READING PROGRAM
Reading Matters
at Villanova College
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1.0 **RATIONALE**

The search for truth, at the heart of our Augustinian tradition, is central to the goals of our Villanova Reads Program (VRP). Augustine teaches us to be restless in our pursuit of knowledge. This restlessness is a step toward realising our own potential but also a step toward bringing us closer to God. The emblem for the Order of St Augustine bears out this premise: the flaming heart, reminding us to exercise charity; the open book calls us to seek knowledge; and the arrow, which pierces the heart and book, is God’s reminder to us to grow in heart and mind.

Part of our school’s mission is to build a community of students equipped with the skills to continue this search for truth beyond the confines of our college and their school years.

“Let our searching be such that we may be sure of finding, and let our finding be such that we may go on searching” *(Villanova College, 2016).*

Our VRP establishes the value we hold in developing within our students the foundational skills required to successfully navigate their academic, spiritual and social learning. Building a community of readers is a deliberate act and requires a collaborative process. For this reason, this program aims to make clear and transparent the partnerships we hope to develop and the role each group will play in building a strong culture of reading at Villanova.

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*The simplest way to make sure that we raise literate children is to teach them to read, and to show them that reading is a pleasurable activity. And that means, at its simplest, finding books that they enjoy, giving them access to those books, and letting them read them* *(Gaiman, 2013).*
2.0 WHAT WE KNOW

2.1 Introduction
Research reveals extensive benefits for students when they regularly engage in self-directed reading; that is, student-initiated reading with or without the assistance of others. These are academic, social, emotional and health benefits.

Interest in reading for pleasure, reading self-efficacy and positive reader identities have all be shown to decline during the teenage years, and boys are more likely than girls to report that they spend no time reading for pleasure (Nippold, Duthie, & Larsen, 2005, p. 93; Smith, Smith, Gilmore & Jameson, 2012, p. 202).

Self-directed reading has been associated not only with increases in reading attainment but also with writing ability, text comprehension, grammar, breadth of vocabulary, attitudes, self-confidence as a reader, pleasure in reading in later life, general knowledge, a better understanding of other cultures, community participation, a greater insight into human nature and decision-making (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Howard, 2011; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (2006) found that those who did not enjoy reading were more likely to be:

- heavier television watchers over time;
- exposed to bullying experiences;
- seen by teachers as having difficult classroom behaviour at age 12;
- less likely to complete their homework; and
- less likely to be enthusiastic about going to school.

Merga (2019a) describes the “Matthew Effect” or “Reading Spiral”. The spiral illustrates the gap that results between those who engage in self-directed reading and those who do not. In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25: 14-30), the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Those who are good at reading, read more, get better at reading and enjoy reading. The “Matthew Effect” can cause an upward or downward spiral as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 (Page 4).

Children who engage in reading become good readers. They experience more success, and they are encouraged by that success to read more. They enjoy reading more. As they become even more successful at reading their vocabulary and comprehension grows, which often leads to greater success in all academic areas.

Figure 2: The spiral up- those who read
On the other hand, those who do not engage in reading, may struggle at decoding and are less likely to want to pick up a book, practise less and fall behind – often way behind – their peers. They continue to not enjoy reading and they may fall behind not only in reading and spelling, but also in other areas such as history and science.

2.2 Academic Achievement

- There is overwhelming evidence that self-directed reading has positive effects on academic achievement.

- [Self-directed readers] are likely to do significantly better at school than their peers (Manuel & Carter, 2015).

- [Self-directed reading is] ... more important for children’s cognitive development between the ages of 10 and 16 than their parents’ levels of education (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2013).

- On average, students who read daily for enjoyment score the equivalent of one-and-a-half years of schooling better than those who do not (OECD, 2011).

- The strongest predictor of reading growth from age 10 to age 16 is whether a child reads for pleasure (Sullivan & Brown, 2013).

- Early experience of failures in reading motivates poor readers only to read when they have to, which in turn leads to poorer reading skills (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007).

- There is a positive link between positive attitudes towards reading and scoring well on reading assessments (Twist, Schagen & Hodgson, 2006).

- Reading fiction (rather than non-fiction) leads to better procedures for processing information, including those of creativity (Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013)

- The ability to read competently and, more importantly, the enjoyment of reading has implications for a student’s academic success. It is also an important indicator of success in other areas of life. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (2006) found that students who love reading had:
  - higher scores on the cognitive and social/attitudinal competencies; and
  - consistently higher scores in mathematics, reading, logical problem-solving and attitude.

- Wylie, Hodgen, Hipkins & Vaughan (2008) include [self-directed reading] as one of the three indicators that suggest a child or young person is well placed for learning.

- “Interest in reading tends to drop off in secondary schools and it is not just development in literacy that this affects; it has a knock-on effect on learning across the curriculum” (Wilkinson & Bredgaard, 2012, May 7).
2.3 Social and Emotional Benefits

- Research confirms that self-directed reading has positive effects on the social and emotional wellbeing of students.

