Framework for whole school wide reading practice

By Dr Anne Whisken

Snapshot

This article discusses applying the author, Dr Anne Whisken's, PhD research findings to exploration of ways that wide reading education might become an explicit practice across the curriculum in secondary schools. It suggests that informed learning ideas (Bruce, 2008) might be adapted to overcome the problem of how to create a whole school reading culture in which students experience a holistic approach to development of their own wide reading strategies. *A Framework for Whole School Wide Reading Practice* and a professional development model, *Informed Learning PAR for Wide Reading Practice*, are explored.

Introduction

Amy Thunig said in her powerful address to The 2021 Stella Prize award night (22 April 2021): 'It is by information that we come to know. It is by story that we come to understand.' How might informed learning ideas (Bruce, 2008) about information literacy education be applied to education about the power of story and the ways it can enhance understanding?

The habit of reading is frequently cited as a goal of education and a foundational global competency, and school libraries ever-ask: how might we develop a school reading culture so that our children become readers? What if wide reading was seen as a way to enhance subject learning as well as being seen as an essential lifelong habit for enjoyment and gaining understanding about self and society and the natural world? Would that help development of a reading culture in a school

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so that it was seen as the responsibility of all – from leaders, to teachers, support staff and parents? My PhD research (Whisken, 2019a, b) and school library experience leads me to suggest that an approach using Informed Learning Participatory Action Research (PAR) might be a way to achieve this. Accordingly, I propose a *Framework for Whole School Wide Reading Practice*. It has as an essential element an ongoing professional development process for teachers in which they use PAR to develop their own wide reading mastery and the associated pedagogies for use in everyday teaching, in collaboration with teacher librarians. Informed learning ideas (Bruce, 2008, 2017; Bruce & Hughes, 2010; Feekery, 2013; Maybee, 2014; Maybee, Bruce, Lupton & Fai Pang, 2018) underpin this approach. In this application, informed learning would ask: how might wide reading enhance subject learning and what learning about wide reading strategies do we want to take place as we use this fiction or narrative non-fiction book as part of classroom subject learning?

To achieve a whole school wide reading practice would require development of a common understanding within the school about what we mean by wide reading - to be specific about the behaviours, habits and strategies used by expert wide readers. Then we would need to ensure that a school which has this as a goal builds in the whole school structures, resources, programs and practices to enable those strategies to be learned by students. AND we would need to ensure that all leaders and teachers in the school model mastery of such a culture and actively create the experiences by which students learn the key strategies involved in being wide readers. How might we bring that about?

My PhD explored the idea that if the learning we want is expert use of information, known as information literacy, then information literacy education needs to be part of subject learning. By variation of learning experiences across the curriculum students could develop their own independent repertoires of expert information use strategies. Using Informed Learning (PAR), case groups of teachers in my research project developed new understandings about expert information use and transferred that knowledge to creation of new curriculum learning experiences in their subjects. They found that the challenges of the fast-evolving information environment can be met by developing and demonstrating subject information mastery themselves and undertaking collegial exploration of information use expertise with fellow teachers and students.

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This supports research showing that it is the collaboration and collegiality of educators working together in well-structured and supported reflective teams over time that produces powerful professional development and transformation of practice (Avalos, 2011; Bajader, Kandlebinder & Trayler, 2019; Gibson-Langford, 2009; Montiel-Overall & Grimes, 2013; Morales, 2016). I propose that these findings can be transferred to development of wide reading pedagogies across a school, as part of teacher practice.

In this article I explore what we mean when we talk about wide reading and its strategies and the idea of taking an informed learning approach to development of a whole school practice of wide reading education. This is premised on a view that if schools and teachers feel that wide reading will enhance subject learning outcomes, they are more likely to see it as an important learning strategy to include in their subject curricula, with increased likelihood of it being valued and taught by all. Accompanying that is my experience that students give great credence to strategies shared explicitly by teachers with whom they have developed close and respectful learning relationships in classrooms. Accordingly, I present a draft *Framework for Whole School Wide Reading Practice* to guide development of a reading culture with a set of ten benchmarks of practice, and a particular model of professional development: *Informed Learning PAR for Wide Reading Practice*.

Repertoires of wide reading strategies

Firstly, how might we describe a Repertoire of Wide Reading Strategies that expert wide readers utilize?

