

Teachers as readers in New Zealand primary and intermediate schools

Sue McDowall

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a small exploratory study carried out in 2021 by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) for the National Library of New Zealand | Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa. The project is part of a wider suite of six studies commissioned by the National Library as part of their Communities of Readers initiative. This initiative foregrounds the benefits of reading for pleasure and the equitable distribution of these benefits across all communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible associations between the personal reading practices of teachers who read for pleasure and their engagement with students around text in their schools and classrooms.

Two main questions guided the research:

- How do teachers who read for pleasure describe their engagement with text and the impact of reading on their lives?
- How do teachers who read for pleasure describe their engagement with students around text in their classrooms and schools and the impact of this engagement?

What did the research involve?

The research involved interviewing nine primary and intermediate teachers known to be passionate readers. The teachers worked at different levels of the schooling system and came from schools that varied in terms of decile, type, size, and location (ranging from Dunedin to Te Tai Tokerau).

The interviews focused on:

- teachers' experiences of being a reader over the course of their lives
- teachers' aspirations for their students as readers
- opportunities teachers provided to help achieve their goals for their students as readers
- ways in which teachers felt that being a reader impacted on their engagement with students around text in their classrooms and schools.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. They were coded for themes using an iterative process whereby data were re-coded as new themes emerged through the coding process.

What did the research show?

There were more similarities than differences among the teachers as readers

The teachers in this study were different ages, and had different backgrounds, life experiences, and career pathways. Not surprisingly, they had different reading preferences. For example, at the time of the interviews, one teacher was enjoying dystopian teen fiction, one was reading poetry, one was reading books on neuroscience, one was reading historical romance, while another was reading contemporary New Zealand novels.

Most described reading different sorts of material at different times to meet their emotional and intellectual needs. These included the need for escape, calm, connection, wellbeing, belonging, and new experiences. All but one experienced reading as a social as well as a solitary activity, recommending books to others and sharing their opinions about what they had read, their questions or wonderings, or the insights they had gained.

The teachers shared a similar orientation towards text, believing in the value of different types of text for different purposes. They shared an understanding that different readers have different reading preferences, and that these can change according to context. These teachers also had a similar orientation to the act of meaning-making and expressed interest in the different ways in which others responded to and interpreted what they read.

Teachers had similar aspirations for their students as readers

While the teachers varied in their backgrounds, life experiences, career pathways, and reading tastes, their aspirations for their students as readers were remarkably similar. Teachers' aspirations for their students were closely aligned with their experiences of being readers themselves.

Teachers wanted their students to:

- enjoy reading
- see themselves as readers (develop a reader identity)
- experience wellbeing
- develop their own sense of identity
- broaden their horizons
- have agency as meaning makers, as lifelong readers, and in the world
- develop the desire to tell their own stories.

Teachers used a range of strategies to realise their aspirations for students

Teachers provided learning opportunities to support reading for pleasure

There were many similarities in the approaches teachers took to meet their aspirations for their students as readers. These included:

- sharing their own reader identities, largely through talking with students as fellow readers about books and reading
- building relationships with students around text
- exposing students to a wide range of text in terms of genre, content, difficulty, and modality
- providing their students with opportunities to read, listen to, think, and talk about text for pleasure
- providing their students with opportunities to engage with others around text
- providing their students with the opportunities to engage deeply with text.

The importance of many of these learning opportunities in supporting reading for pleasure is well established in the research literature. However, the findings from this study also suggest that the teachers' orientation towards text may be as—if not more—important as the learning opportunities they provided.

Teachers modelled a “reader” orientation towards text and meaning-making

Teachers' comments suggest that when the focus was reading for pleasure, they brought their reader orientation to text and meaning-making into the classroom. Teachers described how, in their out-of-school lives, they saw the value of a text in relation to the purposes they had for reading rather than—

or as well as—being inherent in the text itself. They were aware that there could be different views on the merits of a text and expressed curiosity and interest in these differences when discussing texts with others. Consistent with this orientation towards text, teachers exposed their students to a wide variety of text, provided students with opportunities to choose what they read or listened to, and provided time for students to discuss their opinions of the texts read.

Teachers described how, in their out-of-school lives, they were aware that different readers may make meaning in different ways and build different interpretations based on their prior knowledge and experiences in conjunction with the words on the page. Consistent with this orientation towards meaning-making teachers described providing their students with opportunities to discuss their different responses and interpretations, and the reasons for them.

Teachers supported reading for pleasure across the school

Some teachers had more opportunities than others to support reading across the school given their roles as school leaders or teachers with library responsibilities. They described doing so by:

- conversing about books as fellow readers with students at different levels of the school
- using, supporting, and promoting the school library
- building cross-school communities of readers among students (for example, among student librarians, through competitions such as Book Quiz or Author Quiz, or through establishing student book clubs)
- reading, recommending, and sharing their own books with other adults in the school, such as teachers, support staff, relievers, or parents
- establishing a staffroom library of books for recreational reading
- establishing book clubs that included other teachers and sometimes parents.

Teachers observed increased engagement and achievement in reading

Teachers told stories of children becoming engaged with reading, sometimes for the first time in their schooling lives. Some teachers also observed academic shifts, especially with children who had previously struggled with reading. One explanation is that a reader orientation towards text can be inclusive, responsive, sustaining, and purposeful. For the reader teachers in this study, reading was about finding pleasure, wellbeing, connection, relationship, meaning, and a sense of identity in the world. It was about being part of a community with a shared interest in meaning-making. With such an orientation, different interpretations and responses to text are of interest, and the prior experiences and knowledges of all readers are valued as important meaning-making resources. Conversations about different responses and interpretations provided opportunities to learn more about the text, about each other, and about the act of meaning-making itself. This might help explain why teachers found their approaches to be successful, especially with students who had not previously found reading at school to be engaging.

Implications of the research findings

Implications for teachers

All students are entitled to learn, not just how to read, but how to become readers. The research literature tells us that activities such as reading aloud to children, talking with children about text, going to the library, providing time for recreational reading, and providing spaces and places to read, support reading for pleasure. These are things that all teachers can do. However, the findings from

this study suggest that teachers who are themselves readers bring to the classroom a “something extra” and this relates to their identity as readers. The gold standard—at least according to the teachers in this study—is teachers who are themselves passionate readers and bring their reader identities to school with them.

Implications for school leaders

The findings of this study demonstrate the value of school leaders who support the school library, the school librarian or teacher with library responsibilities, and the reader teachers on their staff. School leaders can model being a reader themselves, simply by going along to the school library now and then to engage in their own reading for pleasure or to chat with students, other teachers, and parents about what they are reading.

Implications for providers of initial teacher education and PLD

The findings of this study suggest that some teachers may not always feel, or be, supported in devoting class time to reading, listening to, thinking, and talking about text purely for pleasure. This may be especially so in high accountability contexts with a focus on lifting easily measurable achievement outcomes in the shorter term. This finding suggests a lack of knowledge either of what it takes to create readers or of the correlation between reading for pleasure and academic (as well as social and emotional) outcomes in the longer term. It suggests that in some contexts processing and comprehension skills may be seen as ends in themselves rather than in the service of the bigger purposes for reading. There is a role at all levels of the system to address this knowledge gap. This is a role for policy makers through to resource developers, providers of initial teacher education, school leaders, and teacher professional learning and development.

Implications for further research

This small exploratory study provides some insight into the classroom practices of teachers who read. Further research is needed, in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, into the experiences of their students as readers. Such research might focus on the extent to which students take up the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and values towards text and meaning-making held and modelled by their teachers. It might also focus on the learning outcomes of these students beyond processing and comprehension skills to include more nuanced and sophisticated measures of students’ capacity to make meaning of what they read.

1. Introduction to the research

This report presents the findings of a small exploratory study carried out in 2021 by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research for the National Library of New Zealand | Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa. The project is part of a wider suite of six studies commissioned by the National Library as part of their Communities of Readers initiative. This initiative foregrounds the benefits of reading for pleasure and the equitable distribution of these benefits across all communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

What is the purpose of this research?

This small exploratory study investigated the possible associations between the personal reading practices of teachers who read for pleasure and the ways in which they engage with students around text in their schools and classrooms.

Two main questions guided the research. These questions were:

- How do teachers who read for pleasure describe their engagement with text and the impact of reading on their lives?
- How do teachers who read for pleasure describe their engagement with students around text in their classrooms and schools and the impact of this engagement?

Why is this research important?

Students' reported enjoyment of reading is declining

In the past 15 to 20 years there has been a wide range of initiatives designed to lift the reading achievement of New Zealand students. Many of these initiatives have focused on building teacher content and pedagogical content knowledge. Over this time, there is evidence of a steady decline in students' reported enjoyment of reading. Results from the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) show that for both Year 4 and Year 8 students, there was a "noticeable decline in the popularity of reading" between 2000 and 2004 (Crooks & Flockton, 2005, p. 60), and a "marked decline" in the popularity of reading as a leisure activity between 2004 and 2008 (Crooks et al., 2009, p. 62). The re-designed NEMP (the National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement [NMSSA]) measures show that between 2014 and 2019 there has again been a decline in student enjoyment of reading (Educational Assessment Research Unit and New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2020).

The amount students choose to spend reading is declining

This decline in reading enjoyment may help explain findings from the most recent NMSSA: English assessments which show that many Year 4 and Year 8 New Zealand students choose to spend very little, if any, of their own time reading. The 2019 data (Educational Assessment Research Unit and New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2020) show that, in response to a question about how many hours they chose to read in their own time each week, 20% of Year 4 students selected "None or very

little” and a further 22% selected “Up to 1 hour a week”. Of the Year 8 students, 26% selected “None or very little” and 18% selected “Up to 1 hour a week”.

These findings suggest that we need to pay attention not just to developing students who *can* read, but to developing students who want to read; that is, students who *are* readers. Reading for pleasure is associated with social and emotional as well as academic benefits for individuals and society more generally. These benefits include improved school achievement in assessments of reading (Educational Assessment Research Unit and New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2020; Jerrim & Moss, 2019), listening and viewing (Educational Assessment Research Unit and New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2020), vocabulary and mathematics (Sullivan & Brown, 2015), wellbeing (Mak & Fancourt, 2020a; 2020b), and social inclusion (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016). Some benefits are associated particularly with reading fiction, such as the capacity to better understand oneself, understand different perspectives, and to show empathy (Djikic et al., 2009; Mar et al., 2006; Oatley, 2016, 2008; Wolf & Stoodley, 2018). Reading for pleasure is also shown to be associated with societal benefits as readers engage more fully in public, social, and economic life (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007).

Reading for pleasure is supported by teachers who are themselves readers

The international research literature identifies a range of factors shown to build student enjoyment of reading and to build their identities as readers. One of these factors is being taught by teachers who are themselves readers and bring their reader identities into the classroom (Commeyras et al., 2003; Cremin et al., 2009; Cremin et al., 2018).

However, less is known (especially in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand) about the extent to which teachers who read for pleasure do bring their reader identities—their values, beliefs, and practices—into the classroom, how they do this, for what reasons, and with what results. The purpose of this research is to begin to address this gap in the research literature.

Because so little research has been carried out in the New Zealand context, the proposed project is necessarily small and exploratory, with an emphasis on depth rather than breadth. The findings will provide the basis for designing a subsequent and more extensive research project in this important area.

What did the research involve?

