisfaction of the first author, the PPADs were forwarded to the second author to be independently coded without seeing the initial coding. The same coding process was used, completing Stage One of our analysis. We undertook this stage to establish intercoder reliability and to endeavour to minimise error and bias resultant ‘when processing the voluminous amount of text-based data generated by qualitative inquiry’ (Hruschka et al., 2004, p. 309). While we have used this method in the past (e.g. Merga, 2016), in this instance it seemed particularly important to have two coders independently code the responses, as there was room for subjective interpretation even within the applied frame of the inclusion criteria. As such, we were careful to avoid specific discussion of any school cases before the independent coding was performed, after which time we met to discuss discrepancies, negotiating a final dataset that adhered closely with our objectives.

After both authors coded the data in relation to the two inclusion criteria in Stage One, in Stage Two Margaret analysed the coding to identify instances of agreement, disagreement and indecision. Of the 34 PPADs, there were 22 instances of full agreement, 8 instances where there was at least some disagreement, and 4 instances where both authors desired to discuss further. Each author then provided an explanation of their position for the items that were in disagreement or indecision, and further consideration was given to the strength of these arguments. The authors then met for a review and were able to reach a final agreement on all of the PPADs in relation to the three research questions, concluding Stage Two. This process was not a matter of one author simply acquiescing to the perspective of the other; the process was closely and carefully negotiated.

Results

Overall, of the 34 schools, less than a third (n=11) had a PPAD that was at least to some extent supportive of reading engagement at home or school as per the criteria that we have outlined. Only one of the 34 schools included support of both school and home reading engagement initiatives.

Support for reading engagement at school

We found that n=10 schools supported reading engagement at school. As per Table 2, in relation to Research Question 3, seven supportive strategies and processes were identified.

Table 2. Strategies for supporting reading engagement at school

Anonymous number (S#)	Strategy
S6	Shared discussion about books
S7	Silent reading
S9	Access to books; Silent reading
S13	Teacher modelling; Silent reading
S16	Shared discussion about books; Shared reading
S20	Access to books; Responsive to student interests; Shared reading; Teacher modelling; Silent reading; Shared discussion about books; Environment
S25	Shared reading
S27	Environment; Access to books; Shared reading
S31	Teacher modelling
S32	Environment

Half of these schools only employed one strategy. S20 was by far the most comprehensive in its consideration of reading engagement at school, making reference to all seven of the research supported strategies.

Support for reading engagement at home

We found that two schools’ PPADs were supportive of reading engagement in the home.

As per Table 3, in relation to research Question 3, the following strategies and processes were identified.

Table 3. Strategies for supporting reading engagement at home

School Name	Strategy
S1	Parental modelling; Shared reading
S32	Shared discussion about books

Discussion

Our research suggests that in the current landscape, Australian PPADs are not typically supportive of reading engagement. It also suggests that where reading engagement is supported, it is usually only promoted within school contexts, rather than through optimising home/school partnerships. We found this school-home disconnect interesting, particularly in one school where the school expected parents to ‘model and encourage positive and enjoyable reading and shared reading experiences in literature at home’ (S1, p. 3). As such, the school positioned reading for enjoyment as a home rather than a school responsibility.

We explore these codes, briefly discussing some of the varied supporting research base for each of the identified strategies, before exploring its occurrence in the data set.

Shared reading

Shared reading experiences are associated with both literacy and attitudinal benefits. When teachers or parents read aloud to their students and children in the context of pleasure, and not just for work-related purposes, this is associated with fostering positive attitudes toward reading (e.g. Beers, 1998; Herrold, Stanchfield & Serabian, 1989; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lane & Wright, 2007; Ledger & Merga, 2018; Merga, 2015a; Merga, 2016; Merga, 2017b). Additionally, longitudinal Australian research has found that children aged 10–11 years were more likely to enjoy reading and to read if they were read to when aged 4–5 years (ABS, 2012).

In the data set, there were five schools that made reference to shared reading for pleasure, inclusive of reading aloud for pleasure, and being read to for pleasure, and these were related to both school and home contexts. For example, S16 specifically references reading to students for pleasure in the 'Plan for Reading' under their 'teaching strategies' (p. 16).

Silent reading

Silent reading is reading for pleasure that involves the independent reading of self-selected reading materials at school or at home. It is important that we continue to provide opportunities for reading for pleasure in both contexts. While the value of Silent reading as a beneficial practice has been questioned in the past (e.g. Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008), such challenges have been addressed (e.g. Garan & DeVogd, 2008; Krashen, 2001), with Silent reading valued for its capacity to promote reading frequency and positive attitudes toward reading (e.g. Clark & De Zoysa, 2011; Merga, 2013; Merga, 2018).

