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Introduction: Answering the Call

I ask those of you who are truly concerned about reading instruction to become my partners in igniting a passion for reading in schools. I ask you to raise your voices in faculty meetings and college classrooms, in literacy conferences and at parent nights and educate people about aliteracy—the “invisible liquid seeping through our culture.” And then... offer your listeners hope, ideas, and solutions for change.

— Steven Layne, *Igniting a Passion for Reading* (p. 13)

Books have power. They have the ability to inspire, motivate, encourage, move, and change their readers. For years as teachers we have invested in refining our craft through professional reading, studying various books about creating a skilful reader. We worked diligently to ensure our instruction addressed phonetics, fluency, semantics, syntax, and comprehension. We were led by the work of Pearson et al., Harvey & Goudvis, Keene & Zimmerman, Gear, and others, all who revolutionized our understanding of reading and what proficient readers do, as they identified and labeled the thinking strategies consistently used by proficient readers as they make meaning from text (i.e., activating background knowledge, making connections to schema, questioning, visualizing, inferring, determining important ideas, synthesizing). It was as if Harry Potter himself had lifted the invisibility cloak and allowed us to see for the first time the invisible actions that take place in the reader’s brain. Reading research changed our understanding, not only as reading teachers, but also as readers ourselves. We suddenly became acutely aware of the active thinking that was taking place in our own heads as we engaged with text. To be considered a skilful reader, you have to demonstrate an ability to monitor your comprehension while you read and use the comprehension strategies to make meaning.

As a literacy coach and a literacy consultant we have been blessed with the opportunity to work alongside many teachers who work tirelessly to provide the best instruction they know. We diligently modeled reading strategies that Keene and Zimmerman had identified for us; we used the tangible lessons and

activities with students that were detailed by Harvey and Goudvis; and we made sure to provide ample opportunities for practice. Our conferences were timely and focused and we could see that our students were becoming skilful readers. This brought a sense of pride and joy to daily interactions with our colleagues and students. Our pedagogy and practice was elevated to a new standard, and our students grew and developed as strategic readers. We are forever indebted to these literacy leaders for changing our beliefs and practice. And our students have reaped the benefits.

Just as we were becoming comfortable in explicitly teaching reading strategies, a new reader seemed to emerge in our classrooms—the skilful reader who chooses not to read. We were not alone in witnessing this phenomenon, as other literacy teachers were also beginning to see skilful readers sadly lacking the will to read. These students do not see value in reading, nor do they enjoy reading as a pastime. As a result of identifying these self-identified non-readers, reading teachers and researchers began to consider readers' interests, attitudes, and motivation as part of what it means to be a true reader. It became apparent that, along with teaching the skills, we needed to address and invest in developing the will to read. After all, what good are the skills if you do not have the will?

We longed for our students to see reading as a rewarding experience, to enjoy reading as a pastime, to choose to read in their spare time, and to carry an enthusiasm for reading beyond the classroom. We knew these to be admirable and worthwhile aspirations. What teacher doesn't dream for this to happen for students? However, we were acutely aware that there were obstacles we would have to contend with in our quest to turn students on to reading. For example, some students enter our classrooms with a sour taste in their mouth from reading the wrong things or having unsuccessful reading experiences in the past. Others have little time left for reading pursuits in their jam-packed schedules; some are glued to their phones and consider their devices another appendage. But we were willing to jump, leap, and tear down these obstacles in our mission to create wilful readers. Transferring and turning reading ambitions into reality means our explicit instruction must directly address these goals. Strategy instruction is simply not enough to ignite reading passion. As teachers, we have the responsibility, the obligation, and the duty to create an environment where kids flourish into readers who have the skill and the will.

In this book we offer classroom-based solutions that have been developed, tested, and refined over a number of years in many classrooms. It is built around six essential steps:

1. Sharing Your Reading Life
2. Knowing Your Students
3. Modeling the Habits of a Reader
4. Making the *Why* of Reading Visible
5. Creating the Space
6. Nourishing the Will to Read

With it, you can take reading instruction beyond teaching the skills to addressing the will.

In *Cultivating Readers* you will discover how to foster reading engagement through an active reading community. You will be compelled to reflect on the way in which you currently teach the will of reading, and be inspired and motivated to incorporate new ideas and strategies into your practice—to do what you do even better, just as we have!

areas of need. When we examined our classroom through the lens of reading, our observations indicated that most students were able to

- accurately read grade-level text
- read with expression and intonation
- read text fluently
- talk about their reading
- identify comprehension strategies they were using to help them make meaning

We were pleased to see students who were capable, skilful readers. It was abundantly clear that our strategy instruction had met its mark. Strike up the band, let's celebrate! Getting those results took a lot of work—kudos to us and our kids. Our students could read accurately and fluently, and could make meaning from text.

