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Reading aloud, silent reading and "booktalk" in upper primary school classes:

Teachers' reading programs, motivations and objectives

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Abstract

This case study of four upper primary school teachers sought to discover their motivations and objectives for their decision to implement a combination of three literacy practices: reading aloud to students, providing dedicated silent reading time and engaging students in 'booktalk'.

Results indicated that the teachers' own love of reading, as well as their understanding that well-developed reading skills had an important influence on the future success of their students were recognised as salient motivating factors in each of the teachers' programs. Teachers also had a naïve theoretical understanding of the attitude influence model that framed this study.

This study provides support for the implementation of reading programs in which these three practices are linked and it emphasises the power of teacher modelling as a vital component of pedagogical practice. The teachers' accounts provide access to their emotional commitment to their work, and their stories suggest that they implicitly understand the crucial importance of student motivation to any educational endeavour.

Aim of the study

The aim of this research was to discover and describe the motivations and objectives that prompted four upper primary school teachers to go against the prevailing curriculum trend for precise, measurable outcomes. Instead these teachers chose to read aloud to their students, to implement the classroom practice of silent reading, and to systematically engage students in talking about the books they had read. We intended to investigate the teachers' own accounts; their personal and professional justifications for their pedagogies.

Introduction and background

For those of us living in text-rich, first-world countries, the ability to read and to read well can make an enormous difference to both our school performance, career potential and personal success (Kearsley, 2002; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997) and, ultimately, to our enjoyment of life (Wragg, Wragg, Haynes & Chamberlin, 1998). Reading has the potential to not only inform, but also provoke, delight and stimulate readers intellectually. The ability to read is, therefore, a powerful and enabling tool for learning (Wragg et al., 1998).

There is overwhelming evidence that some parents contribute strongly to the reading attitudes of their children and that a child's interest in books and reading can be firmly established within a family context during the pre-school years (Wilson, 2002). Ideally, a love of reading should continue to be nurtured by teachers in the early years within the school environment, with the support of the family (Cairney, 2000). However, there seems to be a presupposition

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by curriculum developers that children will have attained a sufficient level of ability in reading, by the time children reach the upper primary school level, that teachers' reading aloud to their classes is no longer necessary (Hempenstall, 1999; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997; Wragg et al., 1998).

In reality, however, a proportion of children either come from an environment where reading is not seen as a valued activity (Alexander & Filler, 1976; Masters & Forster, 1997; Saxby, 1997) or have experienced a lack of success with learning to read well (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997; Saxby, 1997). Too often, these children reach the upper primary level with a limited capacity to read and display little, if any, evidence of enjoyment in the act of reading (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997). Frequently such children are not "turned onto reading" (Saxby, 1997, p. 215); they are not "hooked on books" (Pilgreen, 2000, p. 12). Consequently, those students who have developed good literacy skills have already read, and written, thousands of words in excess of those students whose skills are poorly developed, commonly resulting in a significant difference in the reading ability of children in upper primary classes (Kearsley, 2002; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997). Too frequently, such children, if "left to their own devices will make no detectable progress in reading skill for the remainder of their school career" (Hempenstall, 1999, p. 5; see also Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997), thus placing their whole school progress in jeopardy (Worthy, 2002).

Despite the presence of children of low reading ability in schools, and contrary to the frequent "manufacture of 'literacy crises' by governments" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, Drawing on history section, ¶ 1), basic literacy levels, both in Australia and overseas, have steadily increased over the past century (Krashen, 1993; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, 1999). At the same time, however, there has been a significant rise in the demands placed on the population to be increasingly more literate (Krashen, 1993; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997; Moore et al., 1999). And so, while there are very few people who are totally illiterate, there are many who have "poor or very poor literacy skills" (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2000, p. 1). Such people experience difficulty meeting the complex literacy demands expected of them by the society in which they live (ABS, 2000; Krashen, 1993; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997). In these "New Times" (Luke, 1998), society demands high levels of literacy competence in students so that they become productive members of the workforce (Luke, 1998). Luke (1998) also suggests that students will use these "literacies to shape their values, ideologies and identities, and to design and redesign the practices of civic and community life" (p. 306), prompting the speculation that those who do not have that capacity will be increasingly marginalised from the mainstream.

Bearing this in mind, many educators recognise the demands of the modern workplace and understand that, "for the majority of learners, at, or about, the fourth year of school, 'learning to read and write' becomes, and remains 'reading and writing to learn'" (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997, p. 82; see also Rubin, 2000; Wren, 2001). This positions reading as the single most valuable educational tool (Rowe as cited in Rowe, 2000). However, as no tool is useful of itself, students must have the desire to use it. Because the education system, particularly from the upper primary grade level onward, relies so heavily on the skill of reading as an aid to students' learning, it is a priority for schools to equip students with the competence to use these skills (Kearsley, 2002; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997), and to generate a high level of motivation to use them (Morrow, 1991).

Nevertheless, we found that there are teachers who have recognised the considerable influence of positive attitude on children's desire to read, and they have implemented strategies such as sustained silent reading, teacher read-alouds and book talk which have been specifically designed to raise children's interest and motivation in reading (Calkins, 2001; Saxby, 1997; Chambers, 1991). These strategies were designed to provide time for students to practise and develop their reading skills, in order for teachers to demonstrate a reading model

to students, and foster a positive book-based culture within the class (Calkins, 2001; Trelease, 2001; Wilson, 2002). However, the reaction of some educators and powerful, but educationally ignorant, voices from outside education against such holistic language teaching approaches has frequently resulted in contestation over curriculum decisions (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987).