A review of current wide reading and independent reading education description and practice indicates that it ranges from regular visits to the school library for borrowing, to richly resourced and structured wide reading programs driven by the library, to intensive daily sustained silent reading sessions across all year levels. Research and advice about reading education, in the broader understanding beyond the teaching of reading literacy, including that from Victorian and NSW Education Departments (NSW. Department of Education, 2018; Victoria. Department of Education and Training, 2019) can be summarised as follows:

Wide reading of literature
* can be defined as sustained reading engagement for pleasure across a variety of fiction and non-fiction text genres and forms, in increasing complexity and subject matter

* builds students' abilities to stay immersed in text for greater periods of time and to improve their vocabulary and comprehension

* enables understanding of multiple different perspectives and situations and helps expand their ideas, to think in different ways and reflect more deeply

* relies on and applies the specific classroom activities which teach children how to read and how to read independently

Nodelman and Reimer (2003) identified multiple pleasures that wide reading can provide for young people, chiefly:
* the pleasure of having one's emotions evoked

* the pleasure of the pictures and the ideas that words of texts evoke

* the pleasure of escape

* the pleasure of finding a mirror for oneself

Overall, research shows students can be more directly engaged (or re-engaged) with reading when:
* they are given choices in what they read

* the reading itself is valued (rather than, especially, written response)

* classroom reading embraces both paper-based and online texts

* both private and social, dialogic dimensions of reading are emphasised

(La Marca, 2003; Merga, 2020a,b,c; Merga & Mason, 2019; Pledger, 2019; YA Studies Association, 2020).

Broadly, there is a tendency to see wide reading as independent reading, in the sense of it being about the teaching of reading literacy, seen for example in the Victorian Education Department's *Literacy Toolkit: Independent Reading* (2020); Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) literacy in the *Australian Curriculum* (2013); and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reading literacy definitions (Thomson, Hillman & De Bortoli, 2013). Often, this approach sees independent reading as a routine which can be developed by deliberate engagement in sustained silent reading on a regular basis several times a week, using various guided reading pedagogies. Length of time for these sessions varies according to ages and year levels, but to ensure that students gain the experience of sustained silent reading, time should be set aside in schools for this purpose as well as encouraging wide reading as a regular routine at home. It is an approach being used in NSW (Mace, 2021) to overcome a slide in reading engagement with its consequent impacts on learning.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) sees reading literacy as 'the ability to use written information in situations that students may encounter in their life at and beyond school. PISA 2009 defines reading literacy as: understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society' (Thomson, Hillman & De Bortoli, 2013, p. 11). This literacy is further explained:

> *Understanding* refers to the ability to gain meaning from what is read. This can include the meaning of words or it can be more complex in identifying the underlying theme of a narrative.
>
> *Using* relates to the notions of application and function (i.e. applying what has been read to an immediate task or goal, or using what is read to reinforce or change beliefs).
>
> *Reflecting on* emphasises the notion that reading is interactive, where readers make connections with their own thoughts and experiences when engaging with a text.
>
> *Engaging with* involves the reader's motivation to read and is comprised of constructs including interest in and enjoyment of reading, a sense of control over what one reads, and reading practices (Thomson, Hillman & De Bortoli, 2013, p. 12).

This article seeks to extend the independent reading focus on the strategies and pedagogies associated with literacy to those associated with developing wide reading strategies as part of subject learning.

Specification of the strategies associated with the understanding of reading literacy in this broader sense can be seen in research (Graf, 2010; Guthrie, 2008) which demonstrates that student development of independent strategies for wide reading (student self-efficacy in reading) increases when students have the opportunity to choose texts of interest and relevance and share their responses and insights after reading with peers and teachers.

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These independent strategies include:

- Finding books that appeal.

- Exploring different genres and forms

- Finding and following different authors

- Reflecting about and discussing literature

- Setting regular times for sustained silent reading

I see this as a useful basis for a powerful outcomes-driven repertoire of *wide reading strategies* needed for use in learning about wide reading. In this, an expert, independent wide reader would have the following strategies:

- *Browse and select:* know how to wisely select from hard copy and digital fiction or narrative non-fiction collections using particular guides and browse strategies

- *Explore and expand:* explore an ever broader range and depth of fiction and narrative non-fiction genres and writers, and expand knowledge about which genres and writers add to subject understandings

- *Engage and extend:* develop the habit of silent, sustained engagement in narrative reading for increasing periods of time and explicitly choose safe comfortable quiet spaces with ergonomic seating and good lighting