The focus of this research was on the personal and professional experiences, beliefs, and practices of teachers who read for pleasure. Because practice is context bound, I have used case study methodology, with each teacher constituting a case.

How were the participants in the study selected?

There are several factors that may impact on teaching beliefs and practices. These include: gender, age, and ethnicity; years of teaching experience; year levels taught; school factors such as size, decile, and type; and pedagogical beliefs about how reading should be taught. To ensure I included a wide range of these factors, I used a purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 1990), using my contacts and those of the National Library to identify potential participants for the study. The National Library facilitators compiled a “long list” of teachers they considered to be passionate readers and I added to this list with recommendations from colleagues.

I selected nine teachers from this list representing a range of personal characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity) and teaching experiences (school type, school location, class level, years of teaching experience).

I then invited these teachers to take part in a 30–60-minute, semi-structured interview, which focused on their identities as readers and on their approaches to engaging with students around text in their schools and classrooms. Eight of the nine teachers I contacted agreed to participate. I subsequently invited an additional teacher to participate to replace the one who declined.

As a group, these teachers had experience across the junior, middle, and upper primary school levels and came from primary and intermediate schools. At the time of the interviews, two of the teachers taught Year 2 students, two taught Years 3 and 4 students, one taught Year 6 students, two taught Years 7 and 8 students, and two were school leaders with recent classroom teaching experience (one was a principal, and one was a deputy principal). Most of those interviewed had also previously taught at other levels of the school and brought these experiences to bear during the interviews.

The nine teachers came from locations across the length and breadth of Aotearoa New Zealand, ranging from Dunedin to Te Tai Tokerau. The teachers also came from a range of school types spanning decile 1 to decile 9 schools and including both rural and urban locations. Many of the teachers interviewed had also previously taught at other types of schools and brought these experiences to bear during the interviews. The teachers and leaders had classroom experience ranging from 8 to 40 years.

What did the interviews cover?

I carried out semi-structured interviews with the nine teachers via Zoom or telephone, depending on teacher preference. Questions were open-ended and the interviews were conversational in nature. The direction the interviews took varied from teacher to teacher, depending on their interests and experiences. Broadly, the interviews focused on:

- teachers' own experiences of being a reader over their life including early engagement with texts, reading preferences, memorable texts, reader role models, conversations with others about text, and the pleasure that reading can bring
- teachers' aspirations for their students as readers
- any opportunities teachers provided to help achieve their goals for their students as readers
- whether the teachers felt that being a reader influenced the ways in which they engaged with students around text in their classrooms and schools.

How have the interview data been analysed and presented?

With the teachers' permission I audio recorded the nine interviews and had them transcribed. I then coded the interview transcripts for themes using an iterative process whereby data were re-coded as new themes emerged through the coding process.

For clarity, I have lightly edited direct quotations from the interview transcripts to remove spoken word conventions such as “umm/er/ah”, “sort of”, and “like”; and some repeated words or phrases that did not appear to alter the teacher's meaning.

Quotations are identified by the position of the respondent (leader or teacher) and, in the case of the latter, the year level(s) the teacher taught at the time of the interview.

Structure of this report

This report is structured according to the two main research questions and the themes emerging from these. Chapter 2 focuses on the teachers' experiences of reading for pleasure over their lifespan and their sense of identity as a reader. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide some context for the opportunities these teachers provided their students as readers. However, the findings presented in Chapter 2 also shed some light on the interesting question of "What makes a reader?"—at least for this small sample of teachers involved. Chapter 3 focuses on teachers' aspirations for their students as readers, and Chapter 4 explores the ways in which teachers in the study engage with students around text in their classrooms and schools. Chapter 5 provides a brief overview of the findings and considers their implications for teachers, school leaders, policy makers, professional development providers, and initial teacher education.

2. Teachers' identities as readers

This study rests on the assumption that teachers' engagement with students around text is aligned with their own reading practices which are, in turn, informed by their own reading experiences over their lives. To learn about teachers' identities as readers, I asked them when they very first gained a love of reading, when they first saw themselves as a reader, any reader role models they may have had, and the conversations about books or reading that they had. I asked them what they liked to read and about the impact reading for pleasure had on their lives. The conversations were open-ended and wide-ranging.

The teachers in this study came from different backgrounds, had different life experiences, were at different stages in their careers, and enjoyed reading different sorts of material. However, there were striking similarities in the ways in which these teachers talked about themselves as readers. This section focuses on these similarities (as well as the few differences), beginning with the teachers' childhood reading experiences.

Teachers' reflections on their early experiences as readers

All but one of the participants described seeing themselves as a reader since childhood.

My first love of books was when I was at primary school, and I read avidly back then. (Year 2 teacher)

I think for me it was standard 3 and 4 but definitely then I was right in to sort of writing stories [and I] was reading a lot then. (School leader)

Some had seen themselves as readers for as long as they could remember.

I have always been a reader ... I just know that I've always loved stories and loved books. (School leader)

Only one of the teachers did not see himself as a reader as a young person. Although he enjoyed listening to stories read aloud at home he did not enjoy reading at school where he was told what he had to read and when he had to read it. Further, he did not consider the comics and Wikipedia articles he preferred to read over books "counted" as "proper" reading.

I never liked reading what I got told to read if that makes sense. It [enjoying reading] was always as long as I could read what I wanted. And so, I never really considered myself a reader ... I would read every day but often it would just be going down a rabbit warren of Wikipedia articles rather than sitting there with an actual book. (Years 3-4 teacher)

Recollections of listening to and reading stories

All participants described their earliest reading experiences as listening to stories. For some, this involved listening to books read aloud. Others recalled being told stories orally, listening to stories on the radio, or listening to audio books.

We used to read books and listen to stories, Sunday morning requests, so the love of books came from way back then. (Year 2 teacher)

The experience of listening to stories was usually a social one. Some teachers associated these early experiences with feelings of closeness and connection with other members of their whānau.

Mum would read to my sister and me every night before we went to bed, so it was one of those lovely calming sort of connection type times. (Years 3–4 teacher)

It was actually that emotional connection you get when your Mum's reading and we're all snuggled in close and we're listening to the story. It was fun and it was, I guess, a shared experience. (School leader)

[My Dad] had a great way of telling stories. (School leader)

Teachers also talked about the pleasure they gained from books once they were able to read independently for themselves, highlighting the solitary and the social pleasures associated with reading.

It [reading] definitely felt sort of calming to me, like I said, escapism or a place to just be with myself for a bit and escape into a story. (Years 7–8 teacher)

I think also at boarding school was probably the most we talked about books that we'd read. And we'd just talk about books we'd get out of the library, or we'd talk about books that we got from older brothers or sisters or taken from home that we probably shouldn't have read. And we just kept reading. (Year 2 teacher)

Memorable stories from childhood

The books teachers recalled as having a lasting impact on them tended to be those in which they found some point of connection. Often this was a connection with characters, but also with setting and theme. This sense of connection was often associated with the teachers' own sense of identity as children or young people. For example, one of the school leaders, whose father was fluent in English and te reo Māori, recalled with pleasure the stories he told about his own childhood.

I remember stories he told us of when he was little and his Dad would shoot ... kēreru and they'd be plump with the berries off the miro tree. And Dad's job was to catch the kēreru before it hit the ground so that it didn't smash open. Dad was a great story-teller and he was very, very articulate in both Māori and English. So I guess that was another way of kind of loving stories, loving the narrative. (School leader)

Another teacher recalled being read to in Dutch and connecting with the book *Heidi* in relation to both her European heritage and to her experience of a New Zealand childhood spent largely outdoors.

My parents were Dutch and ... I think it was just that European interest and that we used to climb hills here. I identified it on two levels: the hills that we had here and just that European-ness, the family-ness, the impact of grandparents, all those sorts of things. I think it just impacted on me because of that cultural background. (Year 2 teacher)

Some teachers recalled books that gave them new experiences of the world by taking them to other places or times in history. A second teacher identified *Heidi* as an important book because it took her to a world that was different from her own.

And maybe one of the first books that I really read that I thought was wonderful was *Heidi* cause we all wanted to be Heidi up in the mountains free as, eating lovely cheese up in the French Alps. I think you just saw yourself as Heidi and you sort of thought you could be Heidi. (Year 2 teacher)

She described the pleasure of standing in the shoes of another person in a different time and place.

Just imagining being Heidi and living like she did and going up to the mountains and then having to go downtown to live with her cousin and aunt. And just sort of imagining if you were in that position what it would be like when you'd rather be up mountains. (Year 2 teacher)

Other teachers recalled books that took them to an imaginary world of fantasy that allowed them to escape the real world or got them thinking in new ways.

Grimm's Fairy Tales, the sort of the meatier versions ... Probably just the imagery and the escapism of it and the other worldliness. I quite like *Hansel and Gretel*. Probably the thinking about was the stepmother the witch ... the little sort of subtle things you could infer and think about ... *The Happy Prince* and then *The Selfish Giant* as well. Maybe it's sort of those strong morals and the lessons in them. (School leader)

The books teachers remembered as impacting from their teenage years often related to their developing sense of identity, their need for role models, or their need to find a place in the world. For example, one teacher described preferring to read books by Tessa Duder over the Nancy Drew books popular with her peers because she was looking for strong female characters she could identify with.

They all had female protagonists, like very strong women, girls of a similar age of around 12–13 ... So really kind of independent girls really that were a bit more strong minded I suppose. (Years 7–8 teacher)

She went on to say:

I think at that age you're figuring out where you fit in the world and so by reading about these different characters you can think, 'Yes I am like that person' or 'I'm not' or be inspired by them or not. And maybe if you can't find role models in your own life that at least you can find them in a book. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Some teachers recalled books that enabled them to explore life pathways that they would not experience in their real lives.

As a young person, a teenager ... I can remember reading a book about a young girl who was probably not a lot older than I was at that age, who had a drug problem and that had a huge impact on me. I guess as a young person I sort of thought well there's a road you don't want to be going down. (Year 2 teacher)

The impact that memorable books continued to have on the teachers often decades after first listening to or reading them was striking. The teachers continued to carry these stories with them both physically (many still owned childhood books and considered them precious possessions) and psychologically. Some described early books continuing to have an impact on their lives, long after having listened to them or read them.

I Am David would be my all-time favourite book, and I think it's probably as an adult as well ... I did wonder when I read it as an adult whether I would still connect to it but it's as strong, if not stronger. (School leader)

That was one of those books well it stayed with me for 40 years so there was obviously something in there that I needed or wanted. It talked to me at that time. (Years 3–4 teacher)

You have this vivid picture ... the mountains, the Swiss Alps and that little cottage and that fire burning and the cheese, milking the goats and then going off on her own with no adult supervising, it's just so vivid. Even to this day that's sort of very much alive. (Year 2 teacher)

Reader role models

Nearly all teachers described having at least one reading role model from a young age, usually parents or other whānau.

My Dad ... he read the newspaper from cover to cover, and he had an incredible general knowledge from reading. And he loved to read history as well. And Mum, she loved to read biographies and autobiographies. (School leader)

Teachers described the many ways in which the adults in their lives modelled the knowledge, language, values, and practices associated with being a reader and a teller of stories.