In the data set, four schools described use of Silent reading in the context of pleasure. For instance, at S7, reading for pleasure is scheduled into morning and afternoon learning in junior school, though silent reading becomes more optional beyond this point.

Modelling

Both teachers and parents can positively influence children's attitudes toward reading through modelling personal enjoyment of the practice (e.g. Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Artley, 1975; Mancini & Pasqua, 2012; Merga, 2014b; Merga, 2017a; Merga 2016; Methe & Hintze, 2003; Mullan, 2010; Pluck, Ghafari, Glynn & McNaughton, 1984; Wollscheid, 2013). Modelling in this instance differs from explicitly skill-based

modelled reading practices, where skills are explicitly taught, as it focuses either exclusively or inclusively on an attitudinal model.

Our data set contained references to teachers or parents modelling personal enjoyment of reading at four schools. For example, S31 required that their teachers 'demonstrate pleasure in reading' (p. 5).

Shared discussion about books

The research suggests that enhancing the position of reading as a social practice can positively influence students' attitudes toward reading (Merga, 2014c), and that discussing books in the context of pleasure is typically well-received by young people (Lapp & Fisher, 2009; McKool 2007; Merga, McRae & Rutherford, 2018), with this discussion enhancing the attitudes of reluctant readers (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009).

We found four schools made reference to shared discussion about books in the context of pleasure or enjoyment, both at school and at home. For instance, S6 uses literature circles and book clubs to 'focus on enjoyment and comprehension of quality literature' (p. 5).

Access to books

Books are the text type most strongly associated with literacy benefit at this stage (e.g. Baer, Baldi, Ayotte, & Green, 2007; OECD, 2010; OECD, 2011c; Pfof, Dörfler, & Artelt, 2013; Spear-Swerling, Brucker, & Alfano, 2010; Zebroff & Kaufman, 2016), and access to book-rich environments is associated with reading motivation (Clark & Poulton, 2011; Gambrell 1996; Kirsch et al. 2002; Merga, 2015b). If children do not have access to books in the home to read for pleasure, their engagement can be limited, though access to a library can have positive attitudinal effects on reading (Ramos & Krashen, 1998).

In the data set, there were three schools that mentioned provision of access to books for reading for enjoyment. For example, S9 stated 'classes (are) to have a print rich environment, including a class library of relevant topic or theme books and fiction books for pleasure' (p. 8).

Responsiveness to student interests

Where students are able to make choices about their reading material, they are more likely to be interested in what they are reading, and be engaged readers (e.g. Gambrell, 1996; Johnson & Blair, 2003; Schraw, Flowerday, & Reisetter, 1998), and where teachers and

parents are responsive to children's interests in their recommendations and provision of access to books, this typically fosters greater reading engagement (e.g. Merga, 2015a; Merga, 2014b).

Only one school (S20) mentioned being responsive to student interests to foster reading engagement. They described 'giving students a voice in book selection and purchasing books with the specific aim of engaging our students', indicating that they take students' individual interests into account in resourcing.

Conducive environment

By conducive environment, we refer to the specific surroundings in which reading is occurring, rather than referring to broader access factors which are covered in the access code. Previous research suggests that environment can be important for reading engagement (e.g. Merga, 2017), however more research needs to be done on how use of a book promoting space influences young people's engagement with books for this to be recognised as a research-supported strategy.

There were three schools that described aims to create learning environments conducive to reading for enjoyment. S27 described this aim as follows:

We aim to provide a classroom environment which promotes a love of books and reading where students feel inspired to read. Each classroom is a language rich environment with lots of environmental print, labels, posters, information, students' work etc. Books are given their rightful place throughout the school. Each room has a class library where books are displayed in a variety of ways. Topic books are easily accessible to the students. (p. 2)

As such, this school described creation of an environment that privileged the position of books within the learning space.

Further considerations

All of the above strategies are research-supported to some extent, and all of them can clearly be part of a PPAD. However, these strategies are clearly being underutilised in the current landscape of planning in Australian schools. In addition, we also feel that it is noteworthy that there was often a gap between the school mission statements and actual strategic planning. For instance, while S8 identified ensuring that students 'develop a love of language and learning' as a component of their mission statement, fostering a love of reading fell outside the scope of their plan, which instead focuses on reporting assessment, standards

and targets. Similarly, S26 mentioned promoting 'reading for enjoyment and information' (p. 17), but no supportive strategies were detailed.