- *Reflect and grow:* use reflective scaffolds to develop and articulate ways that reading fiction and narrative non-fiction enables personal growth and social understanding and enhances subject learning

It is powerful because it provides a set of specific strategies on which to base development of the common understandings required for wide reading to be incorporated into curriculum documentation and teaching practice. Delivery of the learning experiences by which students might learn these strategies requires the participation of the whole school, with each leader and teacher involved in reflexively developing, modelling, teaching and collegially sharing their reading experiences with students. It moves beyond reading for enjoyment, personal growth and development of reading skills, as important as they are, to being an important element in engagement and understanding to enhance subject learning. The ideas of informed learning play an important role, as they can be adapted to bring attention to the learning about wide reading strategies which can happen as fiction and non-fiction books are used as part of subject learning experiences.

An informed learning approach to wide reading education

How might we transform teacher understandings about wide reading so it might be used to enhance subject learning as well as developing students' expert wide reading strategies?

What might happen
- if we moved beyond the library-centric focus of wide reading education and took it out into the school's classrooms where teachers and students explored ways to use wide reading for enhanced engagement and understanding about ways the subject is applied and experienced in history and society

- if we said that the library is the wide reading learning lab where specialist collections are arranged in specialist spaces with specialist staff who work collaboratively with teachers to
  - guide students to collections which extend their subject understanding
  - work collaboratively with teachers to support and resource them as they teach wide reading strategies as part of subject learning
  - conduct classes to introduce students to the habits and strategies of wide reading and to the genres of Young Adult literature

Might it lead to PAR professional development where teaching teams use informed learning prompts to have conversations about
- how wide reading enhances their own subject understanding?
- how they stay abreast of literature which extends their own and their students' subject understanding?
- how they find and interact with literature?
- how they might demonstrate subject wide reading mastery in their practices?
- how they might work collegially with students to enable them to develop wide reading mastery to improve their learning in the subject?
- how they might work with students to use wide reading as a way of finding personal relevance in the subject and its topics?
- how they might work with students to enable them to use wide reading of literature to gain better understanding of the world from different perspectives, to see the social impact of topics being studied?

An informed learning approach to wide reading would ask: what is the wide reading learning (wide reading strategy) that we want to take place as we use this wide reading resource (fiction or narrative non-fiction book in hard copy, audio book, eBook) for this curriculum learning purpose. Adapting the constructs of the Six Frames and Seven Faces of Informed Learning to a wide reading context might bring new understandings about wide reading strategies and how they can be developed as part of subject learning while also enhancing that learning. It would ask teachers to consider themselves as wide readers, and how they might model and teach that to students as part of the curriculum. The following adaptations of the constructs are very much an early exploration.

Using Informed Learning Seven Faces constructs to focus on expert wide reading strategies

1. Wide Reading *Awareness:* Ways fiction and narrative non-fiction books and authors are promoted, celebrated and reviewed.

2. Wide Reading *Sources:* How to find fiction and narrative non-fiction books that appeal at the right level and interest.

3. Wide Reading *Process:* Reflect about topics, styles, genres, perspectives of fiction and narrative non-fiction books.

4. Wide Reading *Control:* Manage wide reading routines, setting time to read, browse and borrow.

5. Wide Reading *Building:* Identify achievements in wide reading and set goals for new challenges.

6. Wide Reading *Extension:* Try different fiction and narrative non-fiction genres and forms.

7. Wide Reading *Wisdom:* Reflect and share impacts of wide reading.

Using Informed Learning Six Frames constructs to design curriculum in which wide reading assists subject learning

1. *Content:* What fiction or narrative non-fiction book/s can help students learn particular subject content?

2. *Competency:* How might wide reading of fiction or narrative non-fiction help students learn particular subject competencies?

3. *Learning to Learn:* What should students know about the way experts in this subject use wide reading to help construct knowledge and about how they themselves can also use wide reading to construct knowledge?

4. *Personal Relevance:* How might a fiction or narrative non-fiction book assist students to find the personal relevance of a particular topic being studied in a subject?

5. *Social Impact*: How might a fiction or narrative non-fiction book assist students to explore the social impact of a topic in the subject?

6. *Relational:* How might wide reading strategies assist students to gain an overall view of the way literature can present different perspectives on topics and how to bring critical awareness and reflection to the social structures involved?

Framework for Whole School Wide Reading Practice

What framework would be required for a school to develop a reading culture? What would such a school look like?

Based on the findings and implications of my PhD research, which proposed a ten point *Framework for Whole School Information Practice*, I suggest a ten point *Framework for Whole School Wide Reading Culture*.

A Framework for Whole School Wide Reading Practice
Wide reading education in a secondary school should meet these criteria if its practice is to enable development by students of their own individual repertoires of wide reading strategies.
1. **Repertoires of wide reading strategies:** the goal of students' development of individual repertoires of wide reading strategies for future learning and personal enjoyment is seen as a whole school problem, and is articulated in a Wide Reading Practice Statement, which is part of the school's curriculum framework
2. **Holistic wide reading education model:** the school has selected/developed a holistic model of wide reading education which develops and guides teacher practice
3. **School leadership for whole school wide reading practice:** school leadership mandates, champions and models development of repertoires of wide reading strategies & associated practices as stipulated in the Wide Reading Practice Statement
4. **PAR for wide reading professional development:** the Wide Reading Practice Statement is interpreted and integrated into discipline practice by collaborative teams engaged in ongoing wide reading professional development such as the *Informed Learning PAR for Wide Reading Practice*
5. **Explicit integration of wide reading strategies:** wide reading strategies are selected for explicit reference in discipline learning intentions, activities, outcomes, feedback and reporting processes
6. **Explicit modelling of wide reading mastery:** teachers are explicit with colleagues & students about wide reading strategies which enhance understanding and outcomes in subject learning, and which develop wide reading as a lifelong habit.
7. **Collegial reflective wide reading:** teachers engage with colleagues and students to bring reflective attention to variation of aspects of wide reading, subject content and ICTs used in learning experiences
8. **Teacher librarians in curriculum design for wide reading education:** teacher librarians bring their wide reading and ICT use expertise to collaborative teaching teams for curriculum design & teaching
9. **Library and information architecture, resources and spaces for wide reading education:** sophisticated library and information architectures, resources and learning spaces provide for both the physical and digital experiences of developing and using expert wide reading strategies for learning
10. **Documenting & reporting wide reading education research:** the program's progress is documented as part of ongoing PAR at the school and its results are reported into the field to provide reflective, peer reviewed data for evidence-based practice.

Informed Learning PAR for Wide Reading Practice: Professional Development Model

Informed Learning PAR is suggested as a professional development model to manage the changes in teaching practice required to achieve a whole school wide reading culture. An outcome of my PhD was a professional development model to transform teachers' understandings about information use, *Informed Learning PAR for Information Practice in Secondary Schools*. I have applied that to draft a professional development model for transforming teacher understandings about

wide reading practice, *Informed Learning PAR for Wide Reading Practice*. Ideally, a model like this would be used across the school so that common understandings and terminology could be developed in leadership and the teaching cohort about ways to enhance subject learning and develop wide reading as a lifelong habit via engagement with the narratives of fiction and non-fiction in everyday classroom experiences across the curriculum.

This model is very much in draft form, but my hope is that it might provide a springboard for feedback, discussion and further development in schools. A key difference between this model and those which focus on action research about library practices by library staff (Cadieux Boulden, Pellegrino & Gerakios, 2019) is that this is premised on the idea that all in a school must model and teach wide reading, with the support of the wide reading experts in the school library. It requires the existing excellent wide reading programs which usually operate as part of the English curriculum but extends it out to everyday classroom practice.

Note that Readings, Library Units and Feedback Sheets are referred to in the model, but no detail is provided in this article as that material would ideally by developed by those running the professional development to ensure it is tailored to the school's needs. However, undertaking adaptations of the structure used in Bruce's *Informed Learning* (2008), including the Six Frames and Seven Faces constructs, is highly recommended.

