

Reading on One's Own

What We Really Mean by Take-Charge Independence

“Wait. What are we supposed to do?” a student asked her teacher, who had just finished teaching a minilesson. Many students were opening their books and beginning to read, but a few sat there waiting for the teacher to tell them exactly what to do. Flash forward an hour to our planning meeting where the teacher asked her colleagues, “Wait. What are we supposed to do?” as she expressed concerns about student engagement and next steps for instruction. Many of us—both students and teachers—are asking this same question about **what we should be doing**. The complexity and ambiguity of teaching reading can lead us to feel overwhelmed and confused about what is right. While no one can answer the question about what you *are supposed* to do, I wrote this book to help answer the question, *What can we do?* This first chapter is meant to open up a conversation about what we and students really mean when we seek *independence*. What does independence really look like?

Teaching in general, and teaching reading in particular, is always going to be in flux as we seek to understand the relationships that support learning. We

as practitioners are continually adapting and deepening our practice, and on a bigger canvas, new research findings influence classroom instruction. This research comes into our profession from the four corners of neuroscience, social psychology, science, and economics. As I write this book, I lean on findings from inside and outside the education field, as well as my own field research, and am aware that ideas I contribute are part of an ongoing conversation about **which practices matter most for readers and learners.**

John Hattie actually researched the research to identify the keepers. Hattie's 2012 study encompassed more than 240 million students; he identified qualities that did and did not support student achievement. To discover this, in essence, Hattie combed the prior research to pinpoint those instructional practices that really moved the needle on students' academic growth. One such finding is the degree to which effective teachers were able to identify student learning as opposed to mere compliance. He states, "For some, learning occurs if the students complete the task . . . and 'pass' the tests. Moving towards understanding learning, however, means starting with the private world of each student" (Hattie, 2012, p. 37). He goes on to say, "**The key is to understand what is going on in each student's mind**" (Hattie, 2012, p. 37). In other words, student compliance reveals who did and did not do the assignment, and who could and could not do it well. But understanding what students have learned reveals far more, because we really don't have clarity about what to teach next if we only see the end products of our assignments.

Hattie's language is evocative, and his findings are striking to me because teachers have this front-row seat from which to observe their students' processes, yet many of them struggle to know *how* to observe, how to access the "private world of each student." And with good reason—trying to understand students' learning process can feel like trying to find a secret door to the student's inner learner.

What are the mindsets and moves we need to find that door? This is the central question I seek to answer in this book. The short answer? We do a few things at once. **I'll first talk about stepping back so students can step forward.** When we step back, we can become admirers, and it's this vantage point that I want you to picture in your mind's eye as you read this book.

To admire means to regard with wonder and surprise (more on this in Chapter Three). In order to access **students' thinking, choices, and process, we need to take the time to get to know them well.** We can't just get

the gist of who they are. Each day, we have the opportunity to study them. This means we approach readers as admirers with a few beliefs in mind:

- **All students are worthy of study and to be regarded with wonder.**
- **All students are readers, yet their processes may look different.**
- **All students can learn to make purposeful choices about their reading.**
- **All students can develop ownership of their reading lives.**

These beliefs help frame what it means to use an admiring lens as teachers. Our actions and beliefs—and, perhaps most significantly, our mindsets—can help us **get in our students’ minds and better understand what and how they are learning.** The most effective reading teachers I know use an admiring lens when approaching students, and this lens impacts the roles they play.



Gravity Goldberg

Independent reading leads to engagement and achievement. Decades of research have proven that time spent reading has a significant impact on reading ability.

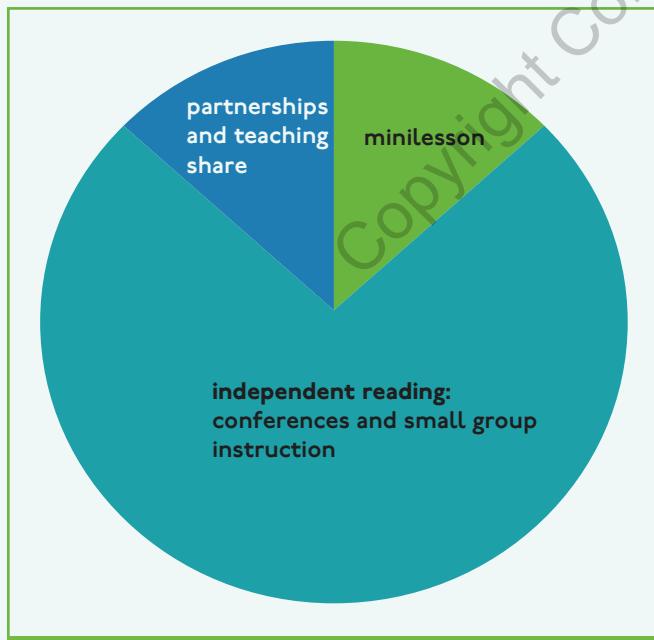
What Does It Really Mean to Read on One's Own?

PARTS OF A READING WORKSHOP

A group of literacy coaches and I stepped out from a fifth-grade classroom coaching session. Typically, when we finish classroom coaching sessions, we are bursting with lots to talk about, but this time we were all silent. At the time, I could not pinpoint what was going on, but I knew we all were a bit puzzled and confused. The classroom we worked in was one that uses a Reading Workshop model for instruction (see the Parts of a Reading Workshop visual below). Each day, the teacher offers a brief minilesson where she shows a strategy; then the students go off to read on their own and use the strategies that have been taught. As the students are reading, the teacher has individual or small group conferences to check in with students, assess their progress, and offer feedback. This particular fifth-grade class had all of the structures of typical Reading Workshop classrooms in place. The minilesson was short, there were anchor charts, the students had books of their own choosing, the teacher moved around the room having conferences, and she even took notes on each one. If we were using a workshop

structures checklist, we would have checked off every box. These students read for thirty or so minutes on their own. This is what we had just observed:

Gail sat at the class meeting area in front of her class of twenty-five fifth graders. She took out a familiar book and showed the students how she inferred the main character's conflict. She opened up the book and explained the strategy. The students smiled and turned to tell their reading partners what they had just seen in the minilesson. The teacher finished her explanation and said, "Now today you are all going to go back to your seats and infer the character's conflict in the novels you are each reading."



Parts of a Reading Workshop

Gail pointed to an organizer that was projected and discussed during the lesson. “Remember to fill out your copy of this chart when you find the character’s conflict. Now please go begin your independent reading.” She smiled and stood up to show the students it was time to begin working.

Immediately following the minilesson, the students arose quietly, walked to their desks, and took out their independent reading books. Each student made sure to pick up a blank conflict organizer on the way to his or her seat and began by filling in the title and author. Gail walked over to Tyler first. Tyler is a tall and lanky boy who was just beginning a new book that day. He was reading the back blurb and looking at the cover when Gail approached him.

“Tyler, are you thinking about the conflict?” Gail asked.

“Not yet,” he responded. “But I will as soon as I start reading.”

“OK. Great. Thank you.” Gail stood up and walked across the room. The entire class was pin-drop quiet as students read.

Gail stopped and squatted next to Sam. “Sam, can you tell me about your book?” she asked. Sam began to retell important parts of his book. He was almost at the end and seemed to want to quickly get done with his conversation with Gail so he could finish the book. “So I noticed you have not written anything on your conflict organizer yet,” Gail noted.

“Yeah, well, I just want to finish my book, and then I will go back and do that,” he explained.

“Do you know what the conflict is? Can you tell me so I know that you understand?” she asked.

Sam began explaining several conflicts in the book and how most of them were resolved and how he just wanted to see how it would all end. Gail checked off the box “infers character conflict” on her conference checklist and then thanked Sam and stood up to work with the next student.

By the end of the reading period, Gail had conferred with five students about character conflict, knowing she would meet with five more per day until she’d conferred with each student. Before the period ended, she said, “Now readers,

please find your reading partner and use your organizer to explain the conflict.” Each set of students found one another and began sharing their organizers and telling about their books.

At the end of the period, during a transition time, I had a few minutes to speak with some of Gail’s students. I was curious to hear their perspectives on reading.

“So how is reading going for you?” I asked a triad of students.

All three students shrugged their shoulders.

“What have you learned about how to read?”

“We learned how to infer the character’s conflict today,” Tyler explained.

“I noticed that was today’s minilesson topic. How did it go for you?” I inquired.

“I was just starting the first page of my book today, so it was kinda hard to figure out the conflict,” Tyler acknowledged.

I thought about what he had just said. It was not really applicable or helpful for Tyler to be asked to infer conflict as he was just starting a novel. At the start of a book, most readers first need to figure out who the characters are and where they are, and then get into the world the author has created. Many books do not start off with the conflict on the first page. The assignment felt forced. Tyler tried to use the strategy because the teacher told him to and not because he needed it right then.