However, before the reading party got started we were dismayed to discover students who

- were not excited to read (*"Ugh! Can we read for only 10 minutes today?"*)
- didn't talk passionately about the text they were reading (*"It's an okay book."*)
- were not aware of their reading preferences (i.e., genres or authors) (*"I don't know what I like to read. I don't really have a favorite author."*)
- rarely shared what they were reading with their friends (*Asking the class if anyone had a great read to share resulted in blank stares and the sound of crickets.*)
- often chose books that were not age-appropriate or thought-provoking (*Students randomly selected text at the last minute of book exchange.*)
- unaware of the rewards and value of reading (*"I read because my teacher and parents make me."*)

It was clear that many of our capable, proficient readers were the farthest thing from passionate readers—their will to read was lacklustre or even nonexistent. They didn't seem excited about reading. They didn't derive joy from independent reading. They weren't actively on the lookout for their next read. They were simply going through the motions to make us happy. Think about your own classroom—does any of this sound familiar?

We compared notes about our classes with friends and colleagues and began to arrive at a description of a new reading entity. Like Lewis and Clark, we entered uncharted territory, but instead of a wilderness what we discovered was a skilful reader with no will. This new reader is proficient but disengaged. When we started to investigate this reading phenomenon, we found we were in good company. Layne, Miller, and Kittle had all seen the same reader. This reader seemed to live in Texas, Illinois, and New Hampshire, and had evidently also crossed the border into Canada! We wondered if these readers really were a new phenomenon. Had they been lurking in our classrooms for some time, but avoided detection because we had been lulled into contentment by their reading ability? We naively had thought that skill and will automatically went together, that if we taught the skills, the will to read would take care of itself! Apparently not.

Unfortunately, readers without the will to read represent a pervasive issue experienced by many teachers in our system. Ontario's Education Quality and Accountability Office statistics show that reading achievement rates in Grades 3 and 6 have increased steadily over the last number of years. As part of this standardized testing, students in Grade 3 and 6 are also asked to complete a reading

survey. In particular they are asked to respond to the following prompt: *I like to read...* In the 2015–16 school year, 47% of Grade 3 students and 48% of Grade 6 students indicated they like to read “most of the time,” whereas just as many Grade 3 and 6 students indicated they like to read “sometimes.” This is part of a ten-year trend that shows a steady decline in students’ attitude toward reading in the province.

These statistics become even more alarming when you consider the body of research on the lifelong benefits of a positive attitude toward reading:

Students with a more positive attitude toward reading tend to be more successful in all subjects. They are more likely to read more and to seek deeper knowledge and consequently develop deeper conceptual understandings of the subject matter... (People for Education, 2011).

This is reinforced by PISA’s findings that students’ enjoyment of reading is one of the most important individual characteristics predicting higher achievement. As teachers, we know this to be true: students who read more develop a more extensive vocabulary, are constantly adding and building onto their background knowledge, are able to navigate text with confidence and ease. “Research also shows that ‘engaged’ readers are also more likely to be socially and civically engaged as well” (People for Education, 2011). There’s no denying it—cultivating a reading life has long-term benefits. Even though provincial, board, and classroom data indicate that reading achievement has steadily increased, the same cannot be said for reading engagement.

Underlying Causes for the Lack of Reading Will

Countless cups of tea and several glasses of wine led us to identify our top three obstacles to creating an engaged reader.

Too Many Activities

You name it, you can do it. And most kids do! We sat down and listed the activities students are committed to in just one of our classrooms. Check out this grocery list: speed skating, dryland training, hockey, ringette, soccer, diving, taekwondo, karate, dance, gymnastics, volleyball, basketball, piano, guitar, violin, voice, Guides, cooking class, youth group, art lessons, yoga, and cultural language classes. Gone are the days when children went outside to play after supper until the streetlights came on, as are the days when children picked one summer and one winter activity and maybe learned to play a musical instrument on the side. It is as if parents feel they are doing a disservice to their kids if they don’t enlist them in everything. In striving to create a well-rounded child, we inadvertently overschedule our children to the point where there is little time left for reading. Reading becomes an afterthought at the end of the busy day, squeezed in the last ten minutes before lights-out.