Five cycles are presented in this model, reflective of the experience of conducting such a project for my PhD, where time constraints of full-time teaching brought a realistic assessment of how busy people might fit such extra work into their routines. However, PAR at its essence is owned by those who are seeking ways to resolve a problem, and as such, the project should reflect the realities of their lives, so there may be more or less cycles run over different periods of time, depending on the circumstances.
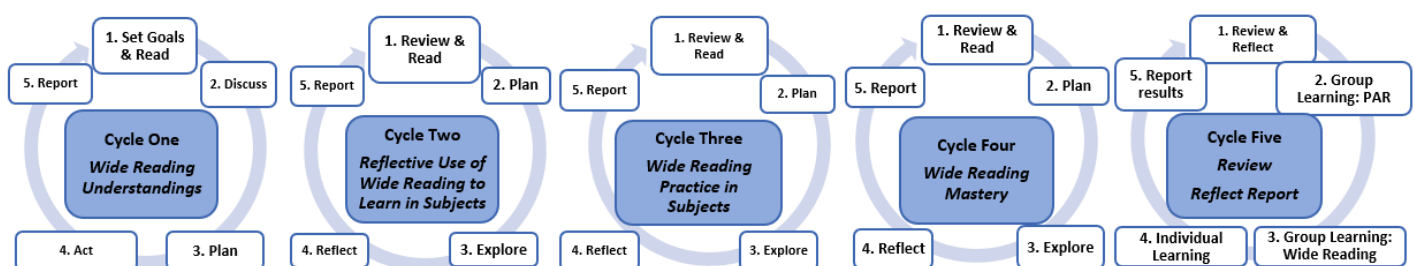
Informed Learning PAR for Wide Reading: Professional Development Model.

Dr Anne Whisken, 2021

Methodology:

Case groups of teachers (of single or mixed subjects, at single or multiple year levels)
- use Informed Learning PAR cycles
- to explore ways they might transform their practices
- so that wide reading strategies are learned within the context of daily classroom experiences.

Ideally, a facilitator (such as the teacher librarian) leads and supports the group by providing reading materials, chairing groups, managing calendars and collating data for analysis and reporting. Often it is advisable to have an external expert mentor with research expertise in the area being investigated.

Cycle One: Wide reading understandings

Learning Goals: establish common understandings within action research case groups about
- PAR
- wide reading and the strategies involved in being an expert wide reader
- impact of ICTs on wide reading

Steps:
1. **Before meeting one:** Pre-read set materials and prepare for reflective group discussion at first meeting
    - PAR process and individual responsibilities (Research Methods Set 1)
    - wide reading and wide reading strategies (Wide Reading Strategies Set 1)
    - personal and professional learning goals for the project (Wide Reading Learning Intentions Feedback Sheet)

2. **Meeting one: Discuss**
    a. Set goals, processes and expectations for PAR process
    (Action cycles of Review & Read, Discuss & Plan, Explore & Reflect, Report)
    b. Share:
    - own experiences of wide reading, own wide reading behaviours and strategies, and the impact of wide reading on personal and professional life
    - perceptions of students' wide reading behaviours, strategies and experiences, and how their wide reading behaviours and experiences might impact on their lives and learning
    - experiences and perceptions of the impact and role of ICTs on wide reading

3. **Plan action**
    - read and reflect about ways wide reading might enhance learning in your subject area (Wide Reading Strategies Set 2)
    - undertake a wide reading collections and resources introduction in the library (Library Wide Reading Unit: the way library collections and resources are curated to enhance wide reading engagement and learning)
        - how they might engage and enhance both your own and your students' interests in wide reading

- the strategies you can see that are needed to browse, select and engage in reading these resources
- whether you can see ways of using these collections and resources in your own teaching practice
    - how you might use them for learning in your subject and for your own wide reading
    - the teaching strategies involved in introducing them to students as part of classroom learning

- prepare reflection about own experiences and observations of where wide reading strategies have been used to enhance subject learning and reading for pleasure

4. Action to explore and reflect
Carry out planned actions and prepare to report at next meeting

Cycle two: Reflective use of wide reading strategies in subject learning

Learning goals: reflect about
- ways wide reading might be used to enhance subject learning
- the wide reading strategies involved
- the teaching practices required

Steps:
1. Meeting two: Report
- share ways wide reading might enhance learning in your subject area (as per Wide Reading Strategies Set 2)
- share reflections about the library's wide reading collections and resources (as per Library Wide Reading Unit),
- share reflections about own experiences and observations of where wide reading strategies have been used to enhance subject learning and reading for pleasure

2. Plan action
- Plan a Wide Reading Activity where wide reading will be used to enhance learning in your subject, using the library's staff and resources to assist the activity
    - Engage with subject learning team and library to plan and prepare the Wide Reading Activity for subject learning,

- Prepare to present plan at next meeting.
  - Include: Learning intentions – subject learning and wide reading strategies; Activity detail and timeline; Teaching strategies involved; Resources; Data gathering and analysis; Measuring & reporting outcomes
- Read material about data gathering and analysis (Research Methods Set 2)
- Read material about wide reading practice in subject teaching – appreciative inquiry of own and others' practices of using wide reading strategies for subject learning (Wide Reading Strategies Set 3)
- Borrow from library for own wide reading enjoyment

3. Action to explore and reflect
Carry out planned actions and prepare to report at next meeting

Cycle three: Wide reading practice

Learning goals:
- ways wide reading can be used to enhance subject learning
- data gathering and analysis in action research
- appreciative inquiry of own and others' existing practices of using wide reading strategies for subject learning
- reading and reflecting about Young Adult fiction

Steps:
1. Meeting three: Report
- Share plans for Wide Reading Activity for subject learning
- Share reflections about data gathering and analysis (as per Research Methods Set 2)
- Share reflections about wide reading practice in subject teaching - appreciative inquiry of own and others' existing practices of using wide reading strategies for subject learning (as per Wide Reading Strategies Set 3)
- Share reflections about own wide reading for pleasure

2. Plan action
- Implement Wide Reading Activity in subject learning, reviewing and altering as needed
- Read and respond to material about wide reading mastery – modelling and collegial reflexivity (Wide Reading Strategies Set 4)
- Read and respond to the Framework for *Whole School Wide Reading Practice*

- Work with library staff and use genre guides to borrow a book from the Young Adult collection to read and share the experience with students and other teachers

3. Action to explore and reflect
Carry out planned actions and prepare to report at next meeting

Cycle four: Wide reading mastery

Goal:
- report actions of incorporating wide reading into subject learning and gathering data about the process
- reflect about modelling and collegial sharing with other teachers and students about wide reading experiences

Steps:
1. Meeting four: Report
- Share reports of Wide Reading Activities in subject learning
- Share reflections about wide reading mastery (as per Wide Reading Strategies Set 4)
- Share reflections about the *Framework for Whole School Wide Reading Practice*
- Share experience of Young Adult reading and collegial sharing with students and teachers

2. Plan action
- Gather data, undertake analysis and report results before next meeting
- Borrow a Young Adult book in a different genre from either school or public library, as eBook, AudioBook, or hard copy, and use ideas about wide reading mastery to share reading with colleagues and students.
- Complete Wide Reading and PAR feedback sheets (Wide Reading Learning Results Feedback Sheet, PAR Feedback Sheet)

3. Action to explore and reflect
Carry out planned actions and prepare to report at next meeting

Cycle five: Review, reflect & report

Goal:
- finalise and report actions of incorporating wide reading into subject learning and gathering data about the process
- reflect about wide reading strategies, wide reading teaching practice and wide reading mastery

- reflect about Informed Learning PAR as a process for professional development
- reflect about modelling and collegial sharing with other teachers and students about YA wide reading experiences

Steps:

1. **Meeting five: Discuss**
   - Share and discuss Wide Reading Activities for subject learning
   - Share and discuss group learning about wide reading strategies, wide reading teaching practice and wide reading mastery
   - Share and discuss group learning about the Framework for *Whole School Wide Reading Practice*
   - Share and discuss group learning about PAR as a process for professional development
   - Share and discuss group learning about experiences of Young Adult reading and sharing with colleagues and students
   - Share individual learning about Wide Reading, PAR and Young Adult reading.

2. Analyse and report group findings

Undertake coding of feedback sheets, develop listing of key themes and significance
Interpret codes to produce findings and implications

3. Report findings and implications to school and broader community

Conclusion

Where to now?

Every day, library staff in schools across Australia seek new and innovative ways to improve their core programs: information literacy education and wide reading education. There has been considerable work done on the collaborative planning and teaching to integrate information literacy education into curriculum, and research demonstrates positive outcomes. There is less work on ways to move wide reading education out of the library and into the classroom practice of teachers – albeit programs such as sustained silent reading and literature extensions in subjects have been successfully used for many decades. I suggest that the library staff, as the wide reading specialists in the school, operating in the specially designed wide reading labs which are school libraries, are well placed to lead professional development teams who explore ways that wide reading might enhance subject learning. Even if school leadership does not commit to the ten benchmarks of the *Framework for Whole School Wide Reading Practice*, starting small with willing teachers and subject department leaders can be done, using the draft *Informed Learning PAR for Wide Reading Practice* professional development model. Christine Bruce calls for exploration and research to apply the ideas of informed learning to ever broader areas, and wide reading education might well be a fruitful application.

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