MENTORING READERS

Why You Matter Most of All

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Have you ever felt like you're doing all the work for a reader? You've set up small groups. You've met in reading conferences. You've even walked by, tapped the kiddo on the shoulder, and said, "Keep reading. Stay on task. You're doing great!"

Every day, you work to build relationships and positive connections. In a sense, you've responded to your readers, but why aren't they responding to you? You wonder, "If they aren't responding to me, what's happening while they read?"

You make a few calls home. You ask some colleagues for advice, yet nothing seems to change. You feel at a loss. No matter what you do, there seems to be a barrier between you and the students.

What happened? Why are things like this? You ask yourself, "What can I do to make it better?"

The Costliest Mistake of All

From my days working in daycare through teaching upper elementary during the depths of school reform, evaluators noted my relationships with students. One performance review mentioned, "The kids would follow you into the fire." At that point in my career, I only had one goal. This was even before I'd become obsessed over test scores and data points. I wanted every kid to love me and be their favorite teacher. Until I wasn't.

I didn't know the first thing about relationships. Instead, I was focused on me and being the "best" teacher every student loved. Think Michael Scott, manager of Dunder-Mifflin Paper Company on the hit-comedy *The Office*. Most kids had a great time. In retrospect, I'm not sure they learned much. Then, in the era of school accountability, a shame-based policy on multiple levels, a devastating reckoning occurred in my approach.

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I grew up with a strong expectation of conformity and outright compliance. I'd excelled and gained favor, nay, respect because of it. I didn't budge from this for fear of *everything*. I made my way through college and the first decade of my teaching career relatively devoid of the concept of relationships, or what educators call mentoring, for one simple reason: I'd spent my life trying to be who everyone else wanted me to be. I had to do what others said, or be like others, or else I was worthless.

Turns out, I treated my students the same way. I'd lost my focus because of my success with test scores and benchmark assessments. I became all too aware of my error when this happened:

I'd just started teaching fourth grade. One student was very excited to be in my class. However, day in, day out, he sat and did nothing. He always said he loved to read, but little evidence suggested he did so (e.g., He read the same book for a month straight and made very little progress during independent reading). My guess is that he claimed to "love" reading attempting to gain my favor or attempting on his part to form the interpersonal bridge.

He'd been placed in my class because of my "good connection with struggling readers." Everyone thought he would be a good fit with me because he needed a strong male role model. I was too immature to recognize he was begging me to notice him, to be his friend. I needed kids meeting reading standards to maintain my reputation. And that's what I went after, whatever the cost.

One day, out of deep frustration about his laissez-faire ambivalence, I figured I'd "motivate" him. I peered down at him saying, "You're lazier than fungus on a rotting log."

The room went silent.

He looked at me with all the courage and strength he could muster. Not a tear fell.

If I ever thought shame worked to correct a student's motivation and interest, his affect told me I was dead wrong. His face showed me how much of a fool I really was. And for what? Test scores, reading levels, and reputation. I'd just sacrificed my integrity for superficial representations of what the student desired most—to be noticed and taken seriously.

So much for being the teacher who "got kids to read." I had failed beyond words. Looking into his hollow eyes, I thought to myself, "I just broke a child." Rather than taking the time to learn right alongside him, I turned away from him, knowing I had destroyed his soul.

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Later, I called his mother, but there were no apologies that could make this right. At no point could I rectify the situation. I had done my damage.

Misidentification of Students as Struggling Readers

What did the young reader I destroyed struggle with? A lack of attention. It's reasonable to consider that our struggling readers don't feel they've been given the same attention as their successful peers. I confirmed that for this student. Not only did I ruin a rare interaction between the two of us, but he also had proof to justify that I wasn't joyful and positive with him like I was his classmates.

Too many readers don't identify as good readers. Their reward for being a struggling reader is a label. If they're lucky, they are invited to an intervention, a dubious distinction. Just as much as they are seeking our attention, they are failing at *what we want them to do*. No matter what, though, there always seems to be an impenetrable barrier between the student and the teacher.

And here's why: The attention these readers receive is linked to an imposed, and eventually internalized, deficit. Readers struggle because of the context we create for them or because they've entered into a reading experience that is generally unfamiliar. The burden of reading struggles falls on the student when they are otherwise *alone*. Furthermore, struggling readers come to realize they are different from their peers. Lesser than. So how do these kids survive? They withdraw from the whole process. They dissociate from who they are to who they need to be or create an appearance that they are in line with the image of being a reader.

> *Struggling readers come to realize they are different from their peers. Lesser than. So how do these kids survive? They withdraw from the whole process.*

Dissociation—The Reason to Reframe Relationships

Struggling readers have a conflict with reading in the context that exists. Whatever the struggle might be, they can adapt through dissociation. Dissociation, in this context, is when a person develops a persona to adapt to an environment, which is different from the actual person, or authentic self (Block-Lewis, 1990). When we've (unintentionally) sought more from the student as a reader than as a person, we should consider how the student is responding and, if needed, chart a different trajectory.

Generally, the signal behavior for dissociation is something we are all familiar with: apathy. Essentially, the reader couldn't care less about reading; they are more likely to demonstrate compliance—doing enough to get by because the teacher said so. A dissociated reader hates reading but loves you. At recess, before school, or anytime other than reading, the reader thinks you're the greatest person in the world. They may even revisit you in later years. But when it comes to reading, they are a completely different person. A split self if you will. This reader believes they must be a particular person as a reader, and that person is not themselves. If they are authentic, they risk the exposure of deficits; they feel they must comply to adhere to the expectations we set forth, be they pedagogical (e.g., volume reading) or curriculum-based (e.g., biography units).

Dissociation can be resolved. The answer: The reader and I must push into the discomfort of reading deficits and enter a world of vulnerability. The essential nature of our relationship is predicated on the reader's feeling that I value them as a significant player in the relationship and that that value is not based on their achievement of a particular reading level. Harkening back to chapter one, Kaufman (1993) calls this the *mutuality of response*.

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Thus, within the classroom or intervention setting, the relationship between the reader and the teacher must be grounded in the reader's merits as a person—a person who engages as a reader—and a thinker—full of their own perceptions, epiphanies, and evaluations. Over time, I learned to see readers as unique individuals with unique experiences and different ways of reading. Now, when facing a resistant reader, I ask myself, "Is this relationship strong enough to push into discomfort? Do they trust me to help them?" It's at this juncture, the initiation of the interpersonal bridge, that can make or break a reader. We must show our readers that we are available and willing to join them on their journey as maturing readers.

➤ Are we willing to listen without judgment or speaking for the reader, to their story, their struggles, and their worries, above our own data-satiated goals and expectations?

➤ Does the student realize that we will be there, forgiving and learning from mistakes, treating every transgression like a new beginning?

➤ Does the reader believe that their struggles will end because of our partnership?

➤ Does the reader believe they can stop saying "I hate reading" because we opened new avenues for them to experience in their journey to become a reader?

Or will we simply suggest the next book and send them on their way?

Enter Delaney. Age 10, Delaney faced many struggles as a reader, including decoding. She stated several times that she didn't like reading. Nor did she read any more than she had to. I could tell by observing her as an independent reader that she didn't really understand what "reading" meant.

I turn to Delaney in our conference, asking, "Hey, do you want to talk about your book some?"

She shakes her head. "No."

Mr. Stygles: "Really? What's going on?"

Delaney: "I don't want to talk about the book. You're gonna make me read it out loud then tell me all the errors I made or that I didn't read fast enough."

Mr. Stygles:	"Hold on, are we doing an assessment or talking about a book?"
Delaney:	"I don't know. Probably both. You know I'm bad at reading. Why should I talk to you about it?"
Mr. Stygles:	"Ok. Fair point. But I'm tellin' ya, I just want to see what it's like to be you, as a reader. I want to see how you think."
Delaney:	"What? That's dumb. That's what everyone says I need to do."
Mr. Stygles:	"What are your thoughts on that?"
Delaney:	"What do you mean?"
Mr. Stygles:	"I mean, 'everyone' says *you* need to do something different when you're reading. What does that mean to you?"
Delaney:	"I don't know. I never really thought about it. I just do what they say. I don't care. All they will do is tell me I didn't do good enough, again, so why bother."
Mr. Stygles:	"So let me go back to my question, 'Can I talk to you about what you're reading, to see what's going on in your world?'"
Delaney shrugs her shoulder.	"Maybe. How are you different than anyone else? I mean, you can try. Why would you care about what I read?"
Mr. Stygles:	"Because, Delaney, the only way you're going to believe in yourself as a reader is if we look at how you think about reading. I want to know you as a reader. Is that okay?"
Delaney:	"I guess."

Carrying the burden of the student whom I crushed in the earlier vignette, I worked to shift my approach when I noticed Delaney sitting at her desk during independent reading, quiet as can be, doing almost nothing. Her eyes scanned the room a few times before fixating on the scene outdoors. The most recent book she'd chosen, *The Queen Bee and Me* (McDunn, 2019), didn't capture her interests like the ebbing tide of the tidal river she could see out the window. Did she know her book was upside down?

I didn't need to snap at her. I didn't need to tell her to read. I wasn't about to tell her to stay on task. I wasn't about to tell her she was lazy. I pulled my chair right alongside her desk. She faced the front of

the room. I faced the back. Together we sat side by side, facing each other. She corrected the position of her book. Delaney read hers, I read mine. Proximal. Just before our time was done, I asked Delaney if she liked what she read today. She returned the courtesy by asking about my book, *New Kid* (Craft, 2019), thus initiating our relationship.

REBUILDING SECURE, TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN FAILINGS: THE ROLE OF READING MENTOR

One of our most human desires is to have someone around us when we are failing. We don't want to feel alone and abandoned. While we don't want to be seen as failing, it sure is better for someone to be there than to be left alone—even if we're busy pushing people away. Our readers' failing is their plea for proximity. Do we leave them to their devices, or do we have an opportunity to walk alongside the reader in their trials?

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Naturally, I am concerned about readers who display unresponsive, disengaged, resistant, withdrawn, and/or avoidant behaviors. Whatever negative shame manifestation is present, I need to notice and respond—not fight and argue. Shame intensifies if I tell a reader to engage with their book regardless of their present emotional state or confidence level. If I say such things, I'm asking the reader to shut down completely. To avoid creating a compromising situation for my readers, I use a structure (Figure 2.1) that helps them portray their perspectives and develop identify as a reader.

I have the responsibility to notice the reader's actions and inquire, in a more private environment, one-on-one. This is especially important for my shy, timid, anxious readers. Small groups are not always their scene, at least not until confidence, maybe even social capital, is present. The security of the interpersonal bridge is where I can support the reader outside of the uncomfortable environment that inhibits interactions with text. I fulfill this mission by serving as a reading mentor.

2.1 Framework for Reading Conferences

Action Step	Example	Purpose
Clearly set the intention behind the conference.	Strategic Reading Conference	Even though I am setting the purpose, students have the option to discuss what features of this topic appeal to them. Generally, I'm available for students to share what they are reading during my "free times."
Dive deep for the reader's perspective.	Does the reader enjoy using _____ (reading strategy)?	I have to be very careful not to assume or judge. The student's narrative is the most important perspective to consider because it represents where they are at a moment of vulnerability. What I think is secondary to their viewpoint.
Restate what the reader says and ask a clarifying question.	I heard you say you're not a big fan of using _____ (reading strategy).	Students need to know they are heard and understood. When they aren't, they can feel undervalued, or they might concede to whatever we think to end the discussion.
Pose guidance as questions or suggestions.	Do you think _____ (e.g., Do you think pausing for a second just to make a quick note, to place a landmark of your thinking, might help you recall more details?)?	There's telling and then there is questioning. Telling means I have the power and I direct the learning. Questioning allows the reader to consider options and wonder what could be, which promotes versatile thinking.
Negotiate the challenge or task to discuss at the next conference.	I'm curious, what are you interested in trying next? Next time we meet, let me know how that goes!	Accountability is compassion. I need to send a clear message that I have a vested interest in their reading development. If they go away knowing they matter, they will come back (sooner than later) to share. If they don't, that's telling in and of itself.

What does mentoring look like? That's hard to answer for every teacher; however, I've learned over time that there is one key practice that enables us to strengthen the interpersonal bridge and invite students to develop as readers: conferring.

Atwell (2015) wrote a single statement that reminded me of my role as a reading mentor with respect to conferring, "The key to handover is that it draws on adults' knowledge" (p. 15). What I take "handover" to mean is that I can't just demand reading because I expect it. Instead, I have to hand over my knowledge about being a reader to the reader so that they have keys to establish themselves as *lifelong readers*.

Kaufman (1993) contributes to my conceptualization of a reading mentor. He writes,

> The relationship . . . must be a real one. Each must come to know the other as a real, very human person. And the relationship must be honest. In these ways the [teacher] will increasingly gain the [student's] confidence and the [student] will permit the [teacher] increasingly to enter his or her experiential world inside. The **onus** to gain entry resides solely with the [student]. . . . [O]nce let in, not only can the [teacher] provide some healing for the wounded self, but [the teacher] can also literally "see" the current inner functioning or life of the [reader]. (p. 134)

In what might feel contrary, sometimes we have to push our readers to face challenges that might otherwise go ignored or they don't want to face (e.g., close reading instead of pleasure reading). Therapist and shame consultant Matthew Mordrcin (2016), LCSW, acknowledges that we must push into the discomfort to release the shame that inhibits development. This has implications in reading as well. We too must lean into discomfort with our readers, which can be done in several ways:

➤ We cannot make reading easier to avoid, or ignore, the reader's struggle.

➤ Nor can we patronize a reader by saying, "Let's go with an easier book" and interaction that could potentially leave the reader more vulnerable to shame in the future.

➤ On the other extreme, we cannot create experiences that lead reading to be a constant frustration, dealt with by the reader alone. This only invites readers to quit reading or make excuses for not reading.

Rather, we have an implicit responsibility to engage readers with "productive struggle," a challenge that, in a mentorship, the reader and teacher undertake collaboratively. In my classroom, I use a framework

to recognize the interplay between me and my readers, based on trust and mutuality, within the interpersonal bridge (Figure 2.2) This is how we become *reading mentors*. In doing so we become the mirror that reflects back the confidence we have in the reader and the glorious feeling that comes with embracing vulnerability and tackling challenges successfully.

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2.2 Interplay within the Interpersonal Bridge

Stage of Interpersonal Bridge	Intention Within the Relationship	Description
Entry Point	Story of Safety What I know about "me"	"Story of Safety" is a therapeutic term used here to know the reader's story. What is it that helps a reader feel safe, secure, confident, and competent enough to read, which informs the teacher and the student what is known about "me"?
Conferring	More targeted instruction occurs Inner defenses are more likely to manifest	Students are best instructed in smaller settings. This makes the reader more vulnerable than in a larger group. Unless the relationship is considered safe, the student is likely to exhibit an array of behaviors to impede either learning or portrayal of more authentic character.
Defense Strategies	Brain Activates (Mal)adaptive process of "self-care"	We are more apt to recall "shaming" because our brain has been activated, albeit negatively. Students engage in (mal)adaptive behavior to protect themselves against exposure. Self-care manifests in the form of compliance (e.g., nodding yes to every statement), withdrawal, or rage, which leads to dissociation, the reader they *need* to become rather than who they *can* become.

