WIRED – English and Library Collaboration Improves Reading Results

WIRED (Wide Interest Reading English Development) is the reading program for Years 7 – 9 students at St Patrick's College in Ballarat. Every two weeks students come to the library with their English class. After a brief presentation by a Teacher Librarian (TL), students choose their reading material and then read silently for the rest of the lesson. We have an extensive collection covering a broad range of subjects, genres and reading abilities. We also have a great library team who know the collection well and which books suit different reading levels. Research shows that successful reading programs need to provide a broad range of reading material (Ladbrook, 2014).

Over time the program has been developed and refined to best serve the needs of our boys. It had all the hallmarks of a good reading program … or so we thought. However, after reading the work of John Hattie (2012) we could see that we were missing a core element - the evaluation of the effect of our program on the learning and achievement of our students.

Using Data – NAPLAN and On Demand Testing

In 2013, we worked closely with the Head of Literacy, Sarah Slater. We started thinking about the different types of data available to us and how we could use it to evaluate reading skills of each year level as cohorts and for individual students. In response to our NAPLAN data, explicit reading skills were presented through WIRED and boys were asked to practise these skills while they read their choice of books.

We also considered how we could use VCAA's adaptive On Demand Literacy Test to better understand each student's reading level. A review of those first results prompted us to add a whole new dimension to WIRED. We saw a means of measuring the effect of WIRED on our students.

Data Journey

Since 2012 we have been on a 'data journey' (Queensland Studies Authority, [QLD Government]); that is, not just implementing a whole-school process and developing a cultural norm of collecting data (including deciding which data) but learning how best to use that data within our context.

At first we were merely data collectors – focusing on collecting results using raw data taken from various sources (teacher judgment, On Demand, NAPLAN, TORCH). This is the first part of the journey and it needs to be recognised that it can take time to build a culture where even simply collecting data on a regular basis is considered normal practice. This was in place to an extent at our school, however, the addition of On Demand comprehension testing added another dimension, particularly for teachers and students. On Demand testing is practical, user friendly to set up, administer and analyse, and most importantly, it provides immediate feedback that is powerful for both teachers and students. Knowing a student's comprehension level can be useful in ALL subject areas and a useful tool for a whole-school literacy focus. Furthermore, from a literacy across the curriculum perspective, when thinking about improving student performance, the research clearly indicates that planned use of data is a common

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characteristic of high-performing schools along with a focus on Literacy and Numeracy (DEECD Victoria, 2009).

The next step was to become data givers – that is, beginning to look at the causes for the result. At this stage, we could begin to question what was currently happening *in* the classroom as a result of knowing the data. The process of analysing, interpreting and discussing the data in a supportive environment started to become part of the cultural norm. This shifted gradually from casual conversations to whole Faculty generalised discussions, then to challenging current practice rather than simply sharing stories. At all times, the conversation needed to be about students not teachers, using the data as a jumping off point. Finally, at this stage we had to ensure the timing was right for data testing (once a year each November, apart from Year 7s who are additionally tested at the beginning of the year) to avoid the danger of testing fatigue.

Now we're at the point of being data users. That is, we're looking for the story behind the data, keeping in mind that accountability behind the numbers leads to school improvement and professional development (Queensland Studies Authority [QLD Government]). We are asking questions about the data, at an individual, Faculty, and whole-school level. More than this, we are collaborating and reflecting on the picture the data is painting as students move through their schooling. We've gone beyond the 'it's the English Department's problem' mentality and WIRED.5 is certainly case in point of how teachers and students are provided with the time and a positive environment in which to provide constructive feedback to the students. Creative actions can be the end result of collecting 'data'. Any improvement plan must be conceptualised, translated and actioned by teachers in the classroom, otherwise it remains an idea, words on an official piece of paper.

WIRED.5

We use the On Demand Literacy Test to set an individual goal for improvement. We aim for all students to achieve a minimum .5 improvement on their reading level at the end of the year when they are re-tested. Being able to personalise goals encourages developing readers to make good reading choices to assist their continued progress and competent readers to extend the breadth and depth of their reading experiences. As for any skill, improvement can only be gained through practice.

What's your WIRED.5 number?

All students are told their WIRED.5 number at the start of the year. Students with lower scores now have something tangible they can work towards. English teachers interview students and discuss ways to improve their reading. Students with high scores are encouraged to borrow a greater variety of more challenging texts.

Every interaction gives the TL or the English teacher an opportunity to connect with the student in a meaningful way. For developing readers, we encourage them and take time to find something that they will be able to access that is also of interest, whereas competent readers are given the acknowledgement that motivates them to try new and challenging material. Much

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has been written about the importance of allowing students to choose books that interest them (Johnson & Blair, 2003; Kelly & Clausen-Grace, 2009).

The response has been remarkable. Developing readers, particularly those in Year 9, appreciate our suggestions of books with mature but accessible content. Many of the competent readers are not aware of their capabilities and with some encouragement are willing to try something new. Although we had ample titles in our collection to support the wide range of reading abilities of our students, with the addition of the WIRED.5 number, we are better able to suggest engaging and suitable books.

Clearly, this is not a new idea – primary schools regularly use Lexile tests and many organise their collections accordingly. The reason we chose the On Demand Test is that it is prepared by VCAA and the levels correspond to the AusVELS levels, therefore English teachers and students relate to them.

Never underestimate the value of knowing your collection. A comprehensive and extensive knowledge of Young Adult (YA) Fiction is needed. Furthermore, TLs are experts in providing appropriate and engaging reading material that caters to a range of reading levels. They specialise in getting 'the right book for the right reader at the right time' (Lesesne, 2005, p. iii).

Reader Profile Survey

Best practice requires programs to be regularly reviewed to confirm they are meeting their stated goals and it is important to ensure that we measure outcomes of the program not only in terms of developing reader aptitude but also reader attitudes. We measure attitudes to reading through a Reader Profile Survey at the start and at the end of the year.

The English teachers use the Reader Profiles for interviews with students regarding reading habits and interests. The WIRED team reviews the data holistically looking for trends and areas where the program can be improved. Consistently, the boys report that what they most enjoy about WIRED is the opportunity to read a good book. They value being granted the time to read books that they have selected.

There are two important messages from the survey. Firstly, boys like reading when they have good books. Contrary to what we might think, they love fiction. Consistently, our survey data reveals this. Dedicated reading time is also highly valued by students. Thus, we need to designate time to read. Furthermore, adults need to model reading, to show that we see it as a valuable use of time and ensure that reading happens regularly.

Evidence of Practice

At the end of 2015, we published our data on our WIRED website. We tracked the changes in the On Demand Literacy Test results for each student to measure the impact of the WIRED program – to see if students achieved their .5 goal. We also extensively reviewed the Reader Survey data, taking particular note of what students liked about the program and their suggested changes. We have been pleased to see that our WIRED program has had a positive effect on students' reading results and attitudes to reading. It has been worth the time

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to collate, review, reflect and present our findings. This 'local data' (Todd, 2015) informs discussions with Leadership, Faculty Heads and the English Department.

This year we presented the data to our WIRED classes showing the boys that we take reading seriously, we take the program seriously, and we take their personal growth seriously. We expect them to do the same – everyone is accountable.

To see our results please go to: http://wired.stpats.vic.edu.au/wired5.html

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