[Mum] was always talking about the books she read, and she'd have a stack by the bed ... We'd be perhaps sitting with her on the bed and she'd say, 'Oh I'm reading this book at the moment ... This is what I'm finding out' ... I think once we were older, Dad talked more to us about the books he was reading ... the stories of his childhood, what he knew about his whānau. (School leader)

Every night my parents would read novels when they went to bed. And then as we got older and we could read those books they would share them with us ... My Mum always loves to talk about why a story ended like that or how it *could* end and what the author's purpose was, all those things. She loved having conversations about what she had read. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Mum read and Nana read and I remember them like talking about books they'd read, them having conversations and sort of passing books between each other. (School leader)

Several remembered teachers who had read to them or had supported their interest in reading, although none recalled having a teacher that they identified as a reader.

We had teachers who read to us every day ... We just would listen sitting ... at our desks and they would read to us. So that was also just that love of, just imagining, just creating that imaginative story in your head, being read to. (Year 2 teacher)

I can't remember noticing, identifying him as a reader but he certainly did encourage me to read and to read widely rather than stick to one genre. (School leader)

What and why did the teachers choose to read, as adults?

The books teachers described choosing to read as adults included crime, fantasy, romance, science fiction, contemporary fiction, the classics, thrillers, picture books, neuroscience, poetry, self-help books, Wikipedia, teen dystopian novels, biographies, and more. Teachers also described accessing reading material in a variety of ways—in print, through audio books, using reading devices such as Kindle, and online. While the teachers' reading preferences were very different, the reasons they read and the benefits they experienced from reading were very similar.

Reading for wellbeing

For most teachers, reading was both a form of entertainment and a way of escaping the stresses and busyness of the everyday world. It was about “being transported into another world”; “just being somewhere else”; “hiding away in someone else's life”; “going down the rabbit warren of make believe”; or “like that holiday”. For many teachers, as adults, reading was restorative. It was a time for solitude, grounding, and calmness.

It helps me just sort of stop everything else ... it is just to stop everything and it's like me time, in my head time. And I get a bit of escapism ... And I guess it's safe, reading's just a safe place for me. And it's quiet. (School leader)

I find it quite relaxing ... I can do it at my own pace ... I'm quite happy in my own company. I think that reading made me that way. I can't be bought because I can just pick up a book and read it and I know that there are some people who can't do that. (Year 6 teacher)

For others, reading provided comfort. Several teachers used the metaphor of friendship and the comfort associated with a friend to describe their relationships with books.

I think, too, it's an emotional connection ... Sitting down with a book, it's like sitting down with a good friend. (School leader)

It's like going back to a familiar friend. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Reading to better understand themselves, others, and the world

Most teachers described how reading helped them to better understand themselves and their relationships with others. They gave examples from books they had read.

One of my biggest problems is giving my time to things I probably shouldn't, and the story is all about time. It's about the time bank and how these grey men come and suck the life out of people by saying, 'Look you could save yourself an hour if you didn't go and see your mother every Friday and imagine what you could do with that hour' ... it's all about spending your time. (Years 3–4 teacher)

It [the book] was about life lessons. It was about getting on the consumerism bandwagon and how you get off it. (Year 2 teacher)

It [the book] was written about three sisters and their ageing mother and the relationships between them ... Years later *my* Mum was going through it, and I went, 'Oh yeah, I kind of see that'. (Year 2 teacher)

Teachers also described how reading helped them understand others and see things from different perspectives.

I guess if I think about Bryce Courtnay's *The Power of One* and ... just the impact sometimes of how the people lived in some of those poorer countries and the stories that they talked around. (Year 2 teacher)

I still read a lot of like to do with the Holocaust and that I think that stems right back from when I was a kid reading being fascinated by World War II and all of the happenings there. So things like *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *The Violinist of Auschwitz* and all that kind of thing. They're things that I've read in books that I'd like to experience for myself ... I think it's the whole human struggle and what can come out of something so horrible, those stories of light in amongst the darkness, I think. (Year 6 teacher)

Some teachers purposefully set out to find books that extended their ways of seeing the world.

I don't always read things that I necessarily agree with or that I love. There's some stuff that I read, and I go, 'Nah that just doesn't feel right,' but I still go there ... I think it's valuable to read a variety of perspectives ... It's really easy to get stuck into a Eurocentric world view. I've been trying to read a bit of poetry from some different places and some of it you're sitting there going, 'Whoa that's a real weird way of saying something'. And then it's actually, 'I need to take a step back and reflect on *why* that's weird for me cause it's probably not actually weird.' (Years 3–4 teacher)

I almost prefer now to read about characters dissimilar to me and sort of explore different worlds ... the way to kind of, you know, travel or be a part of a different world. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Teachers described how they developed a better understanding of the world, and of big questions and ideas about what it means to be human, through reading. Reading also helped them to formulate or confirm their own views, values, and positions in relation to complex questions.

The Handmaid's Tale—just kind of making you really question how the world is and whether it is really that good. Another one is Haruki Murakami, a Japanese author. Both of them have quite dystopian ways of looking at the world that make you question and think. Anything that makes me think well actually I need to review my understanding of the world has an impact for sure.

(Years 7–8 teacher)

It is probably more the psychological novels and the characters and what's motivating them and how they're living and the choices they're making and maybe I'm just quietly like judging people, judging characters. (School leader)

Connections with other readers

For all but one of the teachers, reading was a social as well as a solitary activity. These teachers described how, as adults, they continued to engage with others about the texts they read. These engagements ranged from informal and incidental conversations with friends, colleagues, or family through to membership of more formal reading groups such as book clubs.

I talk, some of my colleagues I talk to my husband ... I talk to Mum about some of the stuff she's reading. I've got a couple of friends that I will hook in with and we might have read the same thing, or we've read something on a similar topic. (Years 3–4 teacher)

We have like a little I guess informal reading club here at school. We swap books and we talk about the stories. It's very informal; we wouldn't call it a book club. But it's just those of us who kind of have a kindred spirit for reading. (School leader)

Mostly it's just in our conversations as we're going for walks, as we're having coffee around the staffroom table ... we're all avid readers. (Year 2 teacher)

Teachers talked about what they were reading to friends and recommended books to each other. They talked about why they liked the book.

It's just talking and recommending books. And sometimes people are like, 'I just haven't read anything good for a long time. I need this sort of book'. (School leader)

We talk about why we like them, what's good about them. (Year 2 teacher)

Conversations about books also included discussing the connections teachers had made with characters, settings, or themes.

Somebody might just talk about a book that they thought was really good, personal connections with the book or could just sort of talk parallels with their own lifestyles or their own life or situations ... I remember somebody told me about one of Liane Moriarty's books and the mothers in the schoolyard, and she goes 'I can just see these mothers they're just like that in the school yard'. (Year 2 teacher)

We just share our books around and we often talk about how we felt about the book, how we connected to the story. (School leader)

They talked about characters and their situations.

You might think about a dilemma that somebody was in [in the story] and what would you do? (Year 2 teacher)

Teachers described conversations to seek clarification about aspects of books they found hard to follow.

Sometimes I haven't understood something very well and I'll say, 'Can you explain what happened there 'cause I didn't really get it?' (Years 7–8 teacher)

They talked about ambiguous or indeterminate aspects of the text, and their differing interpretations.

Often with the book we'll go, 'Hey, when you get to the end tell me what you think.' There's one book we can't decide on. We've all read it and we all have different opinions about the ending and what it actually means ... I guess it's what you infer from the story and the clues you pick up and how much importance you put on those clues. (School leader)

Sometimes you kind of go like, 'Oh I didn't get that from it at all I got something completely different, so interpreted differently yeah.' (Years 7–8 teacher)

[My Mum] makes me read some of her book group readings so she can talk to me about what's happened in them and whether I agree. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Some conversations involved evaluating how the author constructed or represented an idea, or how they told the story.

In our book club we do that a lot; 'How did you feel about the way that happened [in the book]?' (Years 7–8 teacher)

[We talk about] whether we thought the ending was appropriate or dramatic or realistic. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Teachers' reflections on the impact of reading on their lives

I asked teachers to reflect on the impact being a reader has had on their lives overall. Most teachers initially responded by saying it was hard to say as they had never known any other way of being in the world. Most then went on to describe in very similar ways how they felt reading enabled them to better consider other perspectives and enabled them to empathise with other people.

I think it has helped me to look more widely at the world and to look at other ideas, other perspectives, to always be wanting to think there's a flip side to this, there's another story. What's that person's story of the same event? ... I think that's really helped me to connect, to want to connect with others and not be afraid to make a connection or to ask a question or to say I disagree. So I think it's helped me to have that really broad perspective on life and broad perspective on others. (School leader)

I'd like to hope that it makes you a bit more sensitive to the needs of others perhaps, a bit more worldly and a bit more aware. (Years 7–8 teacher)

I think it certainly makes you open-minded ... And I think it just opens your mind you know to different things and different concepts, different ideas. (Year 2 teacher)

Probably just exposure to different ideas, different types of people. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Some teachers observed that, through reading, they sometimes gained insight—into themselves, their relationships, others, and the world.

I'd like to think that I occasionally have some insight that I can offer to a conversation from having read broadly on things, that I can sort of assimilate ideas into a conversation that might give a different perspective. (Years 3–4 teacher)

I think books help you to reflect, reflect on life, reflect on yourself, you make connections with characters and places, you know I just think there's not one aspect there's a whole heap. (School leader)

The insight gained from reading sometimes happened in the moment of reading. And it sometimes happened many years later, as with the teacher who described how it wasn't until she experienced the changing relationship with her own mother as she aged that she gained insight into something she had read many years earlier. And sometimes reading provided teachers with insight into something that had happened in the past.

Teachers' orientation towards text and meaning-making

Teachers' reflections on themselves as readers provide some insight into their orientation towards text and the act of meaning-making. Nearly all the teachers discussed reading a range of texts without signalling any sense of hierarchy. Teachers were aware that some books are considered more highbrow than others, but this did not prevent them reading what they most enjoyed.

It sounds awful but I like teen dystopian books like *The Hunger Games* ... I'll be honest, I prefer the young adult senior fiction over anything too meaty. (Years 3–4 teacher)

I've got a friend that reads probably more highbrow than what I would read. I do a certain amount of academic reading so when I'm reading for pleasure, I'm reading mindless crap is what I say. But in actual fact it's interesting. (Year 2 teacher)

One teacher who described having been "a bit of a reading snob" in the past, went on to say:

But now I'll just read anything, and I'll read it anywhere. At any time. (Year 6 teacher)

Text choice was predominantly related to purpose. A "good" text was one that best met the purpose of the person reading it at that time and context rather than an essential element inherent in the book itself.

I kind of have different books [for different purposes] so I'll have the book that's kind of, not lightweight but you know the story's easy to read, there's not too much depth to it. So that would be my night-time reading. And then I have other books, they're a little bit heavier. I need to be in a certain frame of mind to read them. I have some professional reading that I need to have quiet and space ... so I have different books for different times. (School leader)

When I went backpacking around Europe it was easy just to throw a book in my bag, so it tended to be historical. Philippa Gregory sort of books. I worked at Westminster Abbey, so it was kind of fitting. (Years 3–4 teacher)

At university, Russian literature was, I had a bit of an obsession over it and I do like the classics but I don't read so many heavy books like that nowadays 'cause I just don't really have the head space, and if I am going to read a heavy book it's often like more of an educational related sort of paper or something. (School leader)

In keeping with this orientation towards text was the recognition that different readers like different things without a sense of judgement about the "worthiness" of what others chose to read—rather a sense of interest.

I like lots of crime books, some of the staff like more romantic books, so we have a really big range. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Some described seeking to extend or vary what they read out of curiosity or as a way of discovering new things about the world or themselves.

Every now and again, I do push myself to read other things. Sometimes I try to read contemporary New Zealand books. They're quite a different genre of writing to other things [I read] but they're quite interesting. Sometimes I'll even pick up children's books and read them just 'cause they're good easy stories. (Year 2 teacher)

Also consistent with this orientation towards text was acceptance of and interest in multiple views about the merits of a book.

We [my husband and I] have very different taste and I'll give him a book that I thought really good and he'll be in complete disagreement. But it's good, I think it's good in a relationship to have the ability to say no actually I really disagree about that. (Years 7–8 teacher)

We all read quite a range so I might go for a walk with a girlfriend, and she'll go 'Oh I just read this amazing book' ... and I will go, 'Oh yeah that sounds interesting', or 'Oh no I'm not really interested in that'. (Year 2 teacher)

Teachers' reasons for reading and topics of conversations about text also provide some insight into these teachers' orientation towards meaning-making. They expected that, just as readers could value books differently, so too could readers interpret what they had read differently. In other words, they viewed meaning-making as agentic, active, and, at least in part, subjective. One of the greatest pleasures for many teachers was comparing their interpretations of ambiguous or indeterminate aspects of what they had been reading with others. Disagreements about texts were welcome and a source of interest and curiosity.

3. Teachers' aspirations for their students as readers

One of the interview questions for teachers was “What do you want for your students as readers?” The question was purposefully broad, so that teachers could talk about the aspects of being a reader that they saw as most important. This chapter presents their responses.

To enjoy reading and to see themselves as readers

First and foremost, teachers wanted their students to enjoy reading. This was regardless of the class level or ability of the students concerned. This was true of junior-school teachers of students beginning to learn how to read, through to Year 7 and Year 8 teachers of proficient readers.

Well half of my students as readers are still learning to read ... When they're learning to read you want them to get that passion about reading, you want them to pick up a book and just go, 'Oh this is great' ... and want to read it. (Year 2 teacher)

Just to love reading, love books, just to enjoy the pictures, the stories, the imagination that it gives them and just the engagement in it. (Year 2 teacher)

Understanding that it can be a good escape to read a book ... For me, the best thing to do on a weekend is to sit down with a book and block out the rest of the world, be lost in a story. (Years 7–8 teacher)

I'd hope they would find something more than just like reading being *useful*, that they could actually get some joy. (School leader)

Teachers not only wanted their children to enjoy reading, but also to see themselves as readers; that is, to develop reader identities.

I want them to be readers. So many of them will learn to read and be proficient readers but I think there's a difference. I want them to *be* a reader, to love story and love books. (School leader)

My big thing is for them to see themselves as readers and to love reading as much as possible. (Years 3–4 teacher)

For the teachers in our study this meant demonstrating the values, beliefs, practices, and knowledge of readers, such as believing in the value of spending time reading, talking about books, and sharing books with others.

To experience wellbeing through reading

Closely related to the goal of finding pleasure in reading was the goal of wellbeing.

Thinking about literature as an artform, I guess, and knowing the place of arts with regard to people's wellbeing. So you know reading is I think good for people's wellbeing as well as their brain and their education. (School leader)

Teachers hoped that reading would provide their students the opportunity to slow down, to find down time, to take a break from their busy and sometimes stressful lives, and to find the opportunity to be calm, still, mindful, grounded; that is, to be deeply engaged and to enter a sense of flow.

I think it's important to slow down sometimes and, especially thinking about the kids I teach, if they can get a break from what's going around them sometimes and had a book and that helped then that would be great. (School leader)

[To know] that [books] can amuse you and entertain you and you don't have to be busy all the time, it's actually quite nice just lying on the floor or on a cushion and just reading a book. (Year 2 teacher)

I want them to see books and see reading as a joyful experience that brings a sense of connection or calm or yeah something positive for them, because for lots of our kids life can be pretty hairy. But this is a place where they can find themselves, they can find out stuff about the world. (Years 3–4 teacher)

To better understand themselves, others, and the world

Related to the goal of wellbeing, teachers hoped that, through reading, their students could develop a greater understanding of themselves, their relationships with others, their place in the world, and a sense of connection and belonging.

To know that there are stories and books that are going to impact their life, are going to shape their thinking, are going to challenge their thinking, that are going to help them find out who they are and who they can be. (School leader)

I want them to find connection in books and find something that they love in a book and I want them to experience the viewpoints of other people. (Year 6 teacher)

Teachers hoped that reading would broaden their students' horizons by enabling them to have access to a world beyond their immediate experience. One of these teachers observed that:

Lots of the children I have will never experience things that they read. (Year 6 teacher)

These teachers hoped that reading would take their students to new places both literally and figuratively and open their eyes to new possibilities.

[To] let someone else's imagination put you in to a different world. (Year 2 teacher)

Interest in the world, and interest in creating stories. (Years 7–8 teacher)

To develop the capacity for perspective-taking and empathy

Teachers hoped that, through reading, students would be better able to understand perspectives different from their own. They hoped that, through understanding the situations and perspective of others, students would be able to develop greater empathy for others, enabling them to understand people different from themselves and why people might act the way they do. Teachers hoped that, through a greater understanding of themselves and others, reading could provide students with a greater sense of belonging and inclusion.

I want them to experience the viewpoints of other people ... I want them to feel empathy towards other people. I want them to know that there are people that struggle but still find joy in everyday

things. *[And do you think reading helps children to do that?]* I think so because it takes them outside their own experience ... books are written often from the viewpoint of another person. (Year 6 teacher)

It's about all stories, Pasifika stories, Māori stories, everyone's story. And it's about that critical thinking that comes as you look at the different perspectives. I've just been looking at the draft history curriculum and I think that's really exciting because it's acknowledging that there are different perspectives and different stories that are out there and that need to be told and heard and talked about. (School leader)

Agency as readers and in the world

Teachers wanted students to have agency and be active as readers on a number of different levels. They wanted their students to have the agency to make meaning of text, to extend themselves and grow as readers throughout their lives, and to have agency in their communities.

Agency to make meaning of text

Teachers wanted students to feel agentic when making meaning of text, rather than to see reading simply as responding to text in the "right" ways or in the ways they thought their teacher wanted. Teachers wanted their students to reflect on and question what they read, their own interpretations, and those of others. They wanted students to read to meet their own needs and purposes. In other words, they wanted their students to have a sense of ownership over the act of making meaning. They wanted students to understand that, through story, we can come to understand ourselves but also to express ourselves and our identities and so to represent ourselves in the world.

I would hope ... they could read and actually think about what they're reading and like reflect on it and make connections. (School leader)

Agency in terms of becoming lifelong readers

Second, teachers wanted their students to have the skills, knowledge, and motivation to find and evaluate books for themselves, and to extend the range of books they engaged with to meet their needs and interests.

So for me it is very, very important that students not just learn to read but they're given the opportunity to start a journey of being a reader so that they can continue that. (School leader)

This might, for example, involve finding books on the same author or type, extending the type of books read, judging for themselves whether books were at the right difficulty level for them or met their reading purposes.

Maybe think, 'Oh I like that author. I'm going to see what else they wrote', or, 'I like that type of book. I can go and find other types of books like that.' (School leader)

You want them to be able to say, 'Okay well I'm not ready to read this book' (Year 2 teacher)

In other words, the teachers wanted students to develop the skills, knowledge, capabilities, and dispositions to pursue and extend their own reading journey to meet their changing needs and goals over time; that is, to become lifelong readers.

Agency in the out-of-school world

Some teachers talked about wanting their students to reap the benefits of being a reader, in terms of knowing what is going on in the world and being able to actively participate in and contribute to their communities in ways that mattered to them.

Once you become a reader the world opens up to you and ... you can actually teach yourself anything in the world that you want once you can read. The world is in your hands far more than if you're a non-reader. (Years 3–4 teacher)

We talk about action that we want our learners to have agency. They're able to take action and I think reading and ... telling your own story is part of that action. It links very much to our school goals; we call that the graduate profile of voice, action, and identity. (School leader)

As signalled in the quote above, the agency that some teachers wanted for their students extended to the wish that their students would develop an understanding of the value of their own stories, and the desire to tell them.

The desire to tell their own stories

Teachers also hoped that, through listening to and reading the stories of others, students would develop a sense of agency in relation to producing and sharing their own stories.

I want the exposure ... to give them more extensive vocabulary, and interest in the world, and interest in creating stories. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Teachers wanted their students to understand that we all have a story to tell, that our stories are important, and that we can tell our stories in different ways, whether orally or through play, speaking, writing, film making, drama, drawing, or other art forms.

Everyone has a story. Everyone has a story to tell, and I think that's the great thing about books. That's what books are saying: There's lots and lots of stories and that you can have a story, you do have a story. You can tell that and [tell it] how you choose whether with words or pictures or speaking it that story is really important. And it's about who we are, it's about knowing our roots and we talk about that, know your roots, where you come from, know the places you come from, the people who influenced your story so that you can become a person who influences others in a positive way. (School leader)

I've got dysgraphia ... so my interpretation of writing has always been very fluid. And I think that sort of influences me with reading as well. An audiobook is just as good, it's a story. Graphic novels are books. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Teachers wanted students to understand that books are written by authors, that we can all be authors as well as readers.

And it's just getting them to understand that they can write things down ... that when they're writing it's like an author writing a book, that there's an audience. (Year 2 teacher)

I think books and stories have a lot around identity. We also talk about that you have a voice and writers have a voice, you know, as their stories, as they write their stories. And we also talk about action that we want our learners to be able to, to have agency. They're able to take action and I think reading and writing down your own story, telling your own story is part of that action. It links very much to our school goals, we call that the graduate profile of voice, action, and identity. (School leader)

Summary

The primary aspiration of the teachers in the study for their students as readers was that they enjoy reading and see themselves as readers. They wanted their students to develop a love of reading and a reading identity that would carry them through their lives. This aspiration was the same regardless of the class level or reading abilities of the students these teachers taught.

The teachers identified several benefits of being a reader that they hoped their students would experience. These benefits tended to align closely with the benefits the teachers themselves had experienced through reading for pleasure. They included: a sense of wellbeing; a sense of connection to characters, places, and ideas in the texts they read, and with other readers; the capacity to understand perspectives different from their own and to have empathy towards others; a sense of belonging; broadened horizons and understanding of a world beyond their own immediate experiences; agency to make meaning of text, as a lifelong reader, and in the world more generally; and the desire to tell their own stories.

Interestingly, not one of the teachers answered the question, “What do you want for your students as readers?” with responses such as, “To develop processing skills” or “To strengthen and extend their comprehension strategies”, although they certainly recognised the importance of these skills. Teachers’ responses take us directly to the big purposes of reading, reminding us that skills such as processing and comprehension are not ends in and of themselves but, rather, are in the service of bigger purposes that we can sometimes lose sight of in the day-to-day business of the classroom. This may be especially so in high accountability contexts with a focus on lifting easily measurable achievement outcomes in the shorter term. And not one of the teachers gave as an aspiration for their students, improved reading achievement. They saw reading for pleasure as a legitimate end in and of itself.

4. Creating a classroom reading community

As discussed in the previous chapter, the teachers in this study first and foremost wanted their students to develop a love of reading and become lifelong readers. This chapter focuses on the learning opportunities the teachers provided in their classrooms to realise their hopes and aspirations for their students. These included opportunities to see their teachers as fellow readers, to engage with a wide variety of text, to listen to or read text for pleasure, to talk and think about text for pleasure, to learn more about making meaning of text, and to consider what it means to be an author.

