# Chapter 5
# "Opportunity to Read": Student Voice as a Reading Engagement Enabler


In this chapter, we examine the issue of opportunity to read in schools that serve mostly disadvantaged students from low socioeconomic (SES) families. Beginning with a discussion on the literature and research on reading motivation and engagement, we argue that the conception of effective readers as motivated and strategic needs attention in its applicability among reluctant readers coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Often, disadvantaged readers exhibit a high level of reluctance to read in school alongside a persistent pattern of underachievement. In response, some teachers react by dumbing down the reading curriculum, focusing on basic skