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Should Silent Reading feature in a secondary school English program? West
Australian students' perspectives on Silent Reading

Margaret K. Merga

Abstract

The purpose of my paper is to provide an opportunity for reflection on the merit of incorporating Silent Reading into secondary learning programs. The role of Silent Reading in the learning program has been the subject of recent research, yielding mixed findings. I explore the current issues that have arisen in research which warrant the consideration of practitioners, with a particular focus on adolescent learners. These issues are subsequently examined in light of findings from the recent *West Australian Study in Adolescent Book Reading*. Qualitative data from semi-structured, dyadic interviews were gathered and analysed, with the reflections of students providing insight into the current status of Silent Reading in secondary schools, and the efficacy of elements of contemporary models of Silent Reading.

Introduction

This study focuses on the current position of Silent Reading in the Secondary School curriculum. I recall feeling distinct trepidation when, as a beginning English teacher, I planned to use Silent Reading as part of the learning program for my adolescent students. My primary concern was accountability: justifying the devotion of learning time to a process which I perceived to be

concerned with the achievement of long-term literacy goals and promotion of enjoyment of recreational reading, as opposed to more immediate, curriculum-generated tasks. These concerns are increasingly valid in the high-stakes testing environment in Australia, the US and the UK (Polesel, Dulfer & Turnbull 2012) with claims that “given the increased pressure for student performance, teachers and administrators question the use of every instructional minute and wonder if providing students with time to read is a wise investment” (Fisher 2004: 138).

This paper will explore how, in recent times, the validity of the Silent Reading program has been significantly challenged, primarily due to competing and often contradictory goals attributed to it.

Research in this area lacks the input of valuable insight directly from the target group; the students themselves. In Term Four of 2012, West Australian schools from diverse geographical and socio-cultural settings participated in the West Australian Study in Adolescent Book Reading (hereafter WASABR). This study explored student attitudes toward recreational book reading with an emphasis on social influences. Questions about Silent Reading were also included, as Silent Reading can potentially improve the social capital of recreational book reading, and it is a means by which teachers can influence students’ recreational book reading. The reflections of West Australian students provide a scaffold for examination of the conditions in which Silent Reading could feature as a valuable part of a Secondary School program. With regards to Silent Reading, the study focused on two key questions:

- Are most students in West Australia experiencing regular Silent Reading?
- What are students' attitudes toward Silent Reading?

A Contemporary Model of Silent Reading

In contemporary models, practitioners most commonly position Silent Reading as an opportunity to develop enjoyment in recreational book reading. Key characteristics that lead to the success of Silent Reading programs are commonly identified as the following:

Access: Students have easy access to diverse, interesting and current materials (Pilgreen 2000).

Appeal: Students are given choice about their materials, with greater opportunities to leave some works unfinished (Gardiner 2001) than in earlier models (McCracken 1971). Appeal can also be generated, to some extent, by the position of books in youth culture.

Environment: Students should be able to read in an uninterrupted, quiet environment.

Modelling & encouragement: As a silent form of encouragement (Gardiner 2005), modelling is readily accepted as part of the Silent Reading program. The teacher is visibly engaged in a sustained reading experience, providing an example for students to emulate. Increasingly, other more “active” forms of encouragement are becoming an acceptable element of the program, with an interactive element added to the program (Manning & Manning 1984; Lee 2011; Parr & Maguiness 2005).

Staff training: Teachers also need to be familiar with all of the possible elements of a successful Silent Reading model, yet be willing to adapt the model for their students and situation as required.

Distributed time to read: Opportunities to engage in Silent Reading should be regular, so that students can develop their reading skills and immerse themselves in the books they are reading without sustained interruption (Gardiner 2005).

Non-accountability: Silent Reading should not be tested; Gardiner (2005) experimented with different reporting methods and found that they negatively impacted on what he deemed to be the key purpose of Silent Reading- fostering reading for pleasure. Contemporary Silent Reading is largely untested and unreported on, and thus not quantified in any way. Therein lies the issue in arguing for contemporary validity of the Silent Reading program.

The Purpose of Silent Reading

Despite claims to the contrary, proponents of Silent Reading have not always had a common purpose. For instance, Gardiner states that “the primary goal of silent reading programs has always been to increase students' enjoyment of reading” (2001: 33), whereas for Dwyer and Reed, Silent Reading is to be valued for its contribution to “reading achievement” (1989: 283).

Models of Silent Reading have had different emphases, primarily on at least one of four key areas.

To increase reading stamina

This was an early model of silent reading, which emphasized Silent Reading as a drill, with the aim being the development of “each student’s ability to read silently without interruption for a relatively long period of time” (McCracken 1971). Reading stamina is now rarely mentioned in research concerned with Silent Reading.

To foster independent reading skills

This model is primarily concerned with students at the skill acquisition phase, where literacy skills are still being fostered. Silent Reading provides an opportunity to apply newly acquired reading skills in an enjoyable, independent reading context (Gambrell 1978).

To increase student enjoyment of reading

This focus of Silent Reading is to improve “reading will” and enjoyment (Gardiner 2001), and thus combat aliteracy, the condition in which students can read but choose not to. Improving reading attitudes is usually linked to improving reading skills. Achievement in reading is related to “reading behaviour and reading enjoyment” and “reading enjoyment is also indirectly related to reading attainment through reading behavior”, making reading enjoyment the most powerful factor in reading improvement (Clark & De Zoysa 2011: 21). International research suggests that “in all countries, students who enjoy reading the most perform significantly better than students who enjoy reading the least” (Kirsch et al. 2002: 12). Adolescent aliteracy levels are rising as teenagers become increasingly disengaged in recreational

book reading (Maynard, Mackay & Smyth 2008; Nieuwenhuizen 2001; OECD 2010). Silent Reading is one mechanism intended to counter this trend.

To increase student reading achievement across literacy indicators

In recent times, the role of Silent Reading in improving quantifiable reading skills has come to the fore. The secondary school climate is increasingly driven by the demands of meeting the requisites of high-stakes NAPLAN testing, at the expense of meeting more far-reaching educational needs (Polesel, Dulfer & Turnbull 2012), such as combating aliteracy. The disconnect between these philosophies became apparent in the US in 2000, when the National Reading Panel, hereafter NRP, submitted the following assessment of Silent Reading:

...even though encouraging students to read more is intuitively appealing, there is still not sufficient research evidence obtained from studies of high methodological quality to support the idea that such efforts reliably increase how much students read or that such programs result in improved reading skills. (2000: 12-13)

These findings have been subsequently criticized for being focused on improving skill, rather than will to read (Lee 2011). They also allow too brief an interval for achievement; some studies that the NRP reviewed were of a duration of only one month, and gains are more commonly found after seven months (2011). Rather than being a “quick fix” intervention, Silent Reading

has usually been positioned as part of a long-term goal to improve attitudes toward reading and subsequently, performance on literacy indicators.

The justification for using Silent Reading as part of the learning program has been brought into question, with subsequent research yet to soundly restore its credibility. The most recent extensive meta-analysis (Chua 2008) yielded mixed findings. While the number of students who stated that reading was an enjoyable pastime increased, this did not translate to increased reading outside school time (2008). In addition, student engagement levels in reading for over one hour a day actually decreased (2008). At this stage, there is inadequate research to justify Silent Reading purely on the grounds that it increased reading frequency or engagement. Likewise, there is a paucity of research to substantiate the claim that Silent Reading improves literacy outcomes, though an increasingly strong case is made for improvement in reading achievement indicators, such as word recognition and vocabulary (Samuels & Wu 2001).

The WASABR

Research instruments

The research instruments used were a survey and a semi-structured interview. The 41 question surveys could be completed online or on paper, and they were completed in the classroom by consenting students. The semi-structured interviews followed a schedule to some extent, though frequent departures occurred to allow the line of inquiry to be determined by the

students in addition to the researcher. All instruments received ethics approval from the required bodies.

Participants

Schools were carefully selected so that they were representative of West Australia's diverse demographic characteristics. The final data set of 20 schools included government and non-government schools, public and private schools, single-sex and co-educational schools, and schools in varying socio-economic environments.

The participants were Year 8 and Year 10 students, with one class of each generally participating from each school. Students were aged between 13 and 16 at the time of the study.

Students were required to provide both parental and individual consent in order to participate. The final participation rate was n=520 surveys and n=34 interviews completed.

Results from the WASABR suggest that most students viewed book reading as a socially acceptable leisure activity, with only 9% of the respondents believing that book reading is "not cool" (Author 2013b). This would suggest that most participants were relatively open to reading, even if they were not currently avid readers.

Method

After the literature was reviewed and the study was designed, the method of the study was subject to approval by a peer-review seminar in order for the researcher to receive Doctoral Candidacy. Prior to data collection, the study was piloted at a metropolitan school, and ethics-approved adjustments were subsequently made to the research instruments.