Opportunities to engage with teachers as fellow readers

Teachers provided their students with opportunities to see them reading. Some did this by reading their own texts in class during silent reading time, to model that they too enjoyed reading for pleasure.

I read in the classroom so when they're doing silent reading, I'm silent reading. So I'm modelling that adults do that too. (Year 6 teacher)

One teacher found that when he stopped doing his own reading during sustained silent reading (SSR), students' engagement in their reading dropped.

I did SSR in Years 5 and 6 and I had success in one particular year. And that was the year that I would read at the same time. And that was a class that didn't like reading. But the fact that I was reading set the tone that, 'It's reading now'. And in fact it only stopped working when I started to do work during SSR ... Yeah when I was reading they were all reading and it used to be we'd keep on doing SSR until I'd finished my chapter. (Years 3–4 teacher)

All the teachers described talking with students as fellow readers. This involved discussing with students the books they as teachers were reading at home and showing interest in the books their students were reading.

We talk about what we're reading ... I talk about what sort of things I enjoy reading. I ask them questions about what they enjoy. Often they will bring me a book in the library and say, 'I'm starting to read this. It's about dragons, it's got this in it,' and I'll ask them why they like it just to get a sense of what they like. (Year 6 teacher)

I'll often sort of ask them, 'What did you think about how that ended?', 'Would you read another book by that author?' (Years 7–8 teacher)

I try really hard to communicate my own enthusiasm for books and you know when they read a book I will kind of say, 'Oh my gosh I really loved that one too. What do you think about this, that or the other?' so just hopefully communicate that enjoyment, that passion. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Teachers shared their personal connections with texts and their emotional responses to texts they were reading in their out-of-school lives, and when reading aloud to students. In doing so, teachers gave permission to their students to respond in similar ways.

[I read] a story about this little boy who has cancer and how his class react to that news. That's also another one where I cried at the end. Even though I know the ending—it's a happy ending it's not a sad ending, it's a very happy ending ... I guess when you're passionate about books and stories and that you're open with your emotions. (School leader)

Teachers found that sharing their own emotional and intellectual connection to the texts they enjoyed with their students provided a way of building stronger relationships with them.

It's about a relationship and I know one of my other friends, a teacher friend, who also loves reading, she would say that the way she builds relationships with students is through books. [*It's just those informal conversations about books?*] Yeah I guess it relates to the storytelling because you tell them, 'I like this book because it connects to this you know, it connects to part of my story or it rekindles this memory or it makes me think about [things]'. (School leader)

Some teachers explicitly modelled practices that readers in the out-of-school world engage in, such as abandoning a text part way through, reading several different books at the same time, or choosing to re-read a text many times.

They go, 'Oh but we've read it,' but you say, 'Oh yeah but we can read it again cause it's so exciting ... I read Harry Potter, I could read it again and I still would find out new stuff in it.' (Year 2 teacher)

Teachers were also aware that their natural love of reading shone through, even when they were not consciously setting out to model it explicitly. The teachers saw these incidental learning opportunities to be as, if not more, important in supporting children to develop their own reading identities.

A lot is just your own excitement in a book. (Year 2 teacher)

I think probably because I'm a mad reader ... It's like someone who is really into their art, they encourage children to be artists. (Year 2 teacher)

I know the whole being a male and modelling the fact that [I am] reading gets the boys encouraged into reading and enjoying it. But I have to be frank—it's for my own enjoyment just as much as theirs. (Years 3–4 teacher)

They see me talking [about my reading]. Like when we go to the library, I will often chat with our librarian about what we're reading, what each other is reading. (Year 6 teacher)

The teachers considered being a reader themselves to be one of the most important ways in which to support students to develop their own identities as readers.

I've got a girlfriend who doesn't enjoy reading. She was a brilliant teacher [but] I don't think she read the same to the children as I did or engaged in the storytelling for want of a better word. I think you can still give them that pleasure, but children will identify reading with people who are readers. (Year 2 teacher)

I think it, the love of it comes through ... And I think it's just when you have that love of books children have it too. (Year 2 teacher)

Reading is the last thing I'd give up ... The kids pick up on it quite quickly. The importance you place on things. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Opportunities to engage with a wide range of text

Teachers believed in the importance of sharing with their students a wide range of text in terms of both genre and content.

I would have a good variety of text ... They wouldn't just be like PM readers and stuff. And maybe one day we'd have poems and there'd also be maybe something from the newspaper and, you know, authentic text. (School leader)

I read them different genres. (Year 6 teacher)

We do a lot of work with poetry ... I'll have a poem every week that we use ... I have quite a large personal collection of sophisticated picture books that I use for my students. (Years 3–4 teacher)

They saw the inclusion of rich and challenging text as an important part of their reading programme, and often chose these types of text to read aloud. The concept of rich text was not necessarily related to the complexity of the vocabulary or syntax. A rich text could be quite easy to read while containing challenging ideas. Comments from several teachers highlighted the importance of having high expectations of what students will engage with when supported to do so.

I think some teachers give kids things that are too simple. I was reading this book recently ... [about how] we believe we have to spoon-feed kids when really, right from early ages kids know about big moral concepts like good versus evil and they get that stuff. We don't need to dumb it down. We can present kids with these texts that are quite deep if we can scaffold them into it. They do get the big concepts and it does engage them. (School leader)

Several teachers described how they had successfully used challenging texts, even with children who struggled with reading themselves.

When I started reading chapter books to them, I was worried—they can't read. And they were quite academically behind—that they wouldn't have the attention span to listen to a book. But they do. They've always just got straight into it. I thought I would have to start with junior fiction books which had pictures in them, and show the pictures and then get reading, but no. They have a much better attention span listening to a book than they do writing or doing anything else. (Years 3–4 teacher)

I've got kids in my class at the moment who don't have basic phonemic awareness and then I've got others who are very capable readers already. So, one of the things that I do is I read novels to them ... I started off with this imaginary vet series and I said, 'You know you guys are old enough now to be able to read a big fat book' and they were like, 'Don't know about that'. Well after about 3 or 4 days coming in to hear the story they were actually looking forward to it, to the point where now, we've finished the first book and they were desperate, they said can we start the other one, can we do another one? ... And they don't want me to stop reading, they're like can we have another chapter please. It's huge, that's really huge particularly with this cohort. And it's because they're connected to the characters, they are absorbed in the world. (Years 3–4 teacher)

The importance of teachers knowing their students

The teachers highlighted the importance of knowing their students, whānau, and communities for selecting texts to read aloud or recommend for recreational reading.

You follow students' interests ... Each year is a bit different and you've got to see what they need or what they're passionate about. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Teachers needed to listen and respond to the changing interests of groups of students or individuals in their classrooms.

A lot of the discussions are around an interest of something ... 'Why do we get tornados? How does the earth heat up so that you get a volcano?' So that will come out and then we'll go, 'Oh shall we study that? Yeah!' And then we'll get all the wondering questions ... Sometimes children just want to do it on their own. You've got a couple of kids who are really interested in the Titanic, and we'll just have little topics and so the kids who are not really interested in it will wander off. (Year 2 teacher)

Text selection was not only about supporting students' existing interests but also about extending their horizons by helping students to make connections with new topics, genres, ideas, points of view, or experiences.

It seems to me we have some children who don't want to take as many risks with reading ... Children seem to get hooked into Geronimo Stilton books and they'll want to stick with that rather than to take risks with other stories and other genres ... I guess that is why I talk about [the importance] of the risk taking. (School leader)

It's great when you get a book that you can connect to and the contexts are familiar, but then stepping out into something else, like fantasy. (School leader)

The importance of teachers knowing children's literature

Teachers also described the importance of knowing children's literature when selecting texts for students. Several were emphatic about the need to read a book first before reading it aloud or recommending it to students.

I always read the novel I want to read to the kids before I read it to them. You have to read a lot of novels to find the good ones ... As well as listening to the kids' interests you actually need to have read them yourself, so I think it's vitally important. (Years 7-8 teacher)

Sometimes when I see the text choices that some of the teachers are making, I feel like they've just grabbed things and not much thought has gone into what they're putting in front of the kids. (School leader)

However, it was not always easy to find texts that students in some schools could easily connect with or find interest in. Both school leaders in this study commented on the difficulty of finding texts in which their students could see themselves.

I work in a low decile school in South Auckland. They talk about finding books that are like mirrors and windows for our children. And I know there's a lot of windows out there but [we need more] books that do mirror their lives a little bit as well so that they can see themselves. (School leader)

I think the last book I can remember that made a real impact was *Dawn Raids* ... And that's because the children here made a real connection you know. It's a story that they could connect really strongly to. (School leader)

The leader quoted directly above also commented on the challenge of finding texts written in her students' first languages.

I wish there were more stories and books in Pasifika languages. We find it hard enough to get books just with a context of Pasifika. (School leader)

Her solution was to have the children write their own texts for the library.

So, we're trying this term to get children to do some writing in their heritage language and that will be interesting. So, their stories become part of the library collection. (School leader)

This had the dual benefit of ensuring culturally and linguistically relevant material was available for students to read, and that students had an authentic audience for their writing.

Opportunities to listen to text and to read text for pleasure

For the teachers in this study, an important purpose for reading was pleasure. Teachers therefore provided students with opportunities to engage with text, purely for pleasure. These included opportunities for students to listen to or view texts with no expectations other than enjoyment, and with no follow-up work required.

We read regularly. I read picture books to them and ... I read short chapter stories where it's just listening. (Year 2 teacher)

When I did Years 5 and 6 and we were reading a book called *The Boy at the Back of the Class* ... there were two occasions where we read for the whole afternoon which was 45 minutes to an hour. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Teachers also described providing time for students to read books of their own choice for pleasure, in the classroom.

The last 4 years I've had read for enjoyment as part of the actual reading timetable. So, the groups get given a certain amount of time each week where they can just choose what they want to read ... Most of them will go and read the books in the library corner. There's also a lot of them that will just go in there and they could read forever. (Years 3–4 teacher)

I would have sustained silent reading and everybody would sit and read, and they would until they enjoyed it because I think it's really important. (School leader)

Several teachers described the importance of having places in the classroom dedicated to recreational reading, such as a library corner.

My library corner is decked out with a carpet and cushions, and a big chair that's shaped like a hand. And it's secluded away from the rest of the classroom. It's designed to be like a place you want to go to ... You're going in there to read and it's for the purpose of reading ... And it's a solely dedicated place as well. (Years 3–4 teacher)

I had a nice library corner and I would get books from the school library and from the National Library and I would keep them nicely displayed and tidy to value them. (School leader)

Part of my personal collection is at school and so they can help themselves to books any time they want, you know they're all there. And I've got books in different areas for different subjects so it's like there's plenty of them. (Years 3–4 teacher)

For some teachers, the school library served this purpose.

I do tell them that the library is for the sheer love of it. The learning intention is that people enjoy reading; there will be no follow-up activity. We are not going to be writing about this. You are not going to be required to answer questions. We are just going to read and enjoy this time. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Opportunities to talk and think about text for pleasure

As well as providing students with unstructured time to listen to or read books for pleasure, teachers provided time for them to think and talk informally about text for pleasure. These conversations often involved making connections to the story and making meaning of the story as a collective.