The "debate" over reading instruction

Since the holistic philosophy emerged as a way of theorizing literacy development, there has too frequently been unbalanced criticism of it by parents, the media and some government officials (Moore, 1996; Routman, 1996). There has been considerable ill-informed and unresolved debate over the efficacy of holistic approaches, versus a drill and skills-based approach. The latter is frequently considered a more reliable, and thus testable, option in teaching children to read by those with a venal interest in education (Fields & Spangler, 1995; Routman, 1996). Indeed, there is a body of opinion suggesting the new US legislation has been enacted in response to calls for 'evidence based' research of reading development. Such evidence can only be provided on the basis of testing the testable – children's responses to standardised tests – rather than sampling the long term influences and motivational changes that result from complex human interactions in supportive classroom environments.

Current US policy prescribes a focus on phonemic awareness and emphasises a "back to basics" approach to reading instruction (United States Department of Education, 2002). Critics of this legislation point to the fact that financially interested groups are behind its introduction and argue that there has been a resultant, retrograde, move away from literature-based programs, divorcing the practice of reading from engagement with real books (Edmondson & Shannon, 2002; Ford, 2000; Goodman, 1998). This reactionary legislation in the USA has commonly resulted in the marginalisation of silent reading as a part of the classroom practice of reading instruction. This has happened as a result of a supposed lack of a demonstrable causal link between silent reading and reading improvement (Edmondson & Shannon, 2002). Such a decision was taken in spite of both anecdotal and qualitative research evidence indicating that silent reading is effective as a means of increasing the number of books that students read and in improving students' attitudes to books and reading (Edmondson & Shannon, 2002; Krashen, 1993; Pilgreen, 2000). Unfortunately, such educational developments in the USA have a predictable history of influencing educational practice in Australia (Wilkinson, Freebody & Elkins, 2000).

Teachers and the debate

The suite of classroom practices that encompasses three specific activities – encouraging students to silently read books of their own choice, teachers reading aloud to children, and the systematically planned group discussion about books, or book talk – has been recognised by many concerned educators as educationally productive in Tasmanian schools. This has occurred notwithstanding their 1970s beginnings and the on-going debate over holistic language instruction versus skills-based approaches. In too many schools however, these practices have come under political pressure to marginalise them in favour of a dedicated two-hour literacy block in which teachers are supposed to engage their pupils in skills development (Wilson, 2002). Increasingly, more holistic language teaching practices have tended to be marginalised by teachers who have been urged to engage with teaching that is described as being more explicit (Wilson, 2002). Furthermore, the pressures exerted by some politicians to malign the public education system have polarized the debate over pedagogical practices (Church, 1999).

However, Baumann, Hoffman, Moon and Duffy-Hester (1998) have suggested that while the debate rages outside the classroom over the most appropriate form of reading instruction,

there are some teachers who are only marginally influenced by it. Instead of listening to the ranting of politicians, or even the strictures of bureaucrats, some teachers simply get on with providing what they consider to be the best education for their students and they tend to incorporate into their practice a range of strategies to suit the needs of individual children (Baumann et al., 1998). This proposition is supported by the words of Smith (1982) who explains that:

> all methods of teaching reading appear to work for some children but that none works for all. Some teachers seem to succeed whatever the method they are formally believed to employ. We must conclude that the instructional method is not the critical issue…. It might not be particularly unfair to say that many children learn to read – and many teachers succeed in helping them – despite the instructional method used. (1982, p. 186)

Luke and Freebody (1999) support a view that the reasons for the "literacy problem" are shown, historically, to have "as much to do with economic, cultural, and social change as it did with anything that might go on in schools and classrooms" (Drawing on history section, ¶ 7).

Researcher position

At this point, we feel it is appropriate to make explicit our understanding of the need for children to develop skills in all three cueing systems: graphophonic, syntactic and semantic (Goodman, 1969), within a supportive environment that values literature. There can be no denying that these skills are a necessary part of learning to read and write and there is no suggestion on our part that any area of instruction should be neglected, despite the focus within this study on reading in the affective domain and reading attitude acquisition. We fully support the provision of a thoroughly holistic literacy program throughout all school grades.

Theoretical framework

Motivation, attitude and interest

The terms motivation, attitude and interest do appear to be somewhat "slippery" concepts (Marshall, 2000, p. 381), however they are concepts that teachers have found valuable in describing particular aspects of their practice (Mathewson, 1994). Historically, the concentrated focus on the cognitive aspects of reading instruction has tended to sideline research into the affective aspects of the understanding of reading (Mathewson, 1985). Additionally, the elusive nature of affective variables, when compared with those of the cognitive domain, has been partially responsible for the lack of interest in the topic by researchers (Fox, 2000; Mathewson, 1994). Nevertheless, Mathewson, in 1994, reported an increased interest, by social psychologists, in the "affective area and its influence on reading behaviour". Yet, our extensive search for a body of literature investigating this area of enquiry has produced scant results.

Marshall (2000) described motivation as an invisible force, maintaining that, far from being the ambiguous concept that it may appear, "embraces knowing (cognitive factor) and emotions and feelings (affective factor) which put the learner in tune with books and other printed material" (p. 63). Betts (1979) described motivation as a "master controller" (p. 63) of reading instruction, its different and vital factors, he believed, not only facilitated, but enhanced, students' reading achievement.

The rather minimalist approach taken by some researchers has been criticised by Mathewson (1994) who proposes a complex definition of attitude. He considers that many definitions do not take into account the richness of the concept. Mathewson suggests an inclusive definition, "a tricomponent view of attitude with evaluation as the cognitive component, feeling as the affective component and action readiness as the conative component" (p. 1133). This is taken up by McKenna (1994) who provides a developing, recursive model of research exploration in his Proposed Model of Reading Attitude Acquisition (1994; see Fig. 1).

According to Brown (1980), many information-processing models of learning have not taken into account the importance of factors such as "attitudes, opinions, prejudices, fears of failure, etc. … in determining the efficiency of any learning activity" (p. 13). McKenna's model, however, does embrace the largely affective nature of attitude, with beliefs being related in a causal way to attitude (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995). Factored into McKenna's model are the conditions under which attitudes develop, and conditions under which change is likely to be effected in attitude, the conceptualisations of which are necessary for teachers to be able to intervene in the cycle of learning and positively influencing their students' attitudes in the classroom. Vaughan and Estes (1986) believe that teachers who are enthusiastic and who communicate the valuing of reading, both as a cognitive and aesthetic experience, are empowered to positively affect their students' attitudes toward reading.

Figure 1: McKenna's Proposed Model of Reading Attitude Acquisition
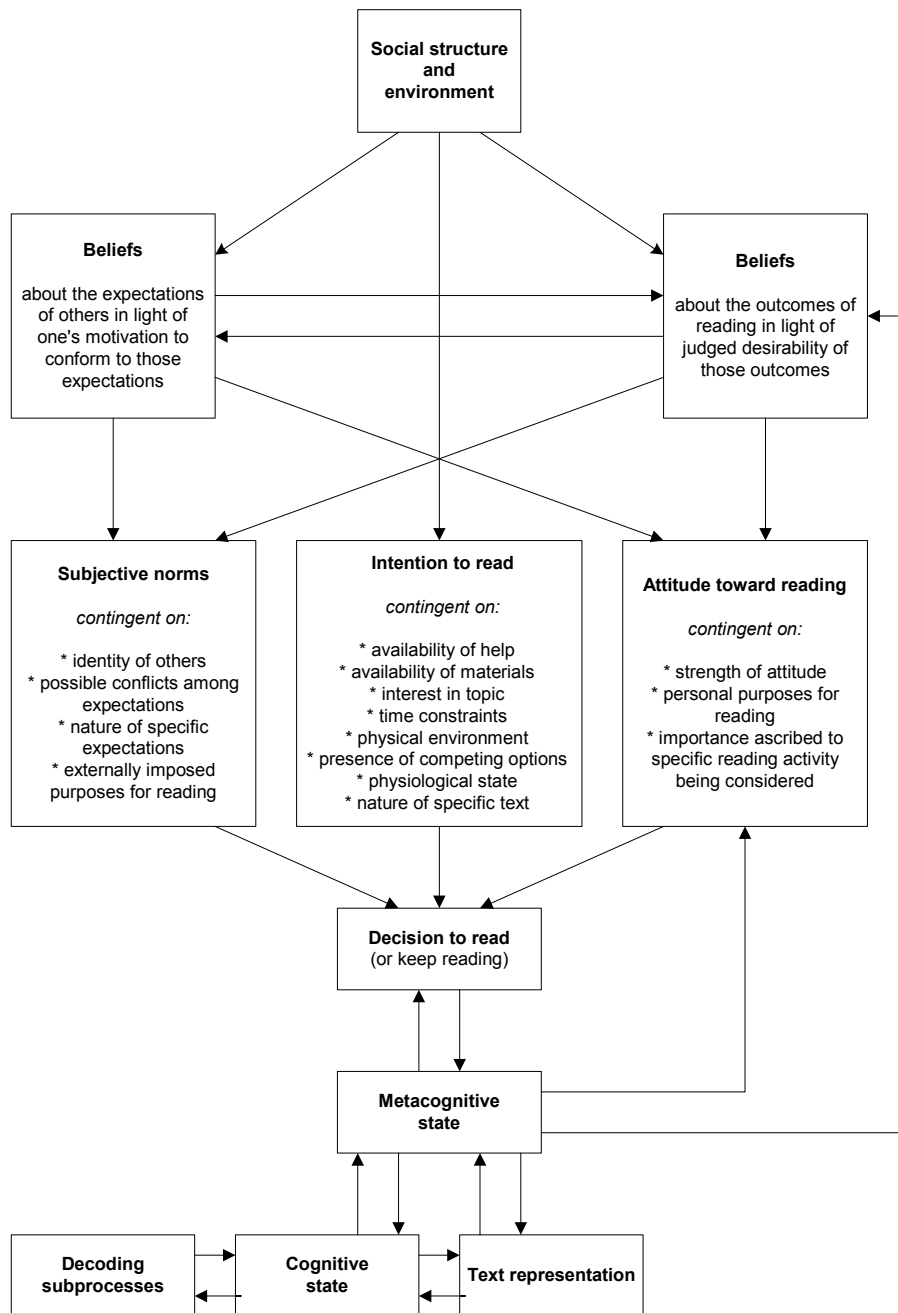
From "Toward a Model of Reading Attitude Acquisition" (p. 31), by M. C. McKenna, 1994, in *Fostering the Love of Reading: The Affective Domain in Reading Education*. Newark, Delaware, USA: International Reading Association. Copyright 1994 by the International Reading Association. Reprinted with permission.

McKenna et al. (1995) are aware that children's acquisition of reading attitude is developed through complex processes and thus:

> may affect the level of ability ultimately attained by a given student through its
> influence on such factors as engagement and practice…. [and that] even for the
> fluent reader, poor attitude may occasion a choice not to read when other
> options exist, a condition now generally known as aliteracy. (p. 934)

Despite the complexity of McKenna's (1994) model it was possible to narrow its focus to only include aspects of the classroom environment and specific elements of the ways in which teachers devise their reading programs to positively influence students' attitudes toward reading.

For example, reading programs that provide dedicated reading time do influence the students' "intention to read" (see McKenna's model, Figure 1) by making available materials of interest to students and eliminating competing factors. McKenna (1994) asserts that the "beliefs about subjective norms" sections of his model take into account the influence of culture, parents, friends, teachers, gender and other environmental factors and demonstrate how these lead "to beliefs about how much reading is valued by significant others" (p. 32).

The "beliefs about the outcomes of reading" (see McKenna's model, Figure 1) sections of the model suggest that students' beliefs about the outcomes of reading do influence their attitude. These beliefs may have their origins in the environment or they may be the memory of actual reading experiences, which McKenna has indicated by an arrow from the "metacognitive state" to "beliefs about the outcomes of reading" (see McKenna's model, Figure 1). McKenna considers that "This recursive, cumulative process suggests that the recurrence of dissatisfying results will lead to successively worsened attitudes. Conversely, a succession of positive experiences may result in more positive attitudes, but only if environmental factors are positive" (1994, p. 34). McKenna's (1994) model also accounts for the indirect, but positive, influence of book corners, and the appealing display of reading materials through the "social structure and environment" (see McKenna's model, Figure 1) section.