Acknowledging the Reader's Vulnerability With Trust and Respect

Delaney, as described above, was one of the readers I noticed. Her face was riddled with confusion.

I paused, commenting, "You look confused."

She concurred.

I said, "Let's talk a little later, ok?"

She approved.

Rather than pulling Delaney from her peers, making a scene so to speak, I made an appointment with her during independent reading.

"Delaney, can you tell me where you started to be confused." She pointed to a place in the text. "Great! Can you etch a question mark in the margin? After you've done that, reread the section."

After rereading, she indicated what made better sense. I instructed her by saying, "Any time you feel confused, stop. Mark a question mark, then reread. Can you do that for yourself?"

Note the last word: Yourself.

I'm informing Delaney that reading is for her, not for my appeasement or satisfaction. I'm merely a support in her quest to improve her reading comprehension. I invoke the interpersonal bridge to address vulnerabilities with the aim of instilling confidence and improving self-perception.

Can I Read a Book With You?

Have you ever caught yourself telling students to read? Do you have that insane feeling of agitation that you're crying out to your students "Read!! Please!! It's good for you!!" Or worse, "Read, or it's gonna make me look bad!" Yet there they sit, motionless, affectless. And it's almost always the same students who don't read at home and for the most part can be a bit incorrigible.

Truth be told, I'm not one to blame a student for not reading. However, there was a time this was not true. A critical shift for me was when I

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realized that children are not in complete control of their lives outside of school. I'm now very aware of the struggles some readers face at home (Payne, 1998) and what many students have been through before they reach my classroom. When well-being and a personal sense of security are either at risk or nonexistent, where does reading fit? Whenever in the life of many readers has the act of reading provided a sense of purpose, accomplishment, or enjoyment? Delaney was one of these kiddos. She had a busy schedule outside of school. Add in a distaste for reading and a high level of self-consciousness about her reading, and there was no way she wanted reading to interrupt her security and sense of self within in her own sheltered world at home.

During the first few months of school, I seemed to have nagged Delaney about her reading day after day. It was one constant reminder to read after another or asking her why she didn't read.

Every day at dismissal, I got the same reply, "I will." The next day . . . nothing.

My research into shame made me realize the dual nature of my error. For one, I was telling Delaney to read. There was no relationship. Just an expectation; more a demand. A barrier existed between us because I was the authority in the power dynamic. All she had to do was appease my request with a compliant reply. She knew what she was going to do. Why change? If she was not valued or heard as a reader, why did she need to comply?

Second, at that time, nowhere was there evidence that *I* read. Herein lies the shame inducing, "Do as I say, not what I do." Delaney had no reason to read. It's not like I went home and read. I was hypo-critical. I mentored Delaney as a reader by sharing books or talking about characters. Why didn't I read? Ironically, like Delaney, I had no one to talk to about books or I believed my thoughts weren't welcome. For Delaney's sake, I had to get my act together. I looked at Delaney one day as she trolled through baskets, and I asked, "Delaney, have you read *Family Game Night and Other Catastrophes* (Lambert, 2017) before?"

She replied, "What's it about?" No doubt, gauging whether or not she was (or could be) interested in it.

I replied, "I don't know. I only heard about it a few days ago. I'm kind of interested. Want to check it out with me?"

"Sure." She stated, almost as if conceding. (I'm not sure she wanted to keep looking for books, which means I gave her an out.)

I could tell she wasn't excited about the proposition, but at least she was willing to try.

Regardless of the outcome, I was trying to create a bridge between Delaney and me, focused on reading, but ultimately with Delaney as a person. Her lack of "book love" (Kittle, 2013) was not likely due to disdain but rather from unfamiliarity. I'm sure she'd been told to read for years, by several people, but with no one to read with, she was abandoned as a reader. My continual demands didn't inspire her; they drove her away. I should have known better from my own experiences (and desires).

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So I read with Delaney. While you will learn more about inviting students into reading in the next chapter, it's imperative to realize that the genuine nature of the interpersonal bridge starts by sitting side-by-side with the student, with the same purpose. In this case, we were learning about a new book; neither one of us knew if we'd be interested in it or not.

Day after day, we checked in with each other. Some days were more successful than others. At times she read more pages than I did, and vice versa. Some days we sat together and read (on days I didn't sit with her, I was doing the same with other students). Nonetheless, we built a relationship by talking about the book, setting reading goals, and asking each other questions, both to clarify misunderstanding and to speculate.

While I couldn't do this with every book Delaney read, or with every student simultaneously, for that matter, it established a sense of security for Delaney. Someone would be there to talk about books and understand that sometimes, reading isn't joyous, nor is it easy to take time to do. I removed the power dynamic in favor of mentoring. Gone was punishment or lectures for not reading. In exchange, she learned about me; I learned about her. All because of a book.

The Importance of Prioritizing the Reading Conference

Here's something I don't want to admit. The most difficult aspect of my reading instruction is making time for reading conferences. Conferences are easy to deprioritize when racing against time and curriculum expectations. Yet there is no more crucial component of a workshop model—and nothing more important when it comes to building the interpersonal bridge. Reading conferences demand time, presence (mindfulness), and authenticity.

In the past, I had shirked my own responsibility to initiate and engage in reading conferences and misplaced my irritation, putting it on students by telling them to "show you are a maturing reader and take responsibility for your own reading lives." On a really bad day, I would simply use a status of the class to find out who didn't read, then keep those kids in for recess to somehow absolve myself of the guilt I felt for not engaging with readers frequently enough to promote and scaffold their reading interests. It was counterproductive.

Conferences can take on a variety of styles and purposes. A reading conference can be, for example:

- An informal conversation between a reader and teacher when a student first arrives at school

- A 5-minute conversation during independent reading

- Kneeling next to a student who is working on close reading in a shared reading activity.

- Giving feedback on something a student has written about reading

The larger purpose of a conference is to demonstrate a genuine interest in the child. A reading conference fosters the mutuality of the relationship, through instruction and an interest in the reader's development

Over the years, I've learned that if I don't confer with readers, I essentially abandon them. The implication being that reading, or their reading, is not valued on my agenda. Readers respond in kind: They stop reading. When I skip reading conferences, I convey to students that

their ideas and experiences are not important. Then I wonder why they don't read, or read them the riot act, as if angry words could create the resiliency to overcome my abandonment. To "dive deep" and best support the reader, I hold an array of reading conferences.

2.3 Types of Conferences

Conference Type	Function	Frequency
Interim Assessment	• Gain a sense of the reader's self-evaluation and rationale • Seek clarification and understanding of perceptions and narrative • Determine actionable goals to incorporate in the reader's process	Trimonthly
Book Selection	• Rationale for selection and goals • Consider prior knowledge about the topic, author, theme • Establish boundaries for successful reading experiences • Consider possible challenges and approaches to persevere	Whenever Possible
Reading Passport	• Create self-awareness and self-efficacy around daily reading habits • Negotiate boundaries that will support successful reading • Observe and consider trends	Monthly
Strategic Reading	• Support recognition of affective response while reading • What actions are you taking to monitor your comprehension and what is the evidence? • How is strategic reading improving engagement, joy, and overall opinion of a book?	Biweekly
Comprehension	• Evaluate what's happening in the book that makes you think about yourself and the world around you • Consider the lessons you're taking away and why are they meaningful • Celebrate reader's perceptions about the text and improve self-perception	Biweekly

Conference Type	Function	Frequency
Reflection	• Acknowledge the reader's process. What's improving? What adjustments are being made to create more successful reading experiences? • Support metacognition. How do I know I'm improving? What can I do to make shifts? • Discuss and consider opportunities for reading habits	Monthly
VOWELS Checklist	• Create self-awareness and self-efficacy around reading habits • Seek clarification and understanding of perceptions and narrative • Celebration of the reader's improvements and identification of target areas to discuss later	Weekly

Consider a child who has made a discovery. They cannot wait to express their joy to a loved one. However, when the discovery is shared, the sentiment is discounted or rejected. In turn, the child feels a sense of unworthiness and abandonment. The interpersonal bridge is shattered, and the child internalizes the sense of abandonment (Claesson & Sohlberg, 2002).

This is what happens when we do not prioritize the reading conference. A reader who has no place to share their reading discoveries recoils from reading. Further, by suggesting to a maturing reader that they are solely responsible for their reading requires that the maturing reader assume the role of an adult reader. The student is denied the mirror though which to see themselves in the eyes of a valued person. When children do not receive feedback, they often presume the worse.

I've since learned that my students, maturing as readers, deserve my attention. They deserve feedback and encouragement. I can give them this by prioritizing the reading conference.

Teacher Credibility

In recent years, Hattie (2012, 2016) and authors Fisher and Frey (2016) have discussed the importance of teacher credibility. Teacher credibility has a .90 effect size (Fisher et al., 2020)—meaning it has the

potential to more than double student learning. Teacher credibility might be what is known as the *it factor*. While the charisma or dynamism that a teacher brings to a classroom is important, teacher credibility is more than that. It is also the belief on the part of students that they can learn from this person; that is, students need to view their teacher as competent. Finally, there must be a foundation of trust, and what the authors call *immediacy*, for a teacher to be fully credible in the eyes of their students. Immediacy "focuses on the perceived, and even actual, distance between the teacher and his or her students" (Fisher et al., 2020).

When I think about my journey as a teacher, I had dynamism and affability, but I didn't have credibility. A big part of credibility, as I said earlier, is defined as the perception that a student can learn from a teacher. In the past, readers in my class may have liked reading, but I didn't convince them that reading was worthwhile. I didn't exactly hear them say things like, "He makes you interested in reading." No, what I heard was, "He's fun! But he makes you read a lot." The negative association students had with reading displayed my lack of credibility. Readers enjoyed my classroom, but I wouldn't say they believed I would be the one to eliminate their reading ills. I had to do more. Yes, more. I had to knock down the wall between my readers and me.

Kaufman (1993) notes, "Being in a relationship to a significant other of necessity conveys to children that they are loved as persons in their own right and in some fundamental way that they are special to that significant other." Here's when I knew Delaney trusted me enough to be able to become a reader:

Mr. Stygles:	"Do you want to become *a reader*?"
Delaney:	"Yeah."
Mr. Stygles:	"What does that mean?"
Delaney:	"Yeah, I want to read better. I don't like how it's hard to figure out words. I don't like how it literally takes forever to read a book. I don't like that other people can read better than me."
Mr. Stygles:	"Man! Sounds like your carry a lot of angst. Do you know what angst means?"
Delaney:	"No."
Mr. Stygles:	"Angst is like negativity, worrying a lot, or feeling anxious."