“What about you, Sam?” I asked. Now I was curious as to whether this strategy helped him today.

“I already knew the conflicts in my book because I was at the end. I wrote them down on the worksheet after I finished the book. I loved this book!” he replied.

“So did the conflict *worksheet* help you with your understanding of this book today?” I tend to ask these sorts of reflective questions of students to figure out not just what they did but also how it went. I noticed that rather than an organizer he called it a worksheet—something to prove to the teacher he did his work.

“No. I just wrote it down because the teacher told us to. I already knew the conflicts,” he honestly answered.

By the time I spoke to the third student in this group, I was really starting to think about how the students in this class can follow directions well, but they may not actually be fully owning their reading processes. I asked Carla, the other student in this group, “What did you work on today in your reading?”

“I worked on character conflicts too. That was the minilesson. I got the assignment done quickly, though, so I could get to reading and enjoying my book,” she proudly stated.

“So, the work you did, the assignment, did not help you enjoy your book?” I wanted to clarify.

She actually rolled her eyes at me and smirked. “No.”

“Hmm,” I thought. Something was getting in the way of students driving their own reading experiences. I had at least one idea to discuss with my colleague Gail.

A few years earlier, prior to implementing Reading Workshop, the students in this district had a very different instructional reading experience. At that time, most of the students’ reading materials were chosen by the teachers or from an anthology, very little reading was done in class, and every book was tested after completing novel guides and worksheets. There was one period a week where students “just read” a book of their choosing. This team of literacy coaches had worked tirelessly alongside energetic and enthusiastic teachers who all wanted to get reading instruction right. They spent a few years putting structures in place so students had much more time each day to read on their own in school. They had read Allington’s (2012) research on increasing the time spent with eyes on text, matching students to appropriate-level books, and the importance of comprehension instruction. They brought me in as a literacy consultant to help them create a reading curriculum that aligned with standards and used a balanced literacy model. We had been rolling up our sleeves over the past few years to build leveled classroom libraries, create meeting areas, and demonstrate Reading Workshop lessons to show what these structures look like. In those first few years, our goals for reading classrooms focused on organization, timing, and structures (see the Reading Workshop Checklist on the next page).

Now, sitting at our meeting table, the literacy coaches and I sat down and waited for the teacher, Gail, to join us. Gail walked in, and before she even sat down,

Reading Workshop Checklist

- The teacher has created an organized and leveled classroom library.
- The teacher's minilesson is short (about seven to ten minutes).
- The teacher has created a class meeting area with anchor charts.
- The teacher meets daily with students in conferences and small groups.
- The teacher takes notes during conferences.
- There is time each day for students to read on their own.

she said, "*Something is off!* It is like they are doing everything I ask of them, but . . ." Her voice trailed off. "I guess I want more than that. How do we get them to use strategies when I am not telling them to? Now that would really mean they were learning to be readers!" We all let out a big sigh and nodded.

What we were seeking is what Stephanie Harvey calls active literacy. She explains, "Classrooms that promote active literacy fairly burst with enthusiastic and engaged learners. . . . They can't get away with being passive participants when they are the ones doing the thinking" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 16). Gail and her colleagues realized something needed to shift for this sort of active literacy to happen.

So what was going on?

Examining Teacher Roles

Together Gail, the literacy coaches, and I began looking closely at the roles she was taking on in the classroom. We recapped what she did in each main part of the Reading Workshop period that day. In the beginning of the lesson, Gail gave an assignment—to locate the character's conflict and write it down. Gail and I noticed that the minilesson narrowed the students' focus solely on character conflict and did not leave room for other types of thinking that likely would help the

varied readers in her classroom. Giving an assignment also created a notion that reading a novel is about completing a task and creating a product rather than about “constructing meaning in an active, ongoing process” (Barnhouse, 2014, p. 30). When we assign, we send the message that reading is done for someone else and to meet another person’s expectations. We know that reading is a deeply personal act—one that varies from reader to reader depending on the person, the text, and the context (Freire, 1970; Goldberg & Serravallo, 2007). Gail realized she had become the assigner in the opening part of the period.

The second role Gail took on was that of a monitor. Gail did walk around and meet with students, but as we all debriefed, she realized she had been quite focused on making sure the students did what they were told. She admitted she felt this constant internal pressure to keep the students focused on the assignment even when it was not applicable. Teachers often feel this pressure because it can be difficult to assess how students are doing with the curriculum. Checking that they have addressed the minilesson topic each day often ends up a default behavior. We know that students never fit in our checkboxes and are much more than a list of skills to be demonstrated, yet the push for data can lead us to use conferring time as monitoring and checking time.

A third role that Gail assumed was that of a manager and decision maker. Gail, like many of us, feels the weight of responsibility for many students, the curriculum, and the standards they have to meet. It is understandable that she felt the need to make most of the decisions for her students. After all, it is much quicker and more efficient for teachers to manage the choices themselves. The problem with using efficiency as a goal is that it often creates passive readers who sit and wait to get directions, and eventually are so accustomed to being told exactly what to do that they don’t self-start their own reading and learning tasks. Why is this passivity corrosive? Because it’s not how authentic learning operates. Authentic learning takes more will and muscle, so to speak. For example, when I sit and read an article at my desk, no one is there to tell me what to do and how to read. Or when I’m reclining on a couch on a Sunday, trying to untangle a complex mystery novel, I set the rules for how long I read, whether I flip back or forward for clues, and whether I take time to read the details about the physical landscape or not. As someone who has in a sense earned the right to read on my own, I call the shots, and it’s this very independence with the myriad choices I need to make as I read that gives me the drive to exert a lot of mental energy on a Sunday afternoon.

As teachers, we can begin to set students on the road to this kind of agency by thinking about how we can teach readers to make purposeful decisions for

themselves. One place to begin this reflection is to look at the language that rides along with being an assigner, a monitor, and a manager.

Peter Johnston, the literacy and language researcher, points out in *Opening Minds* (2012) that the language we use with our students positions us in different relationships with them. “Teaching is planned opportunism. We have an idea of what we want to teach children, and we plan ways to make that learning possible. When we put our plans into action, children offer us opportunities to say something, or not, and the choices we make affect what happens next” (Johnston, 2012, p. 4). Johnston teaches us so much about the power of productive talk—about learning to know when to say something, what to say, and when to be still and quiet—so that children can have more room and voice in that moment.

It is not just our language but also our *actions*, *decisions*, and *beliefs* that shape the roles we play in our classrooms and color how students perceive their own agency. Our language gets bundled with our actions.

I am modeling a reading strategy during a whole class read aloud. When modeling, I reveal my actions, thinking, decisions, and mindsets to students. Young readers benefit greatly from an awareness of growth mindset.



John Altieri

The assigner: When we are the assigners, we often end up telling students exactly what to do and when to do it. This role results in students completing our assignments. While on the surface this might sound like what we want, it may not be helpful for students for three main reasons. First, not all students need to do the same thing in the same way at the same time. Second, it fosters dependence on us as teachers. Finally, our assignments can inhibit authentic reading experiences that lead to greater student learning and motivation.

The monitor: If we play the role of the monitor, we run the risk of too much time being spent checking that every student has completed the task. This often results in students trying to prove to us they did the assignment well. Proving to us becomes the goal, not necessarily learning. When we are monitors, we are limiting the choices students have to create and find their own ways of reading. It also narrows our vision so we are only looking and checking the task of that day. Think about how much we might be missing. All of this monitoring and checking takes so much time that we lose out on time to individualize and get to know readers well enough to meet them where they are.

The manager: When we go on autopilot in the role of manager, we make choices for the students and tell them what, where, how, and when to read. We have all of the control, which leaves students merely following our directions. While following directions might sound like something we want our students to do, it can have potentially negative consequences. First, the teacher's choices may not be right for every student. Second, students may not learn to make choices for themselves, thus creating a model of dependency in the classroom. Third, we know that choice is linked to increases in motivation (National Council of Teachers of English, 2009). If we make all of the choices, we may end up decreasing our students' motivation and ownership. The chart on the next page shows how teacher roles and actions impact student behaviors.

Taking the Spotlight Off the Teacher

After discussing Gail's roles, one literacy coach remarked that our entire conversation had focused on the teacher. "Gail did this, and Gail did that," she said. "It's all the teacher's behaviors."

I glanced back at our Reading Workshop Checklist and noticed none of the items on the list were focused on the students. I was aghast. In our efforts to create classrooms where students read on their own, we had largely forgotten about the students.

Teacher Roles	Teacher Actions	Resulting Student Behaviors	Why It May Not Be Helpful
Assigner	Tell students exactly what to do and when to do it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete assignments • Read within the bounds of expectations • Do the minimal amount of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all students need to do the same thing in the same way or at the same time • Fosters dependence • Can inhibit authentic reading experiences • May habitually prevent creative or original thinking
Monitor	Check that every student has done the task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prove they did the assignment well • Look to the teacher to tell them how they did • Meet others' expectations for them • Compare themselves to the class norm • Confuse completing tasks with learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limits choices for the students to create their own ways of reading • Narrows the teacher's vision to solely look and check • Can take up so much time the teacher cannot individualize and teach
Manager	Make choices for the students and tell them what, where, how, and when	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow directions • Wait for others to solve problems for them • Waste time waiting for the teacher to decide for them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher's choices may not be right for every student • Students do not learn to make choices • Creates dependency • Can decrease motivation and ownership • Doesn't help students develop the disposition to generate choices and decisions of their own regarding texts

Common Teacher Roles and Possible Unintended Consequences

I remembered a recent weekend at a professional soccer game. During the game, I watched the players, cheered for goals, groaned at missed opportunities, and stood up for close calls. I admired the players' every move. I did not once look over at the bench and watch the coach. I do know the coach had a lot to do with

how the players did that day, but my attention was on the field. I don't go to soccer games to ignore the players, yet I could not help but think we were doing this very thing in our reading classrooms. We were focused on the teacher and missing the readers—really missing what matters most. We were observing Gail's teaching but not the readers in the room.

Category	Student-Focused Observations
Classroom environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Students refer to charts and choose when and how to use them. <input type="checkbox"/> Students can select from libraries that reflect their levels and interests. <input type="checkbox"/> Students use spaces for whole group, small group, and individual work. <input type="checkbox"/> Students use materials independently and choose them when needed.
Student engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Students read for the entire independent reading time. <input type="checkbox"/> Students regularly collaborate in partnerships or book clubs. <input type="checkbox"/> Students think, discuss, and articulate their learning. <input type="checkbox"/> Students work through challenges and confidently choose strategies to use when needed.
Individualization	<input type="checkbox"/> Students regularly participate in either conferences or small group work. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students' unique strengths and needs are used in conference decisions. <input type="checkbox"/> Students are focused and independent. <input type="checkbox"/> Students choose their own goals and self-assess their progress.
Independence and transfer	<input type="checkbox"/> Students transfer teaching points to novel experiences. <input type="checkbox"/> Students use strategies several days or even months after they were first taught. <input type="checkbox"/> Students can explain their goals, strengths, and next steps as a reader. <input type="checkbox"/> Students do not look for the teacher to solve problems or answer questions. <input type="checkbox"/> Students can explain what they are doing and why.

Student-Focused Reading Checklist

I asked the group, “What if we made a new checklist where all of the items are about what students are doing? Let’s try this and see what we find.” The Student-Focused Reading Checklist, shown on the previous page, is what we created, and it ended up being very helpful in our ongoing work together.

After creating this second, reader-focused checklist, we began to get excited, and now we couldn’t stop talking. At the end of that conversation, we realized that the workshop that we’d set in motion up till now had established only one facet of what a Reading Workshop really is—a place in which students read on their own. The “off” part was that although the students were reading on their own, their experience of the text was being framed by the teacher’s agenda, and they simply copied what Gail did. They did just enough and seemed to see the purpose of Reading Workshop as pleasing their teacher.

We seemed to be still missing what reading researcher and scholar P. David Pearson (2011) describes as *transfer*. By *transfer*, Pearson means that in comprehension instruction, *when* and *how* students apply the strategies is key. Students need to be taught in a manner that they know to apply strategies in new reading situations, with unfamiliar texts. Only then can we say with assurance that their comprehension abilities have improved. We realized the students needed to own their reading, which means much more than just time to read on their own. Because we focused so much on the teacher and the classroom structures, we had somehow lost sight of the readers. As I collaborated and supported other districts across the country, I found this same pattern. We gave it a name that day with Gail, but it certainly was not unique to her classroom.