Our overview of McKenna's (1994) model emphasises that it does address issues that are highly relevant to the practises of teachers' in this study. It can also be said that while McKenna's (1995) model is one of attitude acquisition it also contains several elements that have strong associations with Cambourne's (1984, 1988) research on the learning environment and the conditions that are required for language learning. The model also makes connections to the social aspects of Luke's (1994) research, and the roles attributed to readers in Luke and Freebody's (Freebody, 1992; Luke, 1994) *Four Resources Model*, and thus demonstrates its capacity and power as a research tool. Despite its complexity, McKenna's (1994) model does illustrate the compatibility and connectedness of the model to the work of significant others in the field of reading research.

Methodology

Instruments

Audio-taped semi-structured interviews allowed access to what was considered a vital aspect of this study: the "thoughts, feelings and perceptions of … informants" (Burns, 2000, p. 388). The use of a semi-structured format in the interviews allowed us the flexibility to elicit a depth of response from the participants and, on occasions, to pursue a line of enquiry regarding a unique experience or facet of practice described by the participant. We allowed all participants the opportunity, at the conclusion of the interview, to contribute information that they felt was of relevance to the study, but that was not covered within the interview procedure itself. This approach accepted that the participant is the only person who understands and can encapsulate all the subtleties and interpretations of their own classroom practice (Burns, 2000). As Burns argues: "The qualitative researcher is not concerned with objective truth, but rather with the truth as the informant perceives it" (2000, p. 388).

The interview schedule allowed for the collection of information regarding each teacher's attitude toward reading and reading preferences, their beliefs about whether they felt their

attitude toward reading influenced and was visible to children in their reading program; and the importance they placed upon children developing reading skills. There was also a focus on certain aspects of their program, such as their specific objectives for children's reading, and how they promoted children's engagement with literature.

The instrument allowed for the collection of data regarding details of various aspects of the teachers' programs; specifically silent reading time, reading aloud to students, book talk and any other activities implemented to encourage reading.

Limited, and mostly incidental, observation of the teachers and their classes did occur.

Participants

The participants in the study were two male and two female upper primary school teachers working in four different Tasmanian schools. Both male teachers were in low socio-economic situations, one rural the other urban (an all-boys class in a co-educational, public school); the two female teachers were in urban, middle-class schools (one of these a Catholic school). The selection of the teachers for this study was based on purposive sampling (Denscombe, 1998). Each teacher was selected on the basis that they regularly read aloud to their students, consistently scheduled periods of uninterrupted, sustained, silent reading and encouraged students to discuss books. These teacher participants were chosen because they presented the opportunity to investigate the motivations and objectives that they had for implementing such practices in their reading programs.

We offered each participant the opportunity to use a pseudonym, which they were able to choose for themselves. This research could not have taken place without the generosity of each of the teacher participants: "Michael", "Jane", "Bronte" and "Steve".

Results

Presentation of the results

Our preference in the analysis of the data was to preserve the complexities of the changing interpersonal and environmental contexts, and to reveal the motivations of the participants (Polkinghorne, 1995), and we decided to present the data in storied narrative form.

The presentation of the data in narrative form within the full report on the study was a recognition that what is at issue in this research is the multiple and different 'realities' that each of the participants brought to the 'story' (Schostak, 1995). The unfolding narrative allows the integrity of the subjective experience of individual participants to be maintained (Burns, 2000). This was a matter of considerable importance to us because of the value of the process in its capacity to present the data with honesty and to preserve the integrity of the participants' voices.

As "storied memories retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivational meaning connected with it" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11), we considered it appropriate to present the data as four narrative vignettes. Each of the vignettes explores the participants' beliefs, values, reasons, justifications and motives for their work practices, and showed how they defined themselves as teachers of reading within the context of their classrooms (Schostak, 1995). The vignettes, as a whole, gave both unity and meaning to the data (Polkinghorne, 1995), however, due to the scope of this paper, we do not present the narratives, which we regret.

Key results

It became apparent from the interview data that all four teachers shared a love of reading and had, as one of their objectives, the desire for children to experience the joy to be derived from engaging with literature. Teachers had a firmly held belief in the absolute importance of their students becoming literate. They understood that when students could not read, or had difficulty reading, their prospects were grim. The teachers held this conviction in terms of students' educational futures and, ultimately, their life futures.

There was a consciousness by each of the teachers in this study that some children were not in the fortunate position of having appropriate reading role models at home. Thus, given the importance that they placed on students becoming literate, they felt that their role as reading model was an obligation, albeit one they enjoyed. According to the teachers there were many competing factors that minimized the time students were free to read outside of school hours. The provision of in-class reading time, therefore, allowed students time to practise this skill, and the chance to engage thoroughly with a book. The teachers expressed the view that when they could get children to engage with literature there was a higher probability that this would positively influence their attitude toward reading. This increased level of engagement, encouraged by the teachers, was understood by them to result in students reading to satisfy their own interests and, in doing so, students not only improved their literacy skills, like writing, but gained awareness about themselves and others, about the world and their place in it.

These teachers were aware of the difference that reading could make to students' lives and, because they were serious about the importance of their profession, they wanted the best possible outcome for their students.

Discussion with reference to the literature

Teachers' own love of reading

The teachers' answers to our question about their interest in reading revealed each of the teachers as being keen readers. While Jane enjoyed novels, Bronte proclaimed her holiday-time addiction to mystery stories. The teachers' reading interests, however, appeared not to be limited to reading fictional texts, but, as suggested by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), had extended to a variety of genres: Michael enjoyed biographies and educational computing texts, and both Jane and Steve read the newspaper. Jane's reading for enjoyment included magazines and "new literacies" (Watson, 1994, p. 2), such as internet texts.