It's not just a book with words and pictures. There is a story here and the story has meaning and with that meaning they can make those connections with the story. (Year 2 teacher)

I just think you can make really nice connections with them with people being different ... you're just drawing lots of life things, life experiences or just everyday things and connecting the children with those ideas in the story. (Year 2 teacher)

We'll talk and, some, they'll reflect on themselves. (Years 7–8 teacher)

The conversation would be about like ... trying to think why that character might be sad, or the differences between the two characters, and depending on who the kids are, they might share times when they've felt like that or how they can connect with the story. (School leader)

The conversations also involved asking questions of the text.

You want them to be curious and inquisitive and to question what they're reading and talk about it, you know, 'How do you feel?' to make connections with those books. (Year 2 teacher)

Sometimes the settings that I find most powerful are when you actually get the kids to ask the questions themselves or ask each other. (Years 7–8 teacher)

As well as whole-class discussions, teachers also set aside time and space for these informal conversations about text to happen among small groups or pairs of children.

They just like lying on the floor with all our picture books or our topic books and just the conversations that come out of it. (Year 2 teacher)

The informal conversation teachers described having with their students around text were much like those readers have in the out-of-school world. They did not have a pre-determined destination and were spacious in nature. They were shaped by the knowledge and experiences of those in the classroom and what they brought to the text. In this way, they could be culturally responsive, sustaining, and affirming.

Some teachers contrasted the type of talk that happened when reading for pleasure with the type of talk that happened in their shared and guided reading lessons.

I think the shared reading more has a teaching purpose to do with the reading skill. [With sharing a picture book] it wouldn't have that, it would more be just for the message or the thinking, you know the discussion. It's the story and the ideas, you don't have to point out, 'Oh they used a capital letter and a full stop'. (School leader)

I guess a big book's more shared reading, and there's a teaching [purpose] like find the capital letter and ... rhyming word and bla de bla. Whereas a picture book is more you're reading to the children. They're not going to join in [like they would for shared reading] and they might read it after you or something. Like you might leave it on your library shelf as well as some other books by that author. (School leader)

Opportunities to analyse text

Although the conversations teachers enabled were pleasurable, they were not lightweight. They were intellectually challenging, involving close reading and analysis.

Some teachers described conversations that involved character analysis.

We might go back and recap what's happened for the characters, so their journey so far, where they fit, like what are the family dynamics happening in the story and those kinds of things, what do we think they want, what they're trying to achieve in the story. (Years 7–8 teacher)

And sometimes conversations about why you think the character acted the way that they did and if they would, you know, if they think that was the right thing to do or if they would have done something else. (School leader)

Others described engaging in collective analysis of language use or illustrations.

We do a lot of talk about the language and things like that, and interesting vocabulary and how did that make you feel when we read that and why do we think that? (Years 7–8 teacher)

Anthony Brown books for example. They're lovely ones to read with kids because the pictures tell you so much and the conversation would be about like what are the pictures telling us. (School leader)

Others described conversations they had about theme.

When I read a book like *The Wild Robot* I'll be unpacking things around emotions, around learning, around engagement and connection and love and all those big [ideas]. Philosophically that book is just mind-blowingly amazing. But we'll go into all of those things because that's what books do for me. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Others recalled conversations about context and intertextuality. Teachers described providing students with opportunities to learn about the time in which the text was written or set and to look at other texts on similar topics. The conversations sometimes led to further research or exploration to help better understand the text.

I'm reading my class *The Silver Sword* and we're talking ... I've shown them pictures of what Poland looked like before and after the war and we talk about things that they wouldn't know like the distance between Poland and Switzerland, for example, and how there wasn't transport available, the roads are different, things that they might not know. (Year 6 teacher)

I also encourage them to go 'I wonder what else I can find out', or 'I wonder if there's another book that shows that', and I think, A, you're doing it for enjoyment, B, you're doing it to find out more stuff, and C, you're sharing. (Year 2 teacher)

The skill in enabling the emergence of these meaning-making conversations should not be underestimated. Several teachers observed that it was being a reader themselves that enabled them to foster the types of deep thinking and talking described here. These teachers considered that, as readers, they enabled students to engage in better quality and more complex thinking about texts and the meanings they made of them.

I have a keen interest and I won't accept a bland answer or a non-committal or an 'I don't know'. I make them think deeper. (Years 7–8 teacher)

I think I would go maybe deeper into a text, like maybe read a little bit less, a couple of paragraphs but go quite deep into them and have time to explore it a bit more. (School leader)

I'm prepared to go deep with it and I take the kids places that sometimes you wouldn't if you didn't see that that's how story worked. You can actually give little kids hard stuff and that actually they can access it if you unpack it well and if you bring it to life for them. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Interestingly, these teachers who read for pleasure, and provide opportunities for their students to do the same, see the main difference between themselves and non-reader teachers to be the challenging intellectual work they were able to engage students in. This focus on pleasure resulted, according to these teachers, in more—not less—intellectual work. For these teachers, the challenge was in fact part of the fun.

The skill in creating the conditions for these natural and wide-ranging conversations was as great if not greater than the more teacher-directed conversations of shared and guided reading. One of the teachers described the time and effort it took for students to learn how to converse in these ways.

The more you model it, and the more time you spend on it, the better they get. Sometimes I'm lucky and I have kids more than one year, and that's where you start to notice it ... and they're just used to those things and engage quite well because they've done the modelling of it and they're able to have those conversations. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Opportunities to build processing and comprehension skills

Because the focus of the interviews was on how teachers' own identities as readers impacted on classroom practices, the teachers tended to talk less about the more formal, or skills-based aspects of their classroom reading programme. However, the comments they did make again reflected their reader orientation towards text and meaning-making. For example, one of the Year 2 teachers described how, even in a guided reading lesson when focusing on processing and comprehension skills, she never lost sight of high-level purposes for reading.

And even when we're reading stories as a guided reader it is about, 'What do you think the author's telling you? What are you engaging with? What can you relate to this? Can you draw on your own life experience with that?' and 'How did that feel and what would that look like?' as well as just all the simple decoding of it. (Year 2 teacher)

Several teachers described providing their students with opportunities to talk, use graphic organisers, draw, construct models, or use drama as a means of sharing their interpretations of text, as opposed to answering comprehension questions.

We talk about how you would illustrate this poem to help the reader to understand what it's about. And then once we've unpacked that then the kids go off and they illustrate the poems themselves, so then that gives me a sense of what they understand. And you often hear them talking about the poem as they're tutuing away with their pictures and stuff. And then we come back and we read it. (Years 3–4 teacher)

In my reading programme at this age group ... I'm very big on the children not having to write answers, like comprehension questions. They're not given comprehension questions. Usually I'll give them a graphic organiser and they get to choose if they're drawing a picture or writing. So a lot of my low ones ... actually get much more detailed comprehension, by drawing their picture and then explaining to me what's in it and then talking to me about it. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Some teachers of older students used student-oriented dialogic approaches such as literature circles.

One of my favourite ways of doing say a novel study would be in a literature circle. You have groups of five or six and each kid has a role which is assigned. And as much as possible once

you've taught them how it works you stand back and let them have the conversation. It's the most powerful thing when you can allow the kids to have the conversation rather than them having to listen to you. I think it gives the kids more buy-in, more ownership, and more power for themselves. I think it's good when kids start to learn that the learning just doesn't happen from teacher to the student. (Years 7–8 teacher)

Teachers preferred alternative approaches to comprehension questions for two main reasons. One was that such approaches were not dependent on students' writing skills.

A kid who's read a book with you could understand it quite deeply, but if they're writing isn't really up to scratch, two things will happen. One, they won't be able to communicate how well they understand the book, or how well they infer and all that stuff. Or they'll just cop out and give you a bare-bones answer because they don't want to write. (Years 3–4 teacher)

And another was because such approaches enabled students to engage in deeper levels of analysis and interpretation—that is, more complex thinking—than answering questions would.

I do use ... graphic organisers rather than a list of comprehension questions because [then] it's not [a case of] 'I've answered it [the question]' and it's over. It's more, 'I've actually got to think about the why's and the where's. How everything links together' when you do one of those graphic organisers. They do take a bit more training for the kids to realise but I do think you get better out of them by using it. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Opportunities to be an author

Finally, teachers described providing their students with opportunities to think about what it means to be an author, and to be authors and storytellers themselves.

I wrote a poem about piwakawaka because the kids were interested in birds. And she [one of my students] ... went and wrote a poem about caterpillars so that became our poem for the following week. And so that was really cool. And we're reading her work. And we actually ended up recording it for our radio that our school does every month. So, she's, you know, she's a published author who has an audience of a few dozen. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Using something like Seesaw where they've done a story and they can read it back to their parents and show them their picture and show them their writing it gives them an audience. And that then gives a little bit more impact. (Year 2 teacher)

Having their writing up on the wall ... it's saying look this is your writing and people are going to read it, so it's there to be read ... And so they've then become the reader of their writing and they understand there is an audience for it. (Year 2 teacher)

I try and put that through into their writing as well; you know someone's going to read your writing and you've got to create a picture in their head of what you're thinking and what it looks like. (Year 2 teacher)

What I have noticed with the kids is that, not the whole class, but there will be a small pocket of kids who will get into the language. And I start hearing them in their own writing using the language that we've unpacked in the story or in a poem, or something else because you know we spend a lot of time playing with words. And recently a couple of my students have been making little books and one of them wrote a whole story about sasquatches because in the *Imaginary Vet* story [I read them] it's about a sasquatch ... and we actually unpacked that a bit when she read it to the class: 'So where did you get your idea from? You know, authors can get their ideas from other writers. Isn't that fantastic?' (Years 3–4 teacher)

Were teachers' hopes for their students as readers realised?

While student outcomes were not a direct focus of the interviews, many stories emerged about the impact of the approaches discussed in this chapter in terms of engaging students in reading. Teachers described noticing large shifts in student engagement across their class.

I've noticed that the attitude in reading when I started was really, really low. And just that unstructured, you [can] read what you want sort of approach has brought, is bringing academic results. But it's also just, it's an acceptable thing to finish your work and go to the library corner and read. And that culture shift in my class is probably the coolest thing this year. [*So how was it at the beginning of the year?*] They didn't like reading. (Years 3–4 teacher)

When we finish activities at school, the one thing they do afterwards is go into the library corner, grab a cushion and just go and lie on the floor and read ... Then the kids are happy, the kids will laugh. 'Can I go in the library corner?' and 'Can I get a book?' 'Can I just sit and read a book?' 'Absolutely.' (Year 2 teacher)

There were also many stories of individual students who became engaged and competent readers.

I'm thinking of a boy in my class who hated reading, and we had temper tantrums all the time. And now two terms in he loves reading. It's his thing, like coming and sharing his reading with me. And the kids know me as the reading teacher if that makes sense ... And I don't think all of the boys care but I do think there are boys that latch onto the fact that there's a male teacher reading. (Years 3–4 teacher)

I remember having a student who was quite, well his behaviour was very, very challenging. And I was reading ... a story about a little boy who was in a coma and he was telling the story from his comatose state. And it's about everything they do to try to help him to come out of his coma after he's been in a car accident ... And this particular little boy always sat right at the back as though he was disengaged. And we get to the end of the story and they bring this little boy's pet into the hospital and when his pet comes in and licks the boy's face he comes out of the coma. And as we were reading this part, as I'm crying—I'm crying as I'm reading—I hear this voice from the back of the classroom: 'I knew it, I knew it, I knew that was going to happen.' So, he had been listening, and been engaged in the story, he knew exactly what was happening. And in his mind, he already had an ending. And that was years ago but I just remember the power of that moment and what it taught me. That actually he was listening to every word I read, and he carried the story in his head which is such a tricky thing to do. And he'd made a prediction about what was going to happen, and he was just so happy that he was right. [*It mattered to him?*] It did matter to him, it mattered to him. (School leader)

One of the teachers measured the impact of her reader identity on students in decades, describing meeting previous students she had taught still remembering and carrying the pleasure with them of a teacher who read to them.