Schools were approached via email to participate in the study. School Principals who chose to allow their school's participation signed Site Manager Consent forms. Parent and student information letters and consent forms were distributed. Both student and parent consent was required for participation.

After participating students completed the survey in class, one student was randomly selected from each class for the interview, though the selection was controlled for even gender distribution where possible. The interviews took place in a location provided by the school, and all interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed by the primary researcher.

Data collection was completed in the final quarter of 2012. All of the data collection was undertaken by the primary researcher, apart from one instance where a participating school was beyond the distance of the researcher's travel capacity. In this case, the cooperating teacher collected the data, and no interviews were held.

Analysis

The data that is the basis of this paper was gathered from the semi-structured interviews, where student were asked about their current and past participation in Silent Reading programs. From 34 in-depth interviews, 32 students addressed the practice of Silent Reading. Even though the sample size was small ($n=32$), it was reflective of practice at 17 schools throughout Western Australia, and is thus of value for statistical purposes. Some students spontaneously discussed their participation in Silent Reading when asked about their teachers' role in encouraging them to read, whereas other students were explicitly asked about their Silent Reading experiences.

After the interviews were transcribed, I read through the transcripts numerous times, identifying recurring codes. The transcripts were then coded using TAMS Analyser. Once the materials concerned with Silent Reading were extracted from the greater data set, they were sub-coded to provide insights into the two focus questions. I used constant comparative analysis (Boeije, 2002; Kolb, 2012) to identify key trends; to “discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories, and to discover patterns” (Tesch, 1990) in the data. I was careful to adopt an emic focus so that the participants viewpoints were foregrounded (Schutt 2012), thus the codes originated primarily from the students' words, rather than common issues that emerged in the literature.

Findings and Discussion

Participation

Less than half of students (41%) were experiencing regular Silent Reading periods. Most Year 8s (65%) still experienced Silent Reading, but only 13% of Year 10s still had a regular Silent Reading period.

Reflections

The majority of students, whether they were still experiencing Silent Reading or not, and whether they were avid readers or not, had a positive attitude toward Silent Reading. I will now examine some of the reasons that Silent Reading was generally well regarded by this cohort.

1. Silent Reading is better than working

When asked about his enjoyment of Silent Reading, a Year 8 boy stated, “Yeah, I don't mind it. It's better than work”, an attitude reflected by several participants. While on the surface this might appear to be an apathetic endorsement, when I drew a student out on the subject, the results were illuminating. A Year 10 female admitted that she would choose to have Silent Reading as part of her curriculum, if permitted, as then she “wouldn't have to do work.” She was pressed further, asked, “So reading doesn't count as work?” She replied, “No, ‘cos like when- when you're reading a book, that you're enjoying it's not effort, ‘cos you're enjoying it, so yeah, not really.”

This exchange suggests that the reason that Silent Reading is seen by some as “better than working” is because some participants viewed it as a pleasurable activity, so much so that it could not be confused with “work”. This supports the survey findings from the WASABR, that suggest many students

have a positive attitude toward recreational book reading in general, even if this attitude is not currently reflected in high engagement levels (Author 2013a; Author 2013b).

2. Silent Reading is relaxing

Many students took this characterisation of Silent Reading as non-work a step further, describing it as an opportunity for relaxation. While speaking with a Year 10 male, who claimed to rarely read for pleasure, it became apparent that the Silent Reading session was the only time he read books. Even though he characterised himself as a staunch non-book reader, when I asked him if he enjoyed his Silent Reading time, he responded, “Yeah, I do. I just like ... sitting there for an hour, and just chillin’” He did actually read during this time, and was able to provide an account of books that he had slowly worked his way through.

Another reader took the opportunity to rest during Silent Reading; when asked if she liked her Silent Reading time, this Year 8 replied, “Yeah, but I- I never, I just put the book on my face, I didn't read it.”

While this girl also viewed herself as a non-reader, she did occasionally check out books from the library of her own volition.

Reutzel, Fawson and Smith contend that “without monitoring, teachers cannot be assured that students are in fact reading during SSR time” (2008), and students who aren’t actually reading are unlikely to experience the benefits of

reading. Monitoring to keep students on task and permission to exchange “boring” books for good ones, as well as teacher knowledge of student interests, can all act to reduce the amount of non-reading occurring during Silent Reading time. It should be noted that simultaneously modeling reading while monitoring class participation can be a challenge for teachers.

3. Silent Reading is uninterrupted

It may not be the case that students have a home environment which is conducive to sustained periods of reading. In the WASABR, sibling care, housework, schoolwork and paid work all contributed to interrupting student leisure time. Silent Reading presents an opportunity to engage in reading without distraction.

Students seemed to appreciate the opportunity to have time to read without disruption. A Year 8 female stated that the key reason she liked Silent Reading was the following:

That no one's gonna interrupt me and I can just read as much as I want.

Similarly, a Year 10 male made the following response when asked why he liked Silent Reading:

It's just good how...it's right in between school, and you know, between all the studies you have, you have quiet time just to read to yourself, no disturbances from the outside.

It would appear that part of the value of Silent Reading lies in giving students time that they might not otherwise have to engage in sustained reading.

4. Silent Reading is fun

Silent Reading was an opportunity for some reluctant readers to discover enjoyment in reading. A highly reluctant reader (Year 10), who claimed to 'never' read, was particularly positive in her recollections of her former Silent Reading experiences. When asked if she ever did Silent Reading at school, she volunteered the following:

I think we did. Yeah, I remember Year 8, once a cycle for English we'd just come into the library and read and we'd have to do quizzes and stuff on them. So that was pretty good fun. I think that when there was set reading times I'd want to read more than independent reading or whatever.

This student appeared to appreciate a diversion from the standard model, in that she did "quizzes and stuff" on the books she read, appearing to enjoy them. Whether or not these quizzes were formally assessed was not explored. It is also significant that having "set reading times" motivated her to

read; while she was reluctant to invest her own leisure time in reading, she enjoyed reading during class.

Issues with Silent Reading

Many students identified issues with Silent Reading, though these were not always negative reflections on Silent Reading. Rather, they provide insight into areas where Silent Reading may be of benefit, or where the contemporary Silent Reading model had been diverted from, or perhaps should be diverted from.

1. Concentration

Silent Reading also has the potential, due to its sustained nature, to build reading stamina and improve concentration. This may be particularly valuable in the contemporary context, when much of the media that is marketed to adolescents relies on high-sensation engagement.

A Year 8 remembered winning a prize for his reading in primary school, though he characterized himself as an ex-reader. He stated that “I read a *lot* when I was younger. But, in the last couple years, I’ve kind of stopped.” He was keenly involved in gaming, enjoying interactive online game experiences. Reading stamina appeared to be an issue for him, as he admitted that during Silent Reading he was reading for longer than he would normally read. He found that he would “usually get bored with it after about 40 to 50 minutes” and that “the last 10 minutes is just a drag”. He had lost his ability to enjoy reading for sustained periods of time. He also

noticed that his reduction in reading time had had consequences for his English performance, in that it takes him “a little bit longer to *spell* certain words”.

A discussion with a Year 10 revealed how dependence on media multitasking, in this case, listening to music while reading, meant that he could no longer enjoy reading without the additional stimulus:

I: Did you *like* Silent Reading?

S: No, it was too silent! [both laugh]

I: What do you mean?

S: Well, when I read books, I usually listen to music as well, ‘cos it's annoying, everything being quiet.

These interactions speak to the value of Silent Reading being considered as a tool for developing the concentration and reading stamina that are so vital for sitting sustained assessments, such as university entrance examinations, which can be a significant determinant of a students' vocational outcomes. Students need to be able to work in a controlled, quiet environment, and to read for sustained periods without fatigue. In revisiting McCracken's early conceptualisation of Silent Reading (1971) for the promotion of reading

stamina, the value of providing an opportunity for building reading stamina in a contemporary context is apparent.

Reading is, in many ways, the antithesis of activities such as first-person shooter gaming. As Carr contends, to read a book demands “sustained, unbroken attention to a single, static object” training the brain to “ignore everything else going on around them, to resist the urge to let their focus skip from one sensory cue to another”, and “forge or strengthen the neural links needed to counter their instinctive distractedness” (2011: 64). The importance of reading as cognitive training of the attention may emerge as more important for the upcoming generation.

2. Location

The location of the Silent Reading program can significantly impact on students’ enjoyment of the experience. When asked how she felt about Silent Reading, a Year 8 had the following response:

I love coming into the library, especially since they've renovated it. It feels so homey, and I love just having your own book, that's probably my favourite cycle, 'cos you get to just sit there and read, and not having to do work or think. Feels so good.

In contrast, a Year 10 was undertaking Silent Reading in less than favourable surroundings. When asked if he liked Silent Reading, he said “not really” as

“usually I've only got some Science books.” He was not permitted to choose a book before Silent Reading for the following reasons:

Nah, 'cos we do it in SOSE (Society and Environment). So, we just have to, we get 15 minutes every Monday, to read, so we can't go and get a book to read.

This student indicated that he would prefer to have his Silent Reading session in a library. While it is reasonable that Silent Reading not be the exclusive domain of English, denying students access to choice of books and assuming that they will bring sufficient reading materials is a design that seems unlikely to foster a positive Silent Reading experience. Indeed, US research suggests that “respecting students' choices and allowing them to read personally interesting materials” may be “the most important feature of self-selected reading” (Worthy, Turner and Moorman: 1998).

3. Choice

Beyond the barriers that location potentially imposed on student choice, some students highlighted the lack of choice available at the school. A Year 8 male who no longer had regular Silent Reading did not miss it, for the following reason:

...when I used to read, they don't have any of the books I read in the school, so when Silent Reading came along, I just picked up a book that I didn't really like, and had to read it.

A Year 8 student spoke of her teachers' lack of awareness that she had exhausted the existing choice of books; while she viewed Silent Reading as "fun", this fun was conditional, stating that "the only bad thing about it, is that the teacher doesn't bring new books in, so you get stuck with the old books."

Getting "stuck" with a limited choice, or books that are of little interest to students, was very much a determinant of student enjoyment in the Silent Reading process, with a Year 10 male stating that Silent Reading "was good if you found a good book to read, if you found something that was not very good to read, then you kind of didn't like it, I guess."

It is not known if all of these instances involved teacher-mediated choices, in that teachers provided a small selection of books for students to choose from. The situations could also have arisen from a failure of the school library to meet the requirements of diverse student preferences, which may in turn be reflective of funding shortfalls in this area.

4. Anti-social

The "silence" of Silent Reading was not only contested from a concentration perspective; it was also found to be unappealing to students who were keenly social. A Year 8 admitted that she would prefer not to "just sit there in silence", finding reading "boring" as "we're not really allowed to talk, 'cos it's silent, so, yeah." She would rather not "just sit there and read and then go [sighs loudly]."

A Year 10 female, who was a keen reader, recalled disliking Silent Reading in primary school, for the following reasons:

It would often be *really* boring. Just *really* boring books, and ... being like a kid, you don't want to read. You just want to have fun, and you know, talk.

Contemporary Silent Reading models sometimes include an interactive element to increase the social capital of reading and to engage keenly interactive and social students, such as the above. Research into this model is relatively limited, though that which has been performed has been significantly positive. In their US study of Silent Reading models, Manning and Manning found that students involved in a Silent Reading program featuring interaction with peers or individual teacher- student conferences had significantly higher scores on a scale measuring attitude toward reading, than students in a more traditional, non-social model of Silent Reading and the control group (1984). Within that group, “students involved in the peer- interaction model obtained significantly higher scores” than all three other groups (Manning and Manning 1984: 375). Lee recently found that allowing her students to talk quietly about the books they were reading during Silent Reading time was conducive to fostering positive attitudes toward reading (Lee 2011). A small study in New Zealand had similar positive findings (Parr & Maguiness 2005). Many adults also find talking about books pleasurable and engaging. While there is usually much discussion about books in the

classroom, how often this is student-generated, from student selected materials, is questionable.

A Year 10 female wished for this opportunity:

...maybe if we could discuss books in class, maybe if...yeah, if, for even five minutes of the lesson, our teacher could be like, "Who's got an interesting book that they've read recently?" and someone could bring it up, and obviously we'd all be like interested, if they described it well, we'd obviously go have a look at it, so yeah, even like five minutes of someone saying, "Oh, I read this book on the weekend," or "I saw that book," or "I find this interesting, I saw it was in the newspaper, I saw it was online", I think that'd be really helpful...

If, as Parr and Maguiness contend, the underlying issues of reading in Silent Reading at school are social issues (2005), following this student's suggestion could do much to raise the profile of Silent Reading in schools.

5. Allocation of time

For some students no longer experiencing Silent Reading, it was seen as being incompatible with secondary schooling. When I asked a Year 8 about the place of Silent Reading at high school, he replied:

...maybe in English, but not often, 'cos usually you try to get all the stuff done, that you need to get done, 'cos, isn't there a curriculum or something? Yeah, so, it's kind of hard, yeah.

Thus the need to meet curricular demands was seen by this student as incompatible with Silent Reading.