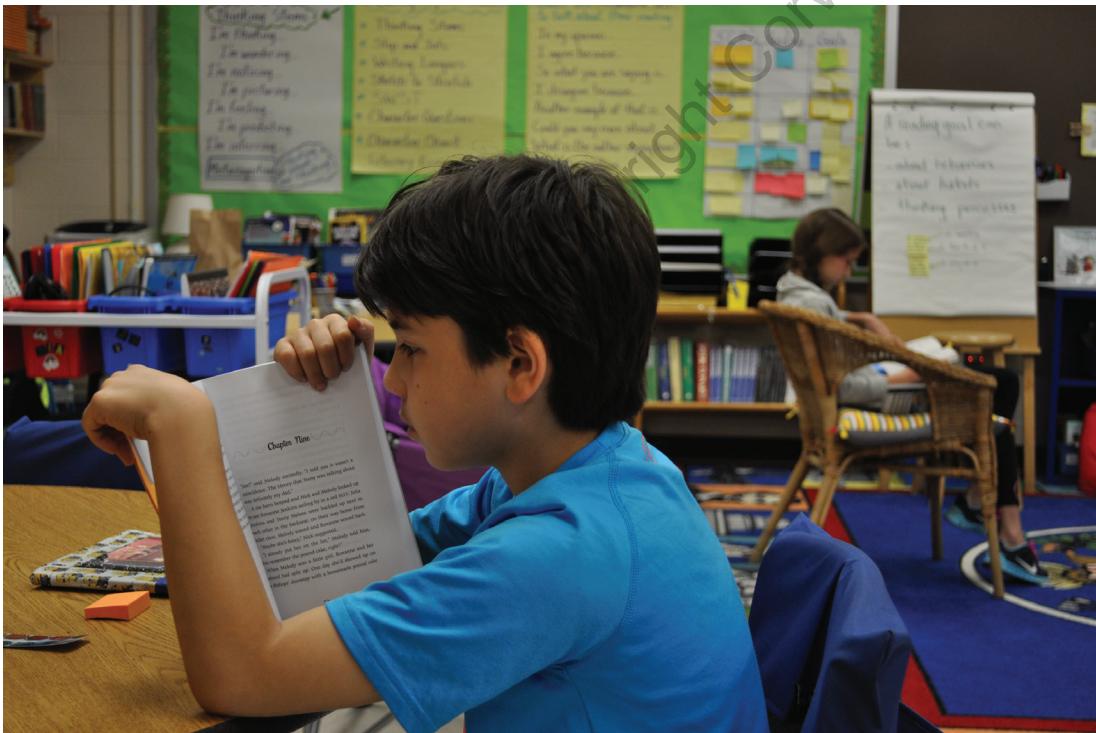
The Facets of Ownership

Owning your reading means being an initiator of your own intentions as a reader. It is being engaged and feeling in charge of your purpose and process of reading. Nell K. Duke and P. David Pearson (2001) point out that while there are many factors that affect students’ ability to comprehend texts, a primary factor is their motivation, purpose, goals, and engagement with the texts and experiences. “As teachers of literacy, we must have as an instructional goal, regardless of age, grade or achievement level, the development of students as purposeful, engaged, and ultimately independent comprehenders” (Duke & Pearson, 2001, p. 423). Sheridan Blau (2003), a professor of English education at Teachers College, Columbia University, explains that students need what he calls performative literacy—a set of dispositions that help a reader construct knowledge and fully

function in the twenty-first century. Performative literacy requires students to “become more active, responsible and responsive readers than ever before” (Blau, 2003, p. 19). One of these dispositions is “a capacity to monitor and direct one’s own reading process” (Blau, 2003, p. 21).

Stephanie Harvey and Smokey Daniels (2009) explain the importance of choice being woven into the way the curriculum is written and implemented in their book, *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action*. They explain that classrooms where deep comprehension happens are ones where “students are exercising choice in topics, reading, and ways to show their learning, but this is not a temporary treat or a ‘day off’ from the official curriculum” (Harvey & Daniels, 2009, p. 6). In other words, students are in charge of their reading and develop ownership of what, how, and why they read in the curriculum and in their daily practices.

Initiating, knowing one’s intentions, one’s purpose, one’s goals—these are all facets of owning reading. In this light, engagement and motivation are the emotional/psychological states that result from ownership. Thus, ownership should always



Gravity Goldberg

This is a self-directed reader. He selected his book and his reading spot. He chose what he is working on as he reads, and has clear reasons why. He’s part of a classroom culture wherein students make purposeful decisions that lead to growth.

be part of the professional conversation about motivation and engagement—and perhaps addressed first because, until students have that sense of autonomy, they can't be fully engaged. To do otherwise is to put the cart before the horse.

My dissertation research (Goldberg, 2010) allowed me to spend an entire year observing in an English classroom, interviewing students, trying to understand the transition the class was attempting to make from a more teacher-centered model to one with more student choice and ownership. I found that many students were stuck in compliant ways of reading on their own, spending each day following directions and completing reading assignments.