Delaney:	"I guess so."
Mr. Stygles:	"What do you think it takes to become a reader?"
Delaney:	"Reading more books?"
Mr. Stygles:	"Do you know how to read?"
Delaney:	"Huh? Duh? You read the words on the page."
Mr. Stygles:	"Maybe," I say, smiling because I'm apologetic for slightly patronizing Delaney's intelligence. "I mean, do you know how to manage yourself as a reader, meaning explore your book options as a reader, use strategies as a reader, make time, or use time successfully to read?"
Delaney:	"Huh? I only read 'cause I have to. I just read what the teacher tells me to read."
Mr. Stygles:	"Let me ask you again, 'Do you think you can become a better reader in this class?'"
Delaney:	"Mr. Stygles, you're confusing me."
Mr. Stygles:	"Why?"
Delaney:	"I already read what I have to. I may not read every night, so what else do I have to do?"
Mr. Stygles:	"Well, it's not necessarily what you *have* to do, it's how you do it and what you do for yourself. You see, despite what everyone says about 'Mr. Stygles makes you read forty books,' the truth of it is, it's not about me making you read, it's about *you* making the choice to say, 'I want to read.' Sure, I'm going to get a bit upset if you don't read. Yes, I might 'pester' you about your reading, but I only do it because I want to see you become a reader. Then again, it's not what I want—I can't force you—but I will ask you what you are doing to take care of yourself as a reader."
Delaney:	"Umm . . . are you saying you're trying to trick me into reading?"
Mr. Stygles:	"Ha! That's kind of funny. I didn't look at it like that."
Delaney:	"Then why do you want me to read?"
Mr. Stygles:	"Like I said, it's not about me *wanting you* to read, it's about adding a special dimension to your life that will help you gain knowledge and experience and give you something to believe in about yourself."

(Continued)

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Delaney:	"Whoa, dude. Now you're kinda creepin' me out."
Mr. Stygles:	"Why?"
Delaney:	"'Cause no one's ever talked to me like this before. They always just say, 'Here's what you're going to read,' then they make me read aloud. Not even my mom cares if I read. She just signs the reading log so I don't go to detention."
Mr. Stygles:	"Well. Let's change this. Let's make this about you."

Final Thoughts

If we consider the role of shame in reading development, we must look beyond defining students through superficial descriptions. Readers—like other people—change over time. Identity cannot be "fixed," it has to be nurtured. Acceptance cannot be conditional (e.g., "I like you because you do this . . ."); it must be shared freely with every student.

The question is, can we accept a reader for how they think rather than defining maturing readers by superficial qualities (i.e., "I like mystery books" or "I'm a level ___ reader"), which will undoubtedly change over time?

Our identity evolves through our experiences, perceptions, and perceived acceptance. Superficial qualities have their role in an identity. "I like . . ." for example, is one of the ways we begin to connect and associate with others. We are attracted to people with matching interests. But the rise of a reading identity originates in strong relationships based on acceptance.

A reader's self-perception is built on what is seen, heard, and felt, from an array of sources including parents, schools, media, and other experiences. Not to mention our impact. No matter how hard we try to control factors such as poverty, language development, and equal access, the fact remains, even if we were able to establish equality for all, not one of us can control how another human being internalizes the world. Internalizations form our self-perception far beyond the speed in which we can teach. It's in this that we have to value and prioritize our relationships with our students. We can control our interactions and the feedback we provide to students. More, we have

the great fortune of helping readers, reflecting back the image they can see of themselves as maturing readers.

For as long as I have taught, reading policies have overlooked the potential of students who incorporate reading as part of their identity. Standardized test scores and reading levels continually define our readers, whether by identity, or the trajectory of the reading instruction they are *bound* to receive. In turn, readers do not evolve into thinkers but rather identify by the labels assigned to them, with little or no choice to the contrary. Again, I cannot blame any reader who displays apathy because their outcome is seemingly already determined for them. We can change this by providing a classroom in which a reader can articulate their voice and by honoring their perceptions, discoveries, and awareness.

Reflect and Act

Use these reflection questions to consider the information shared in the chapter and how you can apply it in your own classroom.

1. Consider your conferring practices, what shifts are you interested in exploring based on this chapter?

2. Consider a negative interaction you had with a reader. What was it that upset you? What could you do differently next time?

3. What assessments are you currently using? How do they inform your instruction based on the student's voice, experience, and perspective?

4. What challenges do your students display that you can "lean into" with them and connect with your readers?