A Year 10 who was a keen reader did not miss having Silent Reading as part of her secondary school experience, for the following reasons:

...because I want to learn. I want to learn more about English, and every aspect of it, because I know that I have free time after school, like when I have weekends and holidays I can read a book. So obviously I came to school to learn. And especially 'cos English is my favourite subject, I'd rather learn more about English and creating books and writing and different stuff than that, than reading it. Even though it- it does help me, I'd rather do it in my free time than be- than be forced to do it in class, with other distractions around you. Yeah.

This student took the pragmatic view that Silent Reading was a less valuable activity for her than other English activities, and would thus be a waste of her in-class learning time.

For a student such as this, the educative purpose of Silent Reading would need to be made explicit, and the link between reading and vocabulary

exposure, which is then beneficial for language production (reading and writing) would need to be highlighted. This highly-motivated student could spend these sessions trying to extend her reading ability by engaging in highly-challenging texts, or even theoretical texts to provide frameworks for her future literature-based arguments.

Conclusions

While the validity of Silent Reading as part of an educative program may have been brought into question, the benefits of reading are soundly established in the research (OECD 2010; Samuels & Wu 2001, Anderson, Wilson & Fielding 1988; Clark & De Zoysa 2011). Thus, as long as a functional model of Silent Reading is employed, where students are reading, and enjoyment of reading is encouraged through provision of an appropriate context and support, it should be considered a valid component of Secondary English.

It can be contended that Silent Reading is not necessary, on the grounds that widespread aliteracy in adolescents is an easy assumption, as it is potentially countered by the text-rich digital literacy experiences they encounter in their daily lives. However, this notion presupposes that the level of benefit conferred in online engagement, such as surfing the internet or social networking, is equal to that of paper-based reading. This has yet to be soundly established in comparative research, where in some cases, internet-based reading did not confer the same positive benefit for reading achievement indicators as novel reading (Baer, Baldi, Ayotte & Green 2007). There is evidence to suggest that cognitive function utilised in reading online

texts is vastly different (Carr 2010), and that the ease and immediacy of access of online information may result in “ ‘mile wide, inch deep’ thinking and a resistance to the patience and persistence required for in-depth scholarship” (Giedd 2012: 102). It would be premature to conclude that digital literacy experiences can offer equal or greater benefit to sustained reading of books.

The insights from this study suggest that a functional model of Silent Reading might include regular, uninterrupted reading to build stamina and facilitate concentration, a wide range of choice, teacher monitoring and encouragement, and opportunities for student-led discussion about books.

Silent Reading offers educative benefit for secondary students, from extending vocabulary, to providing a sustained, focused cognitive experience that may be otherwise lacking in students’ lives. It is possible that a ‘reading for stamina’ model may regain popularity as a useful tool for building student concentration capacity to meet the needs of sustained testing.

Some of the issues that arose related to diverting from the outlined model. Holding Silent Reading in SOSE seems sound, so that fostering reading is seen as a whole-school goal rather than the sole responsibility of English. However, without provision of a choice of books, this exercise seems more likely to foster antipathy toward reading than a positive reading experience. Referring to the model, both environment and appeal, in the form of choice, were not given due consideration in this situation, which may also be reflective of a deficiency in staff training.

When reflecting on an appropriate model for Silent Reading, consideration of student enjoyment should be paramount. Educators should ask themselves two key questions:

- Does this program increase student enjoyment of reading?
- Does this program raise the social capital of reading?

While enjoyment of reading should be the focus, to encourage reading beyond the classroom, the acceptability of reading as a leisure pursuit needs to be addressed by allowing students to talk about good books that they have enjoyed. The increasing profile of hybrid Silent Reading programs which have some element of interactivity incorporated into them is promising, especially in light of the fact that the current generation of adolescents is broadly characterised as highly social and interactive. In the current climate of increasing aliteracy, a Silent Reading program should, where possible, raise the appeal of reading as a preferred leisure activity.

One of the most significant indicators in favour of the continuance of Silent Reading into the secondary years was the number of students for whom this was the *only* book reading they did. Allowing Silent Reading to drop to 13% in Year 10 may mean that a significant number of Year 10s are not reading books for pleasure at all, thus missing out on literacy benefits which can significantly impact on their vocational outcomes post-school (Kirsch et al. 2002) in addition to their academic performance at secondary school (Daggett

& Hasselbring 2007; Marks, McMillan & Hillman 2001). Thus despite current uncertainty about the value of Silent Reading in research circles, it has an important place in secondary school.

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