While the study's results cannot be generalized, I hear and see similar patterns in my work in schools throughout the country. Many students are not transferring what they learned during reading time into science reading, or historical reading, or even home reading. So in addition to a lack of engagement, we've got a lack of real learning—for without transfer, there is no deep learning. In fact, many students are reading as little as possible to get by and please the teacher, and get the A. I ended up calling the “something is off” realization from Gail's classroom the “ownership crisis.”

The choice to use the word *crisis* was not an easy one. I chose it because the lack of ownership feels so prevalent and so pervasive and very few educators know what to do. Crisis is a time when a difficult or important decision must be made. I think we are in such a time. In meetings, in classroom coaching sessions, in parent conferences, and in honest talks with students, we all seem to be noticing the same thing. Most students do not own their learning. William Deresiewicz, Yale University professor and author of *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (2014), explains, “The problem is that students have been taught that that is all that education is: doing your homework, getting the answers, acing the test . . . They've learned to ‘be a student,’ not to use their minds” (p. 13). Deresiewicz goes on to explain the repercussions of teaching students to comply and work hard simply for the purpose of getting an A. He claims college students and recent graduates are more depressed, are more anxious, and feel a lack of meaning in their lives as a result of this type of education.

I think it's fair to say that many teachers in elementary schools would not name the crisis in terms of their students' compliance. In my experience, the concern is expressed along the lines of questions like this: “What about the students who don't use the strategies on their own?” or “How do I get them to care about their reading?” or “I just don't know what to do. These students just don't put the work in, and it shows. How can you help me?”

How Rigor Fits In

In the clamor for rigor, we need to remember that students only become rigorous readers if they do more, think more, read more, and initiate more of their learning. You can't rigorously read a text unless you bring your own vigor to it. The work of understanding an author's intended meaning is intense, and the part that hasn't gotten enough airtime in professional discussions of late is students' drive and agency, as they work through a text. Beneath the national call for rigor in our students is not so much a hope for students meeting higher expectations or a desire to see students break out in a sweat over a challenging text. Underneath it all is a wish to see a stronger appetite for learning. When we say we want rigor, there is something wistful at work: We want vigor. We want ownership.

Students deserve an education that goes well beyond teaching them to comply. Let's instead create environments that support students who are actively engaged and have ownership of their reading. The current educational and global context requires students to be innovative, creative, and invested so they can succeed in the jobs of the future. But they can't become these qualities unless they love to learn, and loving to do something means that you love to do it on your own, of your own volition, and you practice it and master it to the point that you really do "own" the expertise. Ownership will set students up to take on tomorrow's environmental and cultural challenges, and the challenge of creating access and equality for more and more people on the planet (Godin, 2012; Robinson & Aronica, 2009). The following chart shows the difference in choices in compliant classrooms and reader-owned classrooms.

Choices in Compliant Classrooms

- To do what you are told or not
- To do it the teacher's way or not

Choices in Reader-Owned Classrooms

- What to read
- Purpose for reading
- How to write about reading
- How to talk about reading
- Goals for self as a reader

Choices in Compliant Versus Reader-Owned Classrooms

The Pitfalls of Turning Play Into Work: Motivation Challenges

In Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us, Daniel Pink (2009) recounts decades-old research on narrowly focusing on rewards and punishments—on getting people to comply. Most schools and businesses are built on the “carrots and sticks” structure of motivation. Carrots are the dangling rewards, and sticks are the consequences if the person does not comply. In reading classrooms, the carrots might be attention, extra time in a choice activity, or a good grade. Reading Workshop approaches were meant to move away from rewards—books, stickers, points, pizzas, and so on—but lo and behold, even the seemingly greater authenticity of a workshop approach is often caught in the old paradigm. The chart on the next page shows how typical reading instructional practices often get distorted and what we can do to keep them more vital.

The sticks might be completing a task, an assignment, or doing what is told. Most teachers were told that this is the way to get students to obey us and learn. But, as Pink points out, this form of motivation can actually backfire and lead to less motivation and engagement. When classrooms turn something intrinsically motivating into the teacher’s goal that will be rewarded, the activity is viewed as work and loses its intrinsic motivation. This is called the Sawyer Effect and is focused on how there are hidden costs of rewards.

One particular set of studies stands out to me as an educator. Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett (1973), three behavioral scientists, studied preschool students during their free-play portion of the school day. They found that the drawing area was a favorite, and many students chose this activity. As part of the study, they wanted to see what would happen when drawing, an intrinsically motivating and fun activity, was rewarded by the teachers. The teachers introduced to half of the class a “good player” certificate that students could earn from choosing the drawing activity. These students would be rewarded for choosing to draw. Guess what happened? After two weeks, the number of students who chose to participate in drawing went down dramatically in the group that was told they would get a reward for it. These results were further support for the Sawyer Effect. Drawing (play) was turned into work and no longer viewed as intrinsically valuable. To quote Pink (2009), “Careful consideration of reward effects reported in 128 experiments led to the conclusion that tangible rewards tend to have a substantially negative effect on intrinsic motivation” (p. 39).

Practice	What Tends to Get Distorted	How to Keep It Vital
Writing in reading notebooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students write about their reading in the same ways all year. • Students view writing about reading as a task for the teacher. • Writing about reading becomes an activity that may get in the way of time spent reading and thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss why readers authentically write about their reading. • Model a variety of ways you write about your reading for authentic reasons. • Invite students to invent and share a variety of ways of writing about their reading. • Remind students to connect reading notebook entries to the reader's purpose.
Using reading logs to record number of pages, minutes, and books read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students regard volume and recording data as the goal of reading. • Students lie about how much they have read. • Students choose "easy" or short books that can be read quickly. • Completing books is confused with understanding and enjoying books. • The log can become an accountability measure rather than a reflective tool. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect reading logs to students' individually set goals. • Show students how to use the data they are collecting to reflect on their reading lives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Am I choosing books I enjoy? ○ Am I giving myself a variety of reading experiences? ○ Am I challenging myself as a reader? • Discuss why readers might read more on some days than others and create spaces for honest discussions about why we might read more and deeper in certain experiences.

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Practice	What Tends to Get Distorted	How to Keep It Vital
Using reading logs to record number of pages, minutes, and books read <i>(continued)</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rather than making the reading log a yearlong “accountability” tool, it can be used sporadically when readers want to gather more information about themselves.
Using checklists in our reading conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We look at students as boxes to be checked.• Our vision gets narrowed, and we miss a lot about readers’ practices.• Students focus on proving to us they can use a skill on our list.• Skills are practiced but not necessarily chosen when needed or useful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start conferences with a question or category in mind and get more specific with your observations over time.• Take anecdotal notes to recall unique behaviors, interactions, and individualized noticings.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a variety of recording tools to remember what you uncovered about students’ inner reading world (photos, notes, artifacts, etc.) and possibly involve them in this process.• Remember to approach students openly, not focusing on what you found the last time you were with them. Who are they as readers today?

Workshop Practices: How They May Become Ossified

I keep thinking about teachers’ checklists of reading skills and how reading might unintentionally be turned into work and not be pleasurable for its own sake. When we tell students they will be rewarded with something external for reading or punished for not reading, we are putting the emphasis on something external, and we are accidentally divorcing the act of reading from its intrinsic value. When I sit down to read at night, it is not for a grade or sticker but because I

find pleasure in the experience of reading. It has intrinsic value for me. Even when reading on their own, students may view reading as “work” and not play—something to be completed for someone else. When readers have ownership, they view the work that is often a part of reading as play. By play, I mean something with intrinsic value in and of itself.

Peter Gray, an evolutionary developmental psychologist and professor at Boston College, studies the impact play has on children and warns of the consequences of our children being robbed of the freedoms that help them really learn. He explains, “Children are designed, by nature, to play and explore on their own, independently of adults. They need freedom in order to develop; without it they suffer” (Gray, 2013, p. 4). He goes on to explain how lack of freedom kills the spirit and stunts mental growth: “The school system has directly and indirectly, often unintentionally, fostered an attitude in society that children learn and progress primarily by doing tasks that are directed and evaluated by adults, and that children’s own activities are wasted time” (Gray, 2013, p. 8). The results are often superficial knowledge and many missed opportunities for deeper learning to happen. When students are taking charge of their own learning by making choices about all aspects of their reading lives, they are using the freedom associated with play to develop a deeper appreciation for reading and the ability to read.

What’s Next?

In Chapter Two, I examine why grit and mindset are vital elements to consider when making choices about what supports we want to offer our readers. Once I unpack why these traits are so important, I explain new roles that reading teachers can take on. When teachers shift their roles, there is space for readers to develop the ownership and agency they need for true learning. I also take us back into Gail’s classroom to see how she shifted into these new roles and as a result her students owned more of their reading lives.