I know that a couple of times I've run in to students from you know 30 years ago and they've gone, 'I just remember when you used to read stories, remember nothing else but how I read stories'. And I think that's a lifelong impact ... I think you've made an impact on a child when they, as adults, go 'I just remember when you read us stories'. (Year 2 teacher)

Teachers' orientation towards text and meaning-making

Overall, the teachers' orientation towards text in the classroom tended to be closely aligned with their out-of-school orientation towards text in their own reading lives. In general, teacher responses suggested that they saw the value of a text as related to the purpose for reading it, rather than (or as well as) inherent in the text itself. They did not, overall, hold the belief that some texts have an inherent value that makes them of higher quality or better than others in all contexts, for all readers, or for all of time (that is, the idea of a literary canon). However, this was not a case of "anything goes". Teachers took great care over the texts they selected to read aloud or recommend to students. This involved a careful consideration of the text, the reader, and the context. Teachers also understood that the same text could be used in different ways for different purposes. These teachers expected that, like themselves as readers, their students would choose to read different texts to meet different purposes in different contexts. They understood the importance of the reader, in text selection, and considered the interests and personalities of individuals and groups of students in their classrooms to be a very important.

Likewise, the teachers' orientation towards meaning-making tended to be closely aligned with their own out-of-school orientation towards meaning-making. They provided their students with opportunities to formulate and discuss the merits of different interpretations of what they had been reading, rather than leading them towards the one right answer.

Summary

There were many similarities in the approaches teachers took to meet their aspirations for their students as readers. These included: sharing their own reader identities, largely through talking with students as fellow readers about books and reading; building relationships with students around text; exposing students to a wide range of text in terms of genre, content, difficulty, and modality; providing their students with opportunities to read, listen to, think, and talk about text for pleasure; providing their students with opportunities to engage with others around text; and providing their students with opportunities to engage deeply with text. The importance of many of these learning opportunities in supporting reading for pleasure is well established in the research literature (see, for example: Commeyras et al., 2003; Cremin, 2011, 2014; Cremin et al., 2007; Cremin et al., 2008; Cremin et al., 2018; Cremin et al., 2009; Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018; Klauda & Wigfield, 2012; Wilhelm, 2016; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016).

However, the findings from this study suggest that the teachers' orientation towards text may be as—if not more—important as the learning opportunities they provided. While some research into the impact of teacher orientation has been carried out internationally (see, for example, Bernstein, 2014), further research is needed, and especially in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

5. Contributing to a school-wide reading culture

This chapter focuses on what teachers had to say about their contributions to a school-wide reading culture. Some had greater opportunities to do so than others given their roles as school leaders or teachers with library responsibilities. The voices of the teachers in our study holding these positions therefore tend to predominate in this chapter.

Being a reading role model to students in different classrooms

As well as building communities of readers in their classrooms, many of the teachers described contributing to the reading culture of the school more generally. These teachers described how they maintained reader relationships with children they had taught, long after they had left their classes. One of the school leaders described how, when she was still a classroom teacher, she recommended a book to one of her junior-school students for when she was a bit older, and that same student picked up the conversation with her again about the book several years later.

I was teaching I think Year 2s and 3s at the time and while they were reading, I was reading this book, which is probably for readers Years 7 and 8 ... I remember saying to this one particular girl, 'This is a book when you're a little bit older you can read because it's got some ideas that are for older kids.' And I remember the day that she read it, I think she was probably Year 5 or 6, she came and showed me. She said, 'I'm going to read this book. I can read this book now, can't I?' And I said, 'Yes, okay yes.' So I think it's being the role model and also talking really positively about books, 'cause reading for some of our children is really difficult. (School leader)

Other teachers described how they made a point of talking about books and reading, not just to the students in their own class, but to other students as well when the opportunities arose.

I think if you are a reader, kids overhear you talking about it sometimes. I mean I've got 6-year-olds, but also some of the older girls, you know the senior girls. You hear them talking, and you're going, 'Oh that book. Have you read this one?' (Year 2 teacher)

One of the school leaders describes how she deliberately modelled what it means to be a reader to the students at her school. For example, she described making a point of going to read her book in the school library when students were there and talking with students as a fellow reader about what they were reading.

I'll pop into the library when classes are there, in there you know with my book. (School leader)

I still love to go in when there are kids doing book choosing in the library. Children want to talk to you about what they're reading. (School leader)

Using and supporting the school library

Many of the teachers commented on the value they placed on the school library as a place dedicated to reading for pleasure. They also saw the school library as having an important role in helping to sustain a school-wide reading culture. Two described it as the “hub” of the school.

I think it's vitally important that libraries continue at schools ... The library is the hub ... just having a place that's dedicated to reading and the enjoyment of reading. (Years 3–4 teacher)

I like to call it sort of the hub of the school and we're not there yet ... but I guess my vision would be that it would be the hub and everything would flow from it. (School leader)

One teacher who had recently moved to a new school compared the difference in the ways in which the library was valued and used in these two different schools.

The library is, for a lot of kids, their favourite place at school. And my current school is now looking at pushing the library more because it had been neglected over the last few years as just a place to go and get a book. A lot of classrooms don't even visit the library. So that's our big push now is getting children back into the library, back into the routine of actually going there and getting books. (Years 3–4 teacher)

For these teachers, maintaining the primary purpose of the school library as a place for reading was paramount.

The library is really important to me at school you know and when I hear about schools that are putting their library books on trolleys and putting them in hallways and wheeling them around to classrooms I get quite upset ... We know the library is a great space, it is flexible on multi use but it is first and foremost a library. (School leader)

To this end, one teacher described his plan to remove games from the school library to ensure the primary purpose of the library as a place for readers and reading was maintained.

Next term I'm getting rid of all the games. It's controversial I know. I don't mind kids in there colouring but I make the colouring very themed on the books, so it'll be [for example] *Charlotte's Web* colouring things. (Years 3–4 teacher)

This same teacher described his abhorrence of the use of the school library and library time to teach or assess library or other reading skills.

To me it's really, really vital that library isn't reduced to going in to learn library skills. I've had arguments with people over it in the past. The library is for reading for enjoyment. You get children who grab whatever books, it's a time where you're not going to test them, you're not going to ask them about the book that they've read. You're just going to let them find books and enjoy. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Representing and promoting the school library

One of the research participants was a teacher with library responsibilities and another had held this role at their school in the past. Both emphasised the importance of having someone in the school responsible for promoting the library school-wide.

I made an announcement at assembly the other day that I've now bought all the David Walliams books. And just by saying that you have all the children coming back into the library trying to find them and get their hands on one. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Both also agreed on having someone recognised across the school as representing the school library and reading for pleasure.

They [students] know you [the teacher with library responsibilities] are a reader and they trust you so they will ask you, 'Have you read this book?' When I was the teacher in the library the kids thought I had read every book in the library which is very, very untrue. But they'd come and say, 'Tell me about this book, do you think I'll like it? What's it about? Have you read this one?' (School leader)

These two study participants also emphasised the need for the library to be well resourced and well stocked with reading material of interest to today's students.

The library has got to stay current I think and that's where the library sort of lost its way. It stopped putting the money into the library books. Like we've got lots of *Goosebumps* but they're not what kids want to read these days ... Whereas my last school was very, very much there was a huge budget for the library, and a few dedicated support staff. (Years 3–4 teacher)

These two study participants along with other teachers highlighted the value of having a dedicated school librarian, as well as classroom teachers, to take on the role of representing and promoting the school library. One of the reasons for this was, again, related to questions of identity.

The children identify with the librarian because she recommends books and she knows them and she can help you choose them and she reads to them and reads fantastically. So, kids enjoy the library scenario because that's all about books. (Year 2 teacher)

I've never worked at a school with a dedicated librarian. I do think probably dedicated librarians would be much better. Like as a teacher librarian role I am split and can't put as much effort into promoting the reading culture at a school that I would like in a fully dedicated role. (Years 3–4 teacher)

We have employed a librarian in our library now which is really good and she understands the importance of story and books. And she talks about getting books into children's hands. And sometimes it's also getting books into teachers' hands. (School leader)

As signalled at the end of the quote above, another benefit of having a school librarian was to support teachers, as readers and as teachers of reading.

I guess for us, why we have a librarian is so teachers can go in and say, 'Hey look, I'm thinking of this sort of a book. Have you got some books around this theme?' (School leader)

The school library also provided a place for communities of readers to form and meet, for example, among student librarians.

Simply by being the library teacher you get a whole bunch of kids that will attach themselves to you ... I've got my little circle of seniors now and they just want to be in the library and be part of that community ... They get quite protective over ownership of the place. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Running school-wide reading events or activities

Teachers described the value of a range of school-wide activities to promote reading for pleasure. These activities included Book Week, doing a simultaneous reading day, author days, cross-class buddy reading, reading competitions, Guess the Reader and Look Who's Reading Now competitions. Some participated in regional or national events such as Lit Quiz and Author Quiz.

One of the teachers in our study described setting up and running the Lit Quiz in a school that did not initially have a very strong reading culture, and how, through this, he built a thriving reading community. Early members of the Lit Quiz group were students on detention at the time the group was being established. These students went on to become key members and advocated for Lit Quiz in their school which eventually became so popular that students had to compete for places on the team.

It was definitely not very popular. It was a reasonably low decile school ... And I had to struggle to get children to join in the first year. The first year I had practices while having kids in on detention. The kids on detention ended up going to the quiz. And over the 4 years I think we did it four times. Four or five times at that school. By the 5th year we were running trials to get into the team. (Years 3–4 teacher)

The main appeal for teacher and students alike was not winning but being part of a community of readers.

We always came last at the actual quiz except for the last 2 years where we came second to last. And the kids used to join just because they enjoyed joining the team, and it got them reading. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Such was the enjoyment of being part of a community who read and discussed books together that the Lit Quiz group then wanted to form a book club.

What some of the kids wanted last year, but I left the school, was they wanted to follow it through into setting up a book club. So, I think a lot of it was proving that they've read the books and what they can remember, but also just meeting up to discuss books as well. (Years 3–4 teacher)

The same teacher also arranged for students to participate in the local Author Quiz, and again, the students involved formed a strong reading community that was more about the pleasure of reading and sharing books together than reading strategically to win the quiz.

Yeah for me it wasn't about [how well we did], it was always about the enjoyment and just giving another reason to read. (Years 3–4 teacher)

And for the students, being part of a reading community seemed to eclipse participation in the quiz itself as the main motivation for attending. Students became more motivated to read what other members of this reading community were discussing, than reading for the purpose of the quiz.

They would come in and say, 'I've been reading this book. It was really, really cool.' And then, despite the fact that I'd been trying to get those kids to go read a different genre, for certain they'd go and read what the other kids had already read sort of thing. (Years 3–4 teacher)

There's a book and it's set in New Zealand ... about a girl who grew up in a cult ... And I ended up reading half of it and some of the kids took it off me to finish it. And then it just got passed around, so everyone had read it. But no one would read *Lord of the Rings* because none of them wanted to read it. So definitely just meeting up, and having a little quiz, they would then go off and quiz themselves and share. (Years 3–4 teacher)

Building communities of readers among school staff

The principal in this study highlighted the importance of building a community of readers, not just among the students in the school, but also among the staff. She described how, when she was a syndicate leader, she would sometimes dedicate syndicate meeting time to reading for pleasure in the school library.

I remember when I was leading a syndicate I used to have sessions where we would just go to the library and we would read. And I would just say today we're just going to read. I want you to go and get some books, find a quiet space, just have a read ... It was a little bit controversial really 'cause some people found that very easy but some people didn't ... I mean, some teachers will say I'm not a reader, I read stuff on my phone or read for information but for pleasure is different. (School leader)

Most teachers described having reading buddies on the school staff with whom they shared and talked about books. Six teachers described belonging to book clubs attended by other members of their school staff. Sometimes these included members of the wider school community, such as the partners of teachers and parents.

In this particular one [book club] that we've joined recently there are four of us from school, four of us, a couple of parents from school and then just sort of random other people. (Year 2 teacher)

So the book club last year we had only about six staff in our book club but we're going to have 12 this year but a lot of them aren't from our school. There's one of the staff's wives in it instead of him ... One of them is one of our relieving teachers. (Years 7–8 teacher)

One of the teachers in this study described setting up a reading for pleasure library in her school's staff room made up of books brought along by staff members for others to borrow. This quickly grew and was used by teachers, teacher aides, and some parents.

A couple of years ago I started just bringing lots of books in and then other staff started as well and now we've got eight bookshelves in our staffroom filled with our staff shared books that we can lend to each other. And they're just, you know, take a book if you want something to read. And some of the staff take it for their partners if they're not big readers. So that's actually getting quite large now. A lot of the teacher aids take books. There would probably only be a couple that don't really read anything. (Years 7–8 teacher)

The importance of leader support of reading for pleasure

Despite their strong beliefs in the value they brought to the classroom, some teachers expressed concern that the value of reading for pleasure was not always understood by others, and that this could be a problem, especially if such views were held by school leaders

Despite believing that their approach to reading involved intellectual challenge and hard thinking, some teachers raised the concern that reading and talking about text for pleasure was not always valued by school leaders, especially with the advent of National Standards and the focus on lifting student reading achievement. One of the teachers talked at length on this.

You could be the biggest reader in the world, but if you teach at a school where you're not allowed to go off script or follow your own passions in the classroom, it becomes a bit meaningless. (Years 3–4 teacher)

I've been very lucky that both my schools I've had a management where taking half an hour, or sometimes longer, to just read a book [aloud to children] after lunch has been not only okay but encouraged ... I'm talking more about just reading a novel for the sake of reading a novel. (Years 3–4 teacher)

He reflected on the challenge he had faced as a younger teacher at a previous school whose immediate manager/syndicate leader did not see the value of reading for pleasure. Despite this he

was able to continue with his approaches, because the senior leaders in the school did see the value in what he was doing.

I could imagine if you were at a school where that isn't as encouraged or everything needs to have a [direct achievement] link [it could be difficult] because I had managers where that was their belief. Up the food chain that wasn't their belief so it was fine. I could see that being really difficult and you wouldn't be able to do that sort of stuff. (Years 3–4 teacher)

This experience made him aware of the challenges other teachers faced.

I've talked to a lot of colleagues who work at schools where they have to teach reading at a certain time, have to teach maths at a certain time. Where everything needs to be very clear learning. (Years 3–4 teacher)

This challenge is more likely to be a problem for beginning teachers who have less experience and less power in their schools. Interestingly, the teacher who spoke most about this challenge was the one with the least years of experience teaching.

This finding highlights the importance of school leaders understanding themselves the benefits of reading for pleasure in their schools.

Possibilities for extending school-wide reading communities

Many of the teachers talked about the ways in which they supported reading among students across the school through explicitly and implicitly modelling what it means to be a reader. Several mentioned the important role of the school library as a place dedicated to reading, and the school librarian or teacher with library responsibilities as representing and promoting reading for pleasure across the school as well as supporting the development of cross-school reading communities among students. Many of the teachers belonged to informal or more formalised reading communities, such as book clubs, that included other staff members and sometimes parents from the wider community. These spontaneous emergent communities provide models of what could be developed more deliberately by schools interested in building a community of readers beyond their school gates to include students' parents and whānau, with all the benefits such communities are shown to entail in terms of making connections and building relationships.

6. Discussion

The question of how we might better engage students in reading for pleasure is an important one given research findings indicating a steady decline in reading enjoyment among children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand over the past two decades.

The purpose of this research was to learn how we might better engage students in reading for pleasure by talking with teachers known as passionate readers about their own reading experiences and their engagement with students around text in their classrooms. This study rests on the assumption that the ways in which teachers engage with students around text is related to their orientation towards text (their knowledge, beliefs, and practices), which is in turn related to their own experiences with text over the course of their lives.

Although not a direct purpose of this study, the findings provide some indication of what makes a reader—at least for the nine teachers involved. These teachers had in common several key experiences, especially as young children. All but one saw themselves as readers from a very young age. These teachers also described having one or more members of their whānau who read themselves and talked with others about their reading. All described the joy of reading independently and the experiences of escape, calm, connection, wellbeing, and belonging associated with their reading. Nearly all identified a text from childhood that had an impact—often related to a connection they made with the characters, setting, or theme—which they carried with them into their adult lives. All but one experienced reading as a social as well as a solitary activity, recommending books to others and sharing their opinions about what they had read, their questions or wonderings, or the insights they had gained. Nearly all belonged to book clubs of various types, and some had done so for decades.

The teachers also shared a similar orientation towards text, believing in the legitimacy and value of many different types of text for different purposes. They shared an understanding that different readers have different reading preferences, and that these can change according to context. These teachers also had a similar orientation to the act of meaning-making. They shared an openness to the possibility of different interpretations of text. Several described discussing with others their differing ideas about how the more ambiguous or indeterminate aspects of the texts they read might be interpreted, as one of the great joys of reading.

Teachers' aspirations for their students as readers aligned closely with their own beliefs and values about reading in their out-of-school lives, and the benefits they had experienced from being readers. These benefits included: a sense of wellbeing; a sense of connection to characters, places, and ideas in the texts they read, and with other readers; the capacity to understand perspectives different from their own and to have empathy towards others; a sense of belonging; broadened horizons and understanding of a world beyond their own immediate experiences; agency to make meaning of text, as a lifelong reader, and in the world more generally; and the desire to tell their own stories.

So, what did teachers do in the classroom to realise these aims? And how did these reader teachers engage with students around text? The answer is—in remarkably similar ways. These teachers described exposing their students to a wide range of text—in terms of genres, in terms of topics and

themes, and in terms of difficulty. They read picture books, novels, poems, and non-fiction books. They read books with vocabulary and sentence structure that were very simple, and those that were difficult. They read books about weather, planes, dinosaurs, death, loneliness, friendship, survival, and war. They did so by reading aloud to children, and through the books they provided in their classrooms and promoted at the library.

These teachers described sharing their own responses to text—including their emotional responses (they laughed and cried), their interpretations of ambiguous aspects of text, and the personal connections they made. In other words, they responded to text as a *reader*. In doing so they provided permission for students to do the same. Most importantly, they provided space and time to talk about text because they saw the value in this type of engagement. This, after all, was one of the main purposes of reading.

The conversations teachers had with children around text were not evaluative in nature. The purpose of talk around text read for pleasure was to think deeply about the text and to learn more about the characters, settings, ideas, and to learn more about themselves, and each other. These were first and foremost relationship-building conversations—they were about building relationships with texts, characters, settings, and authors and about building relationships with each other. These were the types of conversations that readers have with each other in the out-of-school world. These were reader-to-reader conversations. The act of meaning-making was often collective and involved bringing personal experiences and knowledge to bear as resources for all in the shared endeavour of building interpretations. It involved keeping an open mind to alternative ways of thinking about characters, events, and themes. This approach to reading could therefore be used in culturally inclusive, responsive, and sustaining ways.

Teachers told stories of children becoming engaged with reading, sometimes for the first time in their schooling lives. Some teachers also observed that a focus on reading for pleasure resulted in academic shifts, especially with children who had previously struggled with reading. Some teachers had evidence of the longevity of their impact, such as the teacher who described meeting up with students she had taught 30 years before, who still remembered her as, “the teacher who read us stories”.

Implications

We already know from the existing research literature that the classroom activities the teachers in this study engaged in support reading for pleasure. The research literature tells us that activities such as reading aloud to children, talking with children about text, going to the library, providing time for independent, free-choice reading, and providing spaces and places to read support reading for pleasure. These are things that all teachers can do. However, the findings from this study suggest that teachers who are themselves readers bring to the classroom a “something extra” that cannot be replicated, and this relates to their identity as readers. As one of the teachers in this study observed, “Students will identify with teachers who are readers.” Students know. Students can tell the difference.

Implications for school leaders

Not all teachers are readers; not all teachers read for pleasure. Some are swimmers, musicians, scientists, artists, cooks, chess players, gamers, dancers, athletes, gardeners, builders, historians, or linguists. As several of the teachers in this study observed, primary and intermediate teachers bring with them to the classroom a wealth of riches. But teachers who are readers bring a value that should not be overlooked or underestimated. And if we want our students to become readers themselves,

we need at least some members of all schools to fulfil this function. And as illustrated in this study, it only takes a couple of passionate reader teachers to build around them a growing community of readers among students, staff, and even the wider community. What school leaders can do is listen to and support the endeavours of these teacher readers. They can also provide financial and other support for the school library and the teacher with library responsibilities. School leaders can also model being a reader themselves, simply by going along to the school library now and then to engage in their own reading for pleasure.

Implications for policy makers, ITE, and PLD

The focus on reading for pleasure in policy initiatives, initial teacher education, in teacher professional development, and in curriculum support materials on reading, waxes and wanes. Over the past two decades there has been a heavy focus on lifting student achievement in reading. Interestingly, students' reported enjoyment of reading has declined steadily and consistently over this same time period. Some of the older teachers in our study reflected on their own training and early careers when reading for pleasure had greater prominence and was more explicitly valued. The teacher earliest in his career described experiences of his own and colleagues of leaders questioning the value of some of the practices associated with reading for pleasure, even practices that are associated with increased student engagement and achievement. So perhaps it is time to strengthen this focus on reading enjoyment once again. All teachers can support reading for pleasure. But the gold standard, at least according to the teachers in this study, is teachers who themselves are passionate readers. The teachers in our study developed their reader identities very early. But it is never too late to become a reader. So, this is something that initial teacher education and ongoing teacher professional learning and development could focus on, especially for teachers in the junior school.

Implications for research

This research explores the practices that passionate readers engage in with students around text. We know that these teacher readers can have a positive impact on student reading engagement. To understand how this happens for different students we would need to observe the interactions between these teacher readers and the students in their classrooms, and we would need to talk with the students themselves. There is an opportunity for further research into the experiences of students with teachers who engage with text as fellow readers in the classroom, and the extent to which students take up the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and values towards text held and modelled by their teachers.

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