Comments from two of the teachers referred directly to their own childhood experiences, which indicated a lifelong enjoyment of literature. Michael attributed his inherited love of reading to his father, whom he recalled "used to devour books" (Michael, Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 19). Michael remembered reading *The Coral Sea* during his childhood and, while he didn't claim that he "had some sort of 'happening'" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 19), the experience gave him an understanding of the potential for enjoyment in reading. It was perhaps coincidental that Michael used a phrase using the word "happening", Rosenblatt, too, maintains that aesthetic, engaged reading was just that: "a way of happening" (as cited in Murphy, 1998).

Jane, too, related memories of her own childhood reading experiences:

> I just remember when I was in primary school that I struggled to find authors
> that I liked. When I found one, I was so excited about having books to read,
> and then I'd get to the end of the book, or the series, and wondered what to
> read next. (Interview, May 15, 2002, p. 24)

This type of experience appears to have had an influence on the way Jane interacted with children in her class and it had an affect on the way that she ran her reading program. This became apparent in a comment she made earlier in the interview:

> Perhaps, if they really like a particular author, then I can suggest some more of
> their books that are held by the library. If it's the style of writing or the content,
> then I'll try to suggest something they might like. Sometimes, you can see that
> they need very structured guidance: you almost need to hold their hand and
> walk them to the library. At other times, you can give them a list and send them
> off to look for something. (Jane, Interview, May 15, 2002, p. 18)

It also appeared that the teachers had felt what Smith (1982) and Cambourne (1988) referred to as an "engagement" with texts. This phenomenon of engagement is evident in comments by the teachers. Steve, for example mentioned his efforts to instil in his students the awareness that "you're never lonely if you have a book beside you; you have the characters and their world with you" (Steve, Interview, May 28, 2000, p. 2). His comment emphasises his own 'engagement' with texts. Indeed, during conversation with Steve, he recalled that during his remote isolation in teaching appointments 'far from the madding crowd', he never experienced loneliness because of his stock of literature.

Some of the teachers made comments that indicated a personal understanding of Nell's (1988) awareness of readers being 'taken out of themselves'. Michael, for example, commented that when children enjoyed reading, they could "be off wherever it might be – in outer space or in France or wherever" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 4).

These examples indicate that the teachers' personal attitude toward reading was a strong, motivating factor in the planning and implementation of their reading program. The data indicated that all four teachers were not only keen readers themselves, but had, as a stated objective of their teaching, the intention that their students would develop into keen, highly self-motivated and lifelong readers. An objective that Seow (1999) attributes as one of the most significant in silent reading programs.

The teachers' understanding of the importance of being literate

The value of being, in Smith's (1988) terms, a "member of the literacy club" was obvious to teachers in our study. There was a clear recognition by each teacher that difficulty would confront children if they were unable to read well and, as suggested by McCabe and Margolis (2001), children would seldom become fully engaged in reading until they developed a positive conception of themselves as effective readers.

Steve considered reading a vital accomplishment for students and believed life would be substantially more difficult for students who were without the necessary skills. Although Bronte considered that being able to read was essential for children, she associated this achievement most strongly with developing comprehension and understanding:

> If children are unable to read, they find it hard to do anything. If they cannot
> read and comprehend, they will be unable to understand even simple
> instructions. Their ability to gain understanding is just so important. (Interview,
> May 22, 2002, p. 2)

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The relationship between children's love of reading and their gaining ability in reading were also aspects that Michael linked:

> Without a love of reading, and without success in reading, children really are limited in what they can do. The job of turning them on to reading is what I see as particularly important, especially with reluctant readers and boys. A lot of work has to be done to help them, and I consider it such an important aspect of what I do. (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 3)

Jane shared with the other teachers the view that children would have trouble succeeding in life without literacy skills. She recognised modern society as highly orientated toward the visual, and was convinced that society's reliance on the ability to read to gain understanding made it vital for children to develop a high level of reading ability.

As Rowe (2000) maintains, literacy is the foundation upon which other competencies are built. Each of the teachers in this study had a fully developed but pragmatic understanding of this perception, and had, as a stated objective of their reading programs, the improvement in the life chances of their students.

The need for appropriate reading role models

The need for students to have appropriate reading role models, an idea supported by Bandura (1977), Perez (1986), Wheldall and Entwistle (1988), was something that each teacher mentioned spontaneously. The importance of modelling was repeatedly emphasised by all four teachers, each was concerned because they believed that few parents provided a reading role model for their children. Bronte, for example, noted that, "There are a lot of children whose parents don't read these days, and so these children don't have role models. I think the only place they're going to find a role model is in a teacher" (Interview, May 22, 2002, p. 7). Indeed, each of the teachers said that it was part of the duty of teachers to provide an appropriate role model; that modelling of reading behaviour was very important in improving students' reading attitudes.

Nevertheless, Bronte was the only teacher who acknowledged that she did spend silent reading time in her class by always reading silently herself. Indeed, the expressed understanding of the importance of modelling, mentioned above, was actually being compromised by the classroom practice of the other teachers. Although Michael and Steve indicated that during silent reading time they usually did read silently themselves, more frequently they listened to individual students read, or conferred with individuals, or groups of children about their reading. In Jane's silent reading time, she was commonly occupied by other tasks. For example, she indicated that she might sometimes withdraw a child to help with a maths problem from earlier in the day, or help students complete other unfinished work. The teachers were not asked why they behaved in this manner, but perhaps their actions could be related to the lack time to perform tasks they considered equally important. A comment by Michael indicated that he felt it was necessary to respond to his students' enthusiastic engagement with their reading and their wish to share with him. This can be recognised as an example of his positive engagement with students.

One further response by Jane may help to shed light on other reasons for the actions of these teachers. Jane said that during silent reading time she was "never doing nothing. I'm doing something with them, or for them, in that time" (Jane, Interview, May 15, 2002, p. 7). Earlier in the interview when asked about her personal reading, Jane mentioned that while she really enjoyed reading, "other things seem more important than just me, selfish me, reading for me time" (Jane, Interview, May 15, 2002, p. 1). When viewed together, these two statements by Jane appear to communicate what could be described as a sense of guilt. Although, at a

theoretical level, Jane understood the importance of modelling reading behaviour, when faced with the actual prospect of sitting and reading in front of the class, she seemed to believe that she was "doing nothing" (Jane, Interview, May 15, 2002, p. 7). Rosenblatt (1938), however, explains that readers are certainly not just sitting doing nothing, and that "the experience of [engaging with] literature, far from being for the reader a passive process of absorption, is a form of intense personal activity" (p. v). In the views of Perez (1986), Wheldall and Entwistle (1988), by modelling silent reading in front of the class, teachers are providing an element that is crucial to the success of silent reading programs.

Provision of time to practise

One of the reasons given by Sadoski (1980), Berglund and Johns (1983) for the implementation of silent reading programs was the provision of time during school hours for students to practise their reading skills. All four teachers in this study fully supported the need for students to practise their developing reading skills which they recognised as one of the primary reasons for the inclusion of silent reading in their reading programs. The views of Sadoski (1980), Berglund and Johns (1983) support Steve's contention: "If they don't practise, then they're not going to be very good at reading, like anything else" (Interview, May 28, 2002, p. 5).

All four teachers scheduled regular silent reading sessions in which students were able to read self-selected material. Unlike Michael, Jane and Bronte, however, Steve made a clear distinction in his daily reading program between "reading practise time … and reading enjoyment time" (Steve, Interview, May 28, 2002, p. 4). He did this by providing two daily reading sessions: one for practise and one for enjoyment.

Each of teacher recognised the potential of reading to relieve boredom by "filling" children's free time, but they also acknowledged its potential to make school an enjoyable and educationally beneficial time. There were two differing views expressed by teachers about the question of children's availability of reading time outside of school hours. Michael, Bronte and Steve maintained that children had a lot of free time outside of school. Indeed, all three teachers mentioned the considerable amount of time spent by children in watching television, videos, and playing computer games.

Jane, however, recognised that, perhaps because of their rather different social status, many students in her class had after-school commitments such as training in music, soccer, swimming, basketball and netball. These competing factors, according to Pilgreen (2000), can act together to minimise the amount of time available to students for reading outside of school hours, thus increasing the importance of providing students with time for reading in class.

Interest and enjoyment as motivating factors

There appeared to be an experience-based understanding by the teachers of the role of enjoyment as a motivating factor in encouraging children to read. Like Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Nell (1988), the teachers in this study understood that children do come to feel enjoyment once they have fully engaged with literature. They understood, from their own experience, that such enjoyment had the capacity to lead to an increased interest in reading.

These explanations of teachers' understandings indicated their abstract awareness of the existence of a model of attitude acquisition. The descriptions by teachers of their classroom practices comply with many of the aspects of McKenna's (1994) *Proposed Model of Reading Attitude Acquisition*. However, there was no mention by the teachers of any particular theory of attitude influence. Nevertheless, the conceptual understanding, that the power of enjoyment

was the single greatest motivator of children's engagement with literature, certainly did underpin the teachers' reading programs.

Indeed, the teachers in this study stressed the fact that reading programs which engaged children's own interests were highly important in establishing and maintaining children's interest in reading. Readers' interests were found to be vital to the success of silent reading programs by Pilgreen (2000) and Jane related her understanding of this notion in her anecdote about the love of one of her students for ferrets and his newly developed interest in reading on this topic.

Bronte also commented on the importance of allowing children to read magazines, a reading focus recognised by Wilson (2002) as providing an authentic purpose for students' reading. Bronte accepted almost any form of print material, particularly as an introductory measure, believing that such tolerance increased children's interest in reading. Michael, too, felt that if children are interested in opening a magazine or a book and looking through it, then he considered that this was an indication of the possibility of them deciding to read. Both teachers considered, as did Saxby (1997), that once they had children interested in reading then they could then help them to develop an appreciation of quality children's literature.

Michael made a connection between his own attitude towards children's reading material choices and the considerable length of his teaching experience. He maintained that teachers who did not allow children to read magazines had not yet "learnt the trade" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 7). Michael felt that the children of low reading ability had coped well with silent reading, and he directly attributed their success to the freedom they had to choose to read what they were interested in reading.

A comment made by Jane supported Brown's (1980) perception that "attitudes, opinions, prejudices [and] fears of failure" (p. 13) played an important part in determining whether children would continue reading. Jane said that sometimes teachers were "fighting against past experiences with students; not necessarily that they just don't like reading, but something has happened to them that's made it a really bad thing (Interview, May 15, 2002, p. 2). Jane held a strong conviction that this problem was one that was frequently school-based.

Steve argued that if children did not enjoy what they were reading they would not choose to read. However, a later comment he made appeared to contradict that view. When discussing children of low reading ability, Steve said:

> For those guys, we're very conscious about making progress, so the
> enjoyment's not as high a priority as is the improvement, knowing that the
> enjoyment will come when they can finally be choosing their own books and
> understanding what they read. (Interview, May 28, 2002, p. 6)

This seems to reflect the greater emphasis on a skills-based approach taken by Steve, which may be symptomatic of his awareness of the low level of reading ability of some of his students at the beginning of the year. Steve was the only teacher to bring up the topic of levelled readers for children of low ability. Steve's view concurs with Calkins' (2001) understanding that children may suffer from frustration and give up if they have to struggle to make sense of their reading. Steve's provision of levelled texts attempted to forestall this frustration and have students gain self-efficacy through gains in achievement.

All four of the teachers in this study agreed it was an important aspect of children's enjoyment to be exposed to humour in reading materials. Steve told us of an incident when, in the opening scenes of one book, a character was hit in the testicles by a surfboard. This gruesome detail in the story ensured students' gleeful anticipation of more amusements to

come. They had a desire for him to continue reading based on their emotional engagement with the potential of the story.

The influence of gender on children's reading attitudes was one raised with teachers, and it was an issue, as suggested by Buckingham (1999) with no real consensus of views. To explore this issue to any extent was beyond the scope of this study, however, the teachers' did express views on the topic.

Michael felt that "boys are just not turned on to reading" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 17) and that this might occur "because it's not seen as being cool to read" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 18). He also believed that boys "prefer to be out playing, doing things. They haven't developed that fascination with their own imagination … that seems to be inherent in girls" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 18). However, Michael was enthusiastic about the increase in the number of new books and series intended for boys: "You've only got to look at what the publishers are providing now, the books that are coming out for reluctant readers, for boys. It's quite incredible" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 18).

Bronte agreed with Michael's view that boys appeared to need to be more active and were less likely to want to hear long novels. She suggested they preferred books that were "short and quick in which they get more of an instant gratification" (Interview, May 22, 2002, p. 22). Bronte, like Michael, believed it was important to provide boys with books that were quick to catch their interest. She believed once that had been accomplished her task was to encourage their belief in their reading confidence, leading to self-efficacy (see McCabe & Margolis, 2001). She believed confidence is built on "lots and lots of encouragement. They need plenty of encouragement. They need to be told all the time they've made a really good effort" (Bronte, Interview, May 22, 2002, p. 22).

When asked about whether he had noticed a gender difference in attitudes towards reading, Steve replied that:

> There are boys in the class who really enjoy reading, just because they do, not
> because they're a boy, just because they really enjoy it. And there are girls you
> see who really enjoy [reading] and girls who don't for whatever reason, so no.
> (Interview, May 28, 2002, p. 13)

Although Jane was aware of a reluctance by some boys to read, she, too, speculated whether it was actually boys in general who were reluctant readers, or whether boys simply made their resistance to it more apparent:

> It's been the boys who I've been *aware* of that are not keen to read. I'm
> wondering if maybe because boys are more vocal in saying they don't want to
> read, and girls maybe seeming a little bit more compliant, that [girls] just
> [read], and they don't particularly enjoy it. Maybe, had I delved a bit further,
> I'd have found that [girls] weren't really that keen either. I'm just speculating,
> but I don't think it's just been boys in the past that have been unhappy about
> reading. (Interview, May 15, 2002, p. 29)

We anticipated that a resolution to the speculation over reading reluctance and gender might be elusive.

Language and literacy learning

There was recognition by all teachers in the study that reading was directly responsible for a development in students' understanding of language and of life, and this was both a motivating factor and objective in the implementation of their reading programs.

Writing improvement was one of the literacy benefits to children most frequently cited by the four teachers in this study in relation to their reading programs, and one in which they saw significant gains in student learning. This supports the findings of much of the literature (see for example Fields & Spangler, 1995; Wilson, 2002). Other benefits noted by the teachers related to children's understanding of key literacy concepts.

Bronte gave as one of the main objectives of her reading program her intention to get children to focus on the construction of texts:

> for children to read for enjoyment and to look at the way authors have written. I like them to try to adapt what they learn from reading into a tool for their own writing, to try and use some of the techniques, and perhaps come away with one technique that they think worked. (Interview, May 22, 2002, p. 4)

Maggart and Zintz (1992) believe that descriptive language in children's literature provides a wonderful source of imagery for children, a point identified by Bronte who found that reading lead to children's use of more effective words in their narrative writing. Both Bronte and Jane mentioned the importance they placed on students' developing reading comprehension, a view supported by the literature.

Michael, Jane and Bronte all believed that reading contributed to the spelling skill development of their students. This view is supported by Farris (1993) and Goodman (1986). Michael emphasised the importance he placed on enjoyment as a motivating factor in reading instruction as well as in developing literacy skills: "Clearly, they get enjoyment from their reading as they get better at it, and then their writing improves, and their spelling improves" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 3).

Jane recognised that by reading a large volume of text, students improved in the development of their spelling and grammar because of the examples students are confronted with during the reading process. This is consistent with the view expressed by Farris (1993).

Bronte found that providing a supportive classroom environment and encouraging class discussion allowed for the development of children's awareness of key literacy concepts. Supporting a contention by Killen (1998) and Dixon (2000), Bronte found that during spontaneous discussion after she has read aloud to the class, "sometimes one child's interpretation of a story will be totally different to another child's interpretation" (Interview, May 22, 2002, p. 12) and this had brought about further discussion about how this occurred.

Michael, Jane and Bronte all mentioned using books in their language programs that had an associated video film. Bronte found that this alternate rendering of the text brought about children's realisation that a film is "someone's interpretation of the book, it's not word for word. It leads into an awful lot of discussion, with children wondering why things were portrayed in a certain way" (Interview, May 22, 2002, p. 13). That kind of discussion raises children's awareness and contributes to the shared knowledge of the class as Killen (1998) and Dixon (2000) have suggested it would.

Increased and wider reading by students

The constraints of this study did not allow for the quantification of the number of books read by students. However, each of the teachers indicated their perception that, as a direct result of the reading programs in their classrooms students were reading more books, both in quantity and variety. This anecdotal evidence is supported by studies included in the meta-study of silent reading programs by Pilgreen (2000) and others.

Bronte found that compulsory silent reading time eliminated negative peer pressure (see McKenna, 1994, on the influence of peers on attitude) and allowed children the opportunity to read more books:

> Many children in my class, particularly my very active boys, really benefit
> from being made to sit down and read. They're not looking at anybody to
> influence them, or be influenced. They have to knuckle down and a lot of them
> need that. It's not the "done thing" to be seen to be reading. We completely
> remove the negative peer influence from the classroom and everybody reads.
> They get on with it, they get a lot of reading done, and that's good. (Interview,
> May 22, 2002, p. 10)

Furthermore, later in the interview, Bronte mentioned the positive influence that students sometimes have on each other's reading, derived from children talking about books they have enjoyed. She noticed that, on occasions, children asked if they could be next to read particular peer-reviewed books.

