Chapter 7

Feedback

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Abstract In this chapter we share results from the qualitative data collected prior to (phase 1) and after completion (phase 2) of the Reading Success project. Information from staff interviews revealed some broader issues related to a whole-school approach to the teaching of reading. Findings showed several common themes, including the importance of positive and collaborative learning environments; having consistent language and communication across the whole school in relation to literacy education and more specifically the teaching of reading; and the inclusion of varied approaches that can be demonstrated for the purpose of professional learning.

Keywords Teacher interviews · Literacy education · Whole-school approaches

7.1 Phase 1 Staff Interviews

Initially, we were interested in knowing what the teachers and leaders thought about the literacy practices already being implemented in the school. We, therefore, carried out a number of interviews with staff involved in the teaching of reading at the school to find out what approaches and/or programmes were being used in the teaching of reading and whether the staff thought these were effective or not. It is important to note that these interviews were carried out at the beginning of the school's reform in literacy and reading instruction.

As outlined in Chap. 2, questions included: (1) What programmes are currently in place that aim to improve literacy (and more specifically reading) outcomes for students?; (2) What are the current perceptions of the success as well as areas in need of improvement of these programmes?; and (3) What future programmes and approaches to improving success in literacy learning might be considered in your school? We also gathered demographic information about the teachers that are displayed in Table 7.1.

Further, questions were semi-structured and focused on the approaches used within the school to improve literacy learning, and more specifically reading outcomes. Questions were based around the context of the school, the programmes being used for literacy, and what the teachers feel about the effectiveness of such

Table 7.1 Teachers' demographic information

Teacher pseudonym	Teaching experience in years	Current year level teaching	Qualifications
Lisa	4½	4/5	BEd—Early Childhood
Polly	15	4	BEd and Masters
Marie	4	4/5	Undergraduate and Graduate Diploma in Education
Geoff	15	Member of leadership team	Postgraduate Diploma in Education
Amelie	20	Not available	BEd Primary
Mina	30	5	BEd and Masters
Georgia	25	4	Diploma of Teaching

Note BEd Bachelor of Education

methods. We also asked what the teachers thought should be enhanced and how this could happen.

All interviews were transcribed and member checked (Koelsch, 2013; Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). The team all read the transcripts and wrote down any recurring codes and then themes (de Casterle, Gastmans, Bryon, & Denier, 2012). After initial themes were identified one team member took the lead on further analysis using an inductive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and consequently a number of themes were identified in these data including:

- The importance of a positive learning environment;
- A consistent language for literacy learning;
- Varied activities as well as a targeted approach;
- Cultural diversity.

7.1.1 The Importance of a Positive Learning Environment

All staff interviewed commented extremely positively about the school's culture and learning environment. They unanimously felt that the 'culture' of the school had been greatly improved over the past three years since the implementation of the Positive Behaviour Learning programme, called RISE. Having a consistent approach that was visible throughout the school via posters and slogans was making a difference. Staff believed that the students were willing to learn as a result and that parents were also aware of the school's overarching philosophy. This, in turn, had also impacted on the reputation of the school in the community.

It's actually a really great school. The kids are really good. They're very positive. They love to learn which is great. You notice a huge change in their attitude towards school when they

hear RISE. So if you all of a sudden say what's RISE, they go, Respect, Independence, Safety, Effort and it's one of those things that's now drilled into them and they take it home with them which is really good too. There's a lot of visuals around the school which is great. It's a constant reminder for them. Lisa

Many of the teachers commented on how the school has a wide range of cultures represented in its school cohort. They felt that this diversity contributed to the positive learning environment established in the school. However, they also mentioned that a number of students come and go regularly which makes teaching them difficult. Overall, they felt the school had a good reputation in the community, which had not always been the case.

Probably low to mid socio-economic backgrounds, varied culture. Fairly, transient I think. Marie

I would suggest it is a school that is very multi-cultural but also very accepting. So we're a bit of a mixed bag. We've got high flyers, low flyers, different cultures all the way through. I actually think that it's a school that's really progressing forward. [...] I think a lot of effort has gone into focusing on where the children have come from and then making them progress forward. Polly

7.1.2 A Consistent Language for Literacy Learning

All staff commented on a whole-school literacy approach that had been developed collaboratively over the past few years. The importance of a consistent language for literacy learning was highlighted by each interviewee. All staff believed that the six strategies for reading comprehension, for example, impacted positively on students' learning as it enabled teachers to focus on other areas of instruction; children were able to recite this quickly and move on to the next task. The reading and writing strategies, as well as differentiation and behaviour management plans as outlined in the school's improvement priorities (Table 7.2), were certainly having an effect.