- Those people who read books are on average more satisfied with life, happier and more likely to feel that life is worthwhile (University of Liverpool, 2016).

- Evidence suggests that self-directed reading is an activity that has emotional and social consequences (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

- Fiction allows us to explore ideas of change, complex emotions and the unknown. Reading fiction produces a reality simulation and helps us to navigate complex problems and the complexities of social life (Dovey, 2015).

- Students who engaged in self-directed reading demonstrated:
  - higher average scores for engagement in school, positive communication and relations with family, and positive friendships;
  - less risky behaviour; and
  - higher levels of motivation towards school (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2006).

- Reading activates the region of the brain responsible for better understanding others and seeing the world from new perspectives. When we read about a situation or feeling, it is very nearly as if we are feeling it ourselves (Dovey, 2015; Paul, 2012; Orr, 2020, p. 12).

2.4 Health Benefits

Beyond the academic and social and emotional benefits, reading fiction delivers both physical and mental health benefits.

- Readers have less mental decline, they experience slower memory decline in later years and demonstrate fewer characteristics of Alzheimer’s disease compared to non-readers (Wilson, et al., 2013).

- Research at the University of Sussex shows that reading is the most effective way to reduce stress. Psychologists believe this is because the human mind has to concentrate on reading and the distraction of being taken into a literary world eases the tensions in muscles and the heart (University of Minnesota, 2009).

- Clark & Teravainen-Goff (2018) reported, the more positive children and young people feel about reading and writing, and the more they enjoy reading and writing, the higher their scores on our mental wellbeing index.
3.0 GOALS

The library seeks to coordinate the efforts of the school community and to work with each student throughout his time at Villanova in achieving the following self-directed reading goals.

3.1 Student-centred goals
- encourage students to lead their own learning, become attentive listeners and independent and reflective readers;
- promote and encourage a lifelong love of reading;
- develop within students the motivation to read with enjoyment and evaluate what they have read to justify personal opinions and preferences;
- encourage care and ownership of books;
- encourage students to freely share and recommend their reading with their peers and others;
- identify those students who require additional support to promote their growth as a self-directed reader;
- support students in developing their ability to monitor their own reading and provide peer support; and
- build a collection which has been informed by students, staff, research and suppliers.

3.2 Staff-centred goals
- encourage staff to borrow and be seen as positive reading role models; and
- establish regular classroom visits from leadership to affirm student reading engagement and encourage their self-directed reading.

3.3 Parent-centred goals
- communicate to parents the value of self-directed reading; and
- form a partnership with parents in supporting their sons to commit to reading daily, discuss their reading choice and engage in conversations with their sons about the story and seek advice and confirmation freely with the Library staff.

3.4 Library-centred goals
- maintain a vibrant collection which serves the needs of the entire college community;
- establish a successful method to record reading progress using a journal;
- support students in developing their ability to monitor their own reading and provide peer support; and
- work closely with English teachers to ensure each student carries to class a book of their choice so they can commence each lesson with 10 minutes of reading.
4.0 Stakeholder Roles

4.1 Introduction
As with all aspects of education, the development of young boys into independent readers requires a partnership with various groups. A partnership between teachers, administration and support staff, the students themselves, their parents and the wider community is necessary if we are to encourage all our students to develop a love of recreational reading and to become lifelong readers. As in all areas of pedagogical practice, whether that practice is within the mathematics, science or a history classroom, instilling a passion for a discipline in students fosters a willingness and motivation within students to engage. “Once decoding has been mastered, mature reading skills are ‘best developed by instilling in children a love of literature” (Department of Education, 2015, p. 4).

According to Wigfeld and Guthrie (1997), several aspects of intrinsic motivation predict reading motivation. These are:

- the belief that reading is valuable (importance);
- the desire to learn about a particular topic of personal interest (curiosity);
- enjoyment of reading; and
- preference for challenging text, the satisfaction of mastering or assimilating complex ideas in text.

4.2 Students
As the central stakeholders to this program, the students are expected to engage willingly and positively in the program. Naturally, some students will need little to no support; they are already self-directed in their reading. A goal of this program is to identify those students who do need support and to develop within these students a willingness to engage in this reading program.

Considering the variety of different student dispositions toward reading, the role of the Villanova student in this program is to:

- assist their peers with book selection and recommendations;
- positively engage in the program through their attention in reading classes, language used in discussions, adherence to classroom and library expectations and care of resources;
- maintain a journal of their reading. The journal will be pre-printed and require students to easily (using check boxes) record the reasons for their selection, the features of the book, the reason they enjoyed reading the book or why they decided not to complete the book;
- bring an open mindset to self-directed reading activities; and
- actively engage in activities set by their teachers and parents.