Too Much Technology

Think about it: Instagram, SnapChat, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, etc. And that’s just social media. Add to the mix game systems: Xbox, PlayStation,

Nintendo, Wii. And TV: cable, satellite, Netflix, Shomi, Amazon, and more all the time. All can be consumed in the palm of our hand on our phone, tablet, laptop, or on the large-screen TV. And it's not just at home: there's the DVD player in the car on the way to the grocery store and the screens at the gas station, emergency room, doctor and dentist's office. There is no escaping technology.

Mary

I remember being completely satisfied with the 13 channels we got on our 24-inch black and white TV.

Anne

I remember when I was the human remote control, getting up to reposition the TV aerial just to eliminate the snow from the screen of the one TV in the house.

No longer are cartoons sequestered to Saturday mornings between 7 and 11 o'clock. Children now have access to media 24 hours a day—and there are more than cartoons to see. For students inundated with other activities, screens can provide a welcome opportunity to sit and veg. They coax, entrap, and seduce them into wasting precious time that they could spend lost in an interesting book! As John Irving says, "Wherever the TV glows, there sits someone who isn't reading" (Irving, 1998).

Too Many Expectations

In our province, the Ministry of Education outlines overall and specific expectations for each subject area. There is a document each for Mathematics, Language, Science, Social Studies, Music, Drama, Dance, Visual Arts, Physical Education, and Health, and Grades 4–8 have French as well. Because the curriculum is so immense, teachers strive to make sure every moment counts and that their instruction is directly linked to curriculum. In Language alone, there are 75 specific expectations. Of the 18 that specifically target reading, none—zip, zero, zilch—address student interest and motivation to read, or explore the benefits and value of reading. Every single one focuses on students acquiring the skills.

Upon reflection, we realized that in our quest to create the skilful, proficient reader outlined in the curriculum expectations, we had completely failed to nurture the will to read. We left it out. When we looked back on our instruction, we could not find any evidence that we explicitly explored the will to read. We had clearly taught the skills. There was irrefutable evidence of that. But without a positive attitude and the motivation to use those skills, what good are they?

A Call to Action

Had we contributed to the aliteracy trend that Steven Layne so powerfully and eloquently speaks of? Because we now know there are two sides to that coin: being a complete reader involves both skill (phonetics, fluency, comprehension, semantics, syntax) and will (interest, attitude, motivation, engagement) (Layne, 2009).

In *Igniting a Passion for Reading*, Layne challenges us to create spaces where students develop a love of reading and recognize the value and importance of reading in their life. This plea is echoed by literacy leaders, including Kelly Gallagher, Penny Kittle, and Donalyn Miller, who inspire us to think deeply and critically about the importance of turning students on to reading. Surrounded by experts who have inspired us, we reflected on our current practice. While we were pondering how to develop the will to read in our students, the following questions emerged:

- How do I develop a reading community among my students?
- How do I create a classroom environment where children feel accepted and comfortable taking on the risks and challenges required to develop as a reader?
- How can I ignite a desire to read in a way that prepares students to enter the classroom with enthusiasm and purpose?
- How can I share my passion for reading with my students? (If you do not identify as a passionate reader, what impact will that have on developing your community? How can you potentially light your reading spark?)
- How might I share my reading life with the class in a way that will turn them on to reading? (If I do not see myself as an active reader, how can I begin cultivating a reading life?)
- In what ways can my students embrace reading outside of school?

In our relentless pursuit of answers, we embarked on a quest to find solutions for our students, ourselves, and our colleagues. These solutions have become our core beliefs for developing and fostering the will to read in students. We believe students must

- See reading as fun and enjoyable
- Understand that everyone grows and changes over time as a reader
- Realize that becoming a better reader takes time, effort, and energy
- See themselves as valuable members of our reading community
- Realize that we read for different purposes
- Understand that there is a world of text out there
- Know that authors matter and have something to say to us
- Uncover the vast number of reasons we read
- Value the connections with books and with one another we make as readers
- Discover their own reading habits
- Know that their teacher is a passionate, dynamic, enthusiastic reader
- Know that one of the defining characteristics of our classroom is that we are readers

Just as Debbie Miller tells us:

Once we know who we are and what we're about in the classroom, we become intentional in our teaching; we do what we do on purpose, with good reason. Intentional teachers are thoughtful, reflective people who are conscious of the decisions they make and the actions they take; they live and teach by the principles and practices they value and believe in. (Miller, 2007, p. 4)

Driven by these intentions, we embarked on a quest to translate what we believed to be true into explicit classroom practice.