Unsurprisingly, PPADS typically sought to be closely responsive to the AC, and it is used to justify a wide range of decisions, from broad planning to resourcing. For instance, S11 states that 'the Australian Curriculum is a guiding tool of yearly expectations. It allows teachers to source programmes to cater for individual and small group capabilities, as evident in Bug Club and Blue Prints which each have different levels embedded in their programmes' (p. 5). A number of policies included direct quotes from the AC. We suspect that in order for schools to include reading engagement as a priority in their PPADs, the value of reading engagement needs to be recognised in the AC. In addition, in the absence of a clear and consistent framework around what whole-school literacy policies could and should encompass, there is potential for important potential pillars to be omitted, ignored or misunderstood.

As we move toward furthering our understanding of what constitutes a strong PPAD, this need not be a drive toward uniformity, but rather toward possibility. We acknowledge that a lack of a uniform approach to whole school literacy can be reflective of schools' desires to adopt models that meet the unique needs of their communities. For instance, in the rural context, Clary et al. (2015) describe the importance of incorporating 'rural literacies' (p. 25), which can be characterised as the literacy skills needed to sustain vocational and lifestyle opportunities in rural areas, which may differ to their urban counterparts and also vary between rural locations. Similarly, when describing meeting the needs of a whole school literacy approach in a disadvantaged context, Baxter and Sawyer (2006) highlight the importance of strong systems support focused on mitigating social disadvantage. However, we believe that research supports the contention that reading engagement has universal value, and as such, has broad contextual relevance.

We note that at a discourse level, these documents tend to strongly favour a conceptualisation of literacy success or outstanding performance in relation to testing improvement and diagnostic measurement. For instance, at S5, which did not encourage reading engagement, under the outcome 'Increase the capacity of ALL staff at CPS to deliver effective literacy practice' it was requested that 'NAPLAN planners to be used in Terms 1&2 by Year 3 and 5 teachers', and 'NAPLAN

planners to be used in Term 4 by Years 2&4 teachers' (pp. 1–2), demonstrating how test preparation is a focus not just in the year of NAPLAN testing, but also prior to the year of the test. PPADs also favoured a strongly top-down notion of reading, with very little consideration given to students' interests.

As previously mentioned, only one school gave consideration to home and school strategies for supporting reading engagement. This suggests that in the area of reading engagement, much can be done to increase home and school partnerships. As contended by Sonnenschien and Schmidt (2000), parental involvement in literacy-related activities can convey an important message to children about the value of such activities. They note that 'urging parents to become involved in their children's education is not enough; teachers often must provide parents with the tools enabling them to do so'. Ideally, PPADs should contain clearly articulated strategies and tools for teachers to support parents and guardians to achieve the shared goal of increasing reading engagement.

Limitations

A number of limitations apply to this study. Reading engagement strategies could have been fostered in other documentation that we were unable to source. While the dates on some of the PPADs suggested potential obsolescence, we assumed their continued availability online marked their ongoing currency as per November-December 2017. Though we have used a rigorous process in our analysis, the limitations of inter-subjectivity must still apply.

In addition, not all of the reading strategies we have focused on in this study were equally represented or supported in the literature. However, this does not mean that particular strategies must be considered more or less effectual. For instance, we believe that environments that make use of space and resourcing to promote book reading are likely to be conducive to greater reading engagement, though we acknowledge that further research needs to be conducted in this area.

We also note that this article can only capture reading engagement strategies that are promoted in PPADs, and that schools may employ a range of these strategies in their classroom practice without the necessity that they feature in a PPAD. However, as our previous research notes that schools may utilise reading engagement strategies such as shared reading (Ledger & Merga, 2018; Merga, 2017b), silent reading (Merga,

2013; Merga, 2018) and shared discussion about books (Merga, McRae & Rutherford, 2018; Merga, 2018) far less frequently than might be expected, it also cannot be assumed that these practices are widespread.

Conclusions

Our research suggests that most Australian schools may not have PPADs that support reading engagement. Where research-supported strategies for reading engagement were employed, shared reading and silent reading were most common, though modelling, shared discussion about books, access to books, responsiveness to student interests, and conducive environment were also featured in PPADs. The lack of focus in the AC on reading as a life-long practice, as a result of attitudinal engagement, is evident in these policy and planning documents. We hope that this paper will initiate deeper inquiry into school based policy making, how it is mediated by broader policy processes, and how global and local policy processes might foreground reading engagement. We further argue the need to understand elements of planning for reading engagement, and how these elements contribute to practices in isolation and combination. While the AC is a rich document, we would also like to see greater inclusion of ideas and strategies that reflect the value of fostering reading engagement in our students. Our research also suggests that greater consideration of home and school partnerships in the context of reading engagement is warranted, and it would also be useful to look closely at the individual literacy support roles that teachers, librarians, support staff such as education assistants, and administrators play in enacting a whole school literacy PPAD. We look forward to revisiting this area of inquiry once the pool of PPADs in primary and secondary schools increases, to further our understandings in this under-researched area.

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