Each teacher mentioned that they either read the beginning pages of a story or read excerpts of stories to children with the intention of encouraging students to pick up and read a particular book. This action by the teachers had resulted in an increase in the variety of books that children had read.

Bronte found that by reading aloud to children she gave them enjoyment and that the weaker readers, as suggested by Rubin (2000), gained the most from being able to listen to books that they would otherwise be unable to enjoy. Bronte also found that after she had read a novel aloud to the class that some students, usually of lower ability, would read the book themselves. She postulated that this occurred because their familiarity with the text enabled them to read it more easily and that their enjoyment of the novel motivated them to experience it again.

Improvement in students' self-esteem and self-efficacy

According to Michael, the development of children's self-esteem was "the greatest benefit" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 8) to result from silent reading in his reading program. He had organised a target group of children who were reluctant readers to work with either himself or the teacher's aide. When children had designated time to read, Michael helped them to develop their reading skills, one-to-one, himself as a "knowledgeable other" (Campbell, 2000). As a result he was able to identify increases in children's reading capability and reading self-efficacy, as well as the self-esteem that derived from it:

> I see the development in a child, who's been struggling with their reading, and
> the smile that comes on their face when they come to tell me they've
> completed a page, or a book. That's my motivation for having silent reading.
> (Michael, Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 8-9)

In this statement, Michael has demonstrated his understanding of the powerful affective influence of the child's capacity to create successfully an internal dialogue. Michael is rewarded by the joy demonstrated by a child who has felt success in her capacity to create the story inside her head.

Ability to empathise and understand beyond lived experience

Some of the teachers included literature, that connected to a unit theme, in their programs, and which was judged by them as capable of enhancing children's understanding of situations well beyond their lived experience, as suggested by Wragg et al. (1998). For example, Bronte's account of her unit on Japan led to understanding and awareness of issues far beyond children's life experiences. Saxby (1997) argues that when children are at the Piagetian 'concrete operations' stage they are developing more of an appreciation of the points of views of others, and this developing awareness can be stimulated by the use of books. As a result of their engagement with two books Bronte, had discussed with her students "the moral issue of whether it was right to drop the atom bomb" (Interview, May 22, 2002, p. 11). She found that the children developed empathy for the characters in the two books studied and that some very valuable discussion occurred in her classroom as a direct result of children's exposure to and engagement with literature.

Ability to engage with a book and find escape

Like Nell (1988), Michael and Bronte understood the power of reading as an effective way of engaging with more challenging and exciting situations than those that dominated the present. Michael spontaneously asked the children get out their books and read. He wanted them to understand that "in their own lives, if they're being really hassled by someone at home or things aren't going well, they can just stop, go to their room, pick up a book and be away somewhere else" (Interview, May 8, 2002, p. 10). Bronte told the story of her two sons and how she attributed one son's ability to cope mentally with the trauma of overseas military service to his reading addiction: "He came back having coped well, because he read everything he could get his hands on; he was able to read and get on with life" (Bronte, Interview, May 22, 2002, p. 4). Bronte contrasted this with the very negative affect of the military experience of her non-reading son. Although not directly related to Bronte's classroom experience, this anecdote gave an indication of the strength of Bronte's commitment to, and understanding of, the affective domain of reading.

Conclusions

The interviews with the four teachers provided a detailed picture of their motivations that lead to the implementation of their reading programs. As well as possessing a personal love of reading, which fuelled their enthusiasm for the topic, the four teachers were also influenced in their work by their recognition of the serious implications for their students if they failed to achieve success in reading.

The teachers had a well-developed, if naïve, conceptual understanding of the attitude model described by McKenna (1994). The programs they implemented, while designed to provide students with a model of reading behaviour and provide time to develop and practise reading skills, also had as an underpinning objective; their desire to improve the attitudes of students through their engagement with books and book talk.

The reading programs of the teachers in this study were primarily organised so that they engaged with the interests of the children, but were also intuitive in their intention to intersect with children's developing attitudes towards reading. The teachers were attempting to achieve

these goals in classroom environments that were supportive and encouraging of literacy engagement – in much the same way that Smith (1982), Cambourne (1988), Luke and Freebody (2000) have suggested would be productive. They were, in every sense, fulfilling the theoretically projected objectives of McKenna's (1994) model.

The teachers understood they had achieved their intentions in their literacy programs when they were able to gauge children's attitudes toward reading from the children's response to it. The benefits of engaging with literature, as discussed by these teachers, were not being measured by 'standardised testing'. They were measured instead by the number of books being read, the conversations that emerged from them, the subtle differences that became apparent in the children's writing, the growth in vocabulary and the joyful participation the children expressed when they were encouraged to read their favourite books.

Equally important to the goals of literacy achievement, in the teachers' opinions, was the learning that occurred in the area of children's social and emotional growth. The teachers attributed this growth to the content of the literature with which children engaged and which provided them with access to complex but often abstract concepts that were made concrete for them through their engagement in reading. This, in turn, allowed the teacher and children to engage in the discussion of issues that were relevant and often challenging.

In our view, the carefully constructed contact with literature that these teachers provided had the potential to generate the motivational force of commitment to reading that would encourage children to engage with new and demanding perceptions and to move beyond their known experience. As argued by Dixon (2000), engagement in book talk, the active and meaningful discussion of literature, has the potential to provide a potent means for the voicing of the children's thoughts, and in so doing, adding to the shared knowledge of the class. Children in this study became privy to ideas and gained access to vicarious experience beyond their own actuality as a direct result of their engagement with literature, as Nell (1988) suggests they would. They were able to make discoveries about themselves, their world and the world beyond them, in a way that offered the essence of the experience without its inherent dangers (Meek, 1988).

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