4.3 Parents
A student’s attitude to reading is often but not always drawn from their parents’ regard for the activity. Evans, Kelley and Sikora (2014) report that “homes that abound in books and in which the way of life involves esteeming, reading, and enjoying books – is associated with higher educational attainment”.

Having access to books at home is a key aspect of reading for pleasure. Children who do not have
books at home are more likely to report that they never read. It is therefore vital that parents are aware of their impact in encouraging their sons in becoming self-directed readers.

With support from the school, parents are encouraged to help their sons to focus on the entertainment value of reading at a young age (primary school) over the need to pass tests (Baker, Scher & Mackler, 1997).

### 4.4 College Leadership

Beyond the classroom teacher and Library staff, the College leadership team sets the vision and focus for a school through their actions and provides powerful role models to our students.

The leadership team is encouraged to:

- visit classes to share their current reading, encourage students to read for enjoyment and reiterate the benefits of reading;
- be seen to borrow books from the library; and
- share their current reading with their classes and in conversations with students around the school, when the opportunity arises.

### 4.5 Staff

Values are both implicitly and explicitly espoused in the classroom and around the school campus. If staff demonstrate the value of reading to their students by both what they say and that they themselves demonstrate reading for enjoyment, then our students will be positioned to more readily accept the benefits of reading. Teachers [and school officers] have been shown to have a big impact on children and thus it is imperative that they model the behaviours they want to encourage (Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Safford, 2009).

Staff should endeavour to:

- accept a wide range of reading undertaken by their students as legitimate; that is, audio books, the reading of graphic novels and the classics should equally be acceptable to the teacher;
- stay abreast of the latest popular reads; here, the Library staff are well positioned to share their knowledge; and
- support the Library Reading program by reiterating the benefits (namely, the academic, social, emotional and health benefits discussed above) of self-directed reading to their class and when the opportunity presents in conversations.
4.6 Library

The Villanova Reading Program is an initiative of Villanova’s Tolle Lege Library. School libraries add significant value to the work of the classroom teacher. Library staff are at the forefront of delivering reading collections which are vibrant, engaging, tried, tested and current. Further, they engage in conversations with each patron, gauge interest in titles and collect recommendations from across the school which lends significant weight to the recommendations they in turn make. The Library Reading Program sees each Year Five, Six and Seven class in the library once a week. During these lessons, students are made aware of recent additions to the collection, given an opportunity to share their reading and make recommendations, provided with time to peruse the collection and make selections based on their interests, peer recommendations, self-recommendations and/or teacher/community recommendations, and given time to quietly read for a sustained period. The focus of these lessons is to teach students how to select a book because, according to Pachtman and Wilson (2006), selection is important for encouraging reading engagement as this can help create a reading culture. “Equipping students to be autonomous selectors of appropriate and engaging materials is an important role of the Teacher Librarian. Poor choosing skills has been identified as a barrier to reading engagement by 39% of adolescent infrequent readers” (Merga, 2019b). The role of the Library staff is central in developing the ‘whole’ community into self-directed readers. This role includes the:

- regular review of the library’s reading collection to ensure the material available is appealing;
- ensuring the collection holds titles which are age appropriate, yet accessible, for struggling readers;
- formulation and administration of a reading program appropriate to Years 5, 6 and 7;
- collection of data to support the classroom teacher in identifying students, particularly those struggling readers, who demonstrate a reluctance to read and/or negative attitudes toward reading; collaborate with the classroom teacher to identify possible reasons for these attitudes/reluctances (above) and explicitly address these;
- education of students in the academic, social, emotional and health benefits of reading; and
- support of the classroom teacher when they book their class into the library for a reading session.

4.7 Wider Community

Groups, organisations and other schools provide a valuable support and opportunity to reinforce the value of self-directed reading through the active promotion of reading. For this reason, the Tolle Lege Library will seek to engage with these groups in the following ways:

- continue the partnership with Loreto in bringing together Years 7 and 8 students as ‘Book Buddies’, meeting once a term to share their love of reading;
- maintain relationships with Teacher Librarian networks, Australia-wide, state-wide and Brisbane-wide, to remain informed regarding recommended author visits to best engage students;
• establish a relationship with Avid Reader and provide a venue for the book store to hold their book launches and book talks with Australian authors. These events would be publicised Brisbane-wide and open to all as an evening event; and

• maintain close ties with both Riverbend Books and Avid Reader as suppliers of library fiction books but more importantly as sources of book selection for both reluctant and enthusiastic readers.
5.0 CONCLUSION

The Villanova Reading Program serves to establish within our students a love for reading. Research demonstrates the holistic benefits of such a pastime. This program draws together the efforts of our school community (parents, College staff, community experts and student peers themselves) in supporting each of our students in becoming self-directed readers throughout their schooling and lifelong.
6.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY


Villanova College Tolle Lege Library

Hours:
Monday to Thursday – 7.30am-4.30pm (for Years 7 – 12)
Friday – 7.30am-3.30pm (for Years 7 – 12)

Phone: 3394 5531