The school recognised that professional development (PD) was an important component of all priority areas. Korthagen (2017) noted that both new and traditional approaches to PD are needed for teachers. He highlighted how a lot of "teacher learning takes place unconsciously and involves cognitive, emotional and motivational dimensions" (p. 387). Others have also revealed that professional development needs to be varied and not always top-down (Bahr, Dole, Bahr, Barton, & Davies, 2007; Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015) and should take into account all teachers' needs. Bahr et al. (2007) offered a model of effective PD that notes the importance of teachers being able to choose the type of professional learning that suits their needs best. Further, the staff felt valued and that their voice was being heard.

In the last three years ... new ideas coming out and they are monitored properly. Teachers are given time like this to sit down and discuss things and the peer observation we can go to other classes where teachers sit through what they're doing and then pick up something from there. Then they come to your class and they pick up something. There's a lot of opportunities. There's a lot of time factor given to us to collate all this information.

Table 7.2 The school's improvement priorities

Reading and writing	Differentiation	Behaviour management
Pedagogy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Scheduled literacy blocks – Explicit teaching – School reading framework – Jolly Phonics (Prep) – Robust Vocabulary Instruction – Heggarty's phonemic awareness (Prep-2) – Read It Again – FoundationQ! (Prep) – Professional development (PD) – Student goal setting – Effective student feedback – Running records – Moderation – Differentiation – Reading data wall – Whole-school home reading approach Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Master Teacher and Head of Curriculum – Peer coaching – Student support team – Planning meetings – PD – Instructional feedback (five weeks) 	Pedagogy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – PD – Coaching and mentoring – Collaborative development of Individual Curriculum Plans and Personal Learning Plans – Evidence-based decisions – Case management Support staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Student support team – Teacher aides – Head of student learning – SEP teachers and aides – Speech pathologist – EAL/D teacher – Guidance officer – External agencies Support programmes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Intervention programmes – Extension programmes, e.g. robotics, U2B – Social skills – Mindfulness—growth coaching 	Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) – Internal PBL coach Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – RISE – Classroom rules – Behaviour matrix – Official launch – STAR mascot – STAR student of the week – Classroom behaviour walks – Time out buddies – Newsletter PD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – PBL tiers and visualisation – Effective behaviour management strategies – Behaviour data trends

Generally, the staff felt supported in their work in the teaching of reading and noted that there were a number of improvements that had been happening over the past year, since the implementation of the school's reading plan.

Our school's very focussed at the moment in terms of reading. Literacy is a really big push for us, especially reading. We do a lot of data meetings and collaborative meetings based around reading. We've got a huge data wall that we use to track how the kids are going in terms of the age appropriate level and their year level targets. We are just constantly focussing on reading and trying to improve it. Lisa

A couple of years ago we developed a framework to try and have consistent language and consistent practices. It takes time to implement. It takes time to up-skill teachers and it takes time – that's continuous. But it takes time also to monitor it and to offer support and coaching, etc. Part of it was around consistent strategies in oral reading, as such and strategising comprehension. So there are two elements to it. Geoff

7.1.3 Varied Activities as well as a Targeted Approach

Another area mentioned consistently by staff was not only the targeted approach involving the six strategies but also the fact that their literacy plans consisted of varied activities for the students. Even though staff were asked to implement three literacy blocks per week that included guided reading activities, they were also able to develop and implement a range of pedagogical approaches to ensure all students' needs were met. Included in these activities were:

- Learning support lessons;
- Small group work;
- Explicit instruction;
- Time for reading;
- Guided reading;
- Comprehension skills;
- Text variance;
- Literacy blocks.

While the variety of activities was seen to be important, some staff did find there was limited flexibility due to time constraints and the requirement to do three literacy blocks each week. Further, some staff felt the need for more professional development on guided reading and that there were just too many expectations as to what to use in the classroom. Teachers still wanted more experience around particular teaching strategies in comprehension and in particular inferential comprehension.

7.1.4 Cultural Diversity

When staff described their school they were all well aware of the range of cultural diversity present in the student cohort—with 33% of students from ESL/EAL backgrounds and 6% Indigenous. While they mentioned this as a challenge, they also believed it was strength of the school. Interestingly, some of the staff were also from culturally diverse backgrounds and had extensive knowledge of different pedagogical approaches that supported diverse students' learning needs. Two staff members, for example, spoke about the importance of having a range of bilingual resources such as early readers in other languages for the children. They also recognised the need to acknowledge what the children bring to school with them from home in terms of experience. Similarly, some staff mentioned the need to improve the school's partnership with the community via a range of ways.

7.2 Phase 2 Staff Interviews

After the project was completed, a number of interviews with the staff who were available as arranged by the deputy principal, were conducted by an independent research assistant. Post-interviews involved Lisa, Polly, Marie, and Georgia. The same analytical process was carried out in this phase as in Phase 1, whereby codes were initially identified and then the codes were clustered into several themes. The themes in this phase of the project were identified as: communication, the importance of demonstration, a variety of strategies, and high expectations.

7.2.1 *Communication*

A strong theme from the second round of interviews was communication. All of the classroom teachers indicated that there was limited communication about the project's final results. They all felt that knowing the results of the children who participated in the intervention as well as how they improved would have been good.

There wasn't a lot of communication...I didn't understand really in the end how... I guess if it was an improvement I would have liked to have seen the results. The post results for the kids that I had for those two years, because they are now in year six, and I've got no idea how they've progressed. (Lisa)

The teachers were also concerned about how the communication about the process itself was sometimes confusing. For example, Marie and Polly commented:

I think one of the things that we had the most difficulty with to be honest was just the way that we were all communicating with each other about what was going on. (Marie)

I don't really know anything else about the project ... They were just being taken out to be tested with the speech pathologist in the last month or so... I know very little about it except that [it had] something that had to do with the university and that they were getting data and that sort of thing (Polly)

Additionally, the teachers indicated that they would have liked to know what the students were receiving in the small-group instruction. The teachers were, however, aware of whether or not they were a control group or not. They also knew about some of the measures such as the YARC, testing sound-letter correspondence, and the assessments that the speech pathologist was doing. Despite this, they all felt that knowing more about the results of the overall project as well as what activities the students were engaging in would have contributed to a more effective approach across the school.

I think there was some improvement shown from the students that went, but for the rest of the class, I don't know that it had a huge impact. Like I said, we being the control group, we didn't really get much to support I guess. The kids were being taken out of the classroom to do it, so it was hard to know what skills they were being shown. (Georgia)

One of the positive aspects about communication about the project was that the teachers observed that there was now a consistent language being used across the school in relation to teaching of reading. This included the guided reading sessions as well as the robust vocabulary instruction. The teachers all felt these were both good approaches but more time reading and further understanding by the students about reading as a process would enhance the practice overall.

Robust vocab is definitely a strength that we've got across the school. You talk about robust vocab to kids [and they] know exactly what you're talking about. Pretty much every class in the school have now got RVI walls. I think it just makes it come to the forefront of teachers' minds before they teach things. (Lisa)

7.2.2 The Importance of Demonstration and Professional Development

Another theme related to the second round of interviews was the importance of demonstrated practice. All of the teachers commented on how powerful it was for them to see someone else demonstrate and support their practice in the classroom context. This was particularly apparent with the Robust Vocabulary Instruction method. The teachers, however, would have liked to have seen a similar approach to some of the other activities related to the teaching of comprehension and decoding.

And I think as a school we've just taken on some skills from the reading and we've actually applied it across the whole school level, so including smaller fluency groups, including smaller vocab groups, doing robust vocab in the whole school I think has really improved as well, so I think that's improved my skills, but also just a whole skill level. I thought it was really good because it was really good to be able to teach the robust vocab instruction and have someone set that example for us. (Marie)

Marie commented that having someone else show them what to do directly in the classroom with their students was extremely helpful. This also meant that the teachers were directly involved rather than, as previously explained, the students just being taken out of the class without the teachers knowing what activities they were doing. The teachers indicated that they would like more opportunities for someone to show them explicitly how to improve reading through a number of methods in their classroom spaces.

Another positive demonstrated practice was identified as the student SWOT interviews and speech-to-print profiles. The teachers agreed that these data sets told them specifically what the students needed once they were back in their mainstream classrooms.

And I also thought it was really good that we had the interviews [and profiles] because we could actually see specifically what the kids needed in reading. It told us a bit more than just the general test, the diagnostic assessments that we would do with them in terms of PROBE and things like that. It actually broke it down into their phonemic ability and their phonological awareness, which was really good. (Marie)

The professional learning gained from direct experience was an important notion for the teachers and links with the theme of communication. It also aligns with the next theme of being able to utilise a range of strategies to improve reading outcomes.

7.2.3 Variety of Strategies for Teaching Reading

As per the first round of interviews, using a variety of strategies to improve reading results was encouraged by the staff. These strategies, it was also revealed, needed to be communicated and understood across the whole school. Teachers mentioned some of the consistent approaches that were expected to be implemented such as guided reading, robust vocabulary, and a number of comprehension strategies such as skimming, scanning, and summarising. The interviews revealed teachers were using a range of strategies, but they wanted to know more so they could support their students further:

I think any focus on literacy, and vocabulary, and comprehension is a good thing. I think it did help staff across the school, because as a school we have actually adopted the specific instruction of robust vocab. It makes us think when we're doing whole unit planning, about the language involved, and the demands that are going to be needed from the kids to comprehend the task. (Lisa—second interview)

We have a vocab group that we do when we're reading, and that's before they start to read. We've got a fluency group that we've got going. We obviously have independent and guided reading and things like that that we do. And then there's also a small group that comes up and admin actually works with them in terms of their phonemic awareness for those smaller groups, which is really good. And then as a whole class I do robust vocab for those texts that we do in the classroom, so it's really good. (Marie)

Despite the teachers having new knowledge about a variety of strategies, it was clear that more direct links between the classroom work and the Reading Success project were needed. As highlighted, a whole-school approach needs a comprehensive management plan that includes all methods being connected in meaningful ways. Unfortunately, both time and money were mentioned as inhibitors to such practices.

We're looking at different strategies and we do reading groups and we've just started doing inferential questioning... We have a designated time when the children split into their differentiated groups reading and that's what I've been doing all year... They've all improved... I have six groups in my class and I have one group that go with one teacher aide for half an hour, and they're doing vocabulary and a cold read. After that they go to the fluency group the next day and in fluency group they are annotating the passage and after that they come to me and that's when I do the harder questions with them and we look at all the things that they've annotated and vocab that they don't know and then we do a really deep read and that rotates and keeps rotating. (Polly)

As described by Polly the teachers now have a bank of approaches they can use to support their students' reading progress. These, however, seemed not to relate clearly with the Reading Success programme.

7.2.4 *Having High Expectations and Celebrating Achievements*

An additional theme the teachers regularly mentioned was the importance of having high expectations and rigorous approaches to teaching reading. The teachers' discourse focused on how they were committed to supporting improvements in the students' overall learning and this required them to expect hard work and high achievement levels. They felt that the project did ensure that gains were made, particularly, for the students who may have been struggling more than others.

Just to try, and lift the rigor that's in a guided reading lesson. And then the second program is, we actually have our leadership team coming in at least twice a term to actually watch, observe, and give specific feedback on our guided reading. The children know exactly what to expect from a guided reading lesson, and teachers are heavily supported in that process. (Lisa)

And trying to find time and ways to do a more rigorous work, because in the half an hour, you can only do so much...I think it's more important that they're I guess having more time to look more deeply at the reading. (Georgia)

Finally, the staff believed that as the students were demonstrating improvements this needed to be reported to the whole school and community. Further, the leadership team acknowledged how teachers had learnt more about the teaching of reading and in particularly teaching vocabulary. Not sharing these successes could potentially make teachers and students feel their efforts are unrewarded. This sentiment also relates to the need for clearer communication of the results of the project generally.

7.3 Feedback from the School Leadership Team

When interviewing the leadership team, it became clear involvement in the Reading Success project had been a positive experience. When asked what the school had learned from their involvement in the project and whether it had changed the way they approached the teaching of reading, Geoff commented that:

The Reading Success Project confirmed that our school is on the right track in terms of the targeted teaching of reading. It confirmed and highlighted the importance diagnosing individuals' needs and early and ongoing targeted intervention. It highlighted the fact that we need to invest more time into focusing on comprehension and as a result we have introduced 'Text Dependent Questioning' to help in this area.

The leadership team had appreciated the additional human and financial resources that were offered as part of the project which assisted the school in conducting the specific reading assessments and in providing the additional targeted reading interventions. However, there was acknowledgement of the need for ongoing professional development for teachers to help them accurately diagnose areas of needs and to develop specific teaching strategies to help make improvements.

However, the leadership team acknowledged the challenges faced during the project in “*finding a balance between the project’s needs and the school’s needs*”. Although Geoff said there were many positives to come out of being involved in the project, the school’s main challenges in the implementing the model relates to time and resources:

There is also a need to ensure teachers have the knowledge, skills and time to implement additional testing and to provide ongoing targeted teaching as a result of this. This requires a significant amount of time (ongoing) and resources. Developing a sustainable model is one of the challenges we face at a school level.

7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has shared findings from the staff interviews, prior to and following the school’s involvement in the Reading Success project. Common themes within the staff interviews showed the importance of clear and consistent communication across the whole school in relation to approaches adopted towards teaching reading more generally, as well as the Reading Success project more specifically. The teachers, in particular, found demonstrated practice on a range of approaches to teaching reading extremely beneficial.

It became clear from the teacher interviews that communication regarding the specific results of the Reading Success project (both assessment and interventions) did not always filter back to all the teachers even though several professional development sessions were held with small teams of teachers involved in the project. Achieving whole-school reform is difficult, as acknowledged in the previous research (Fullan, 2007; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006), particularly, in relation to literacy learning and the teaching of reading (Barton & McKay, 2016). Despite such challenges, it is important that all staff, students, and the community understand the particular approach being adopted and *why*. Chap. 8 will summarise what we have learned from the Reading Success project and how we may ensure these findings are shared with all stakeholders involved in ensuring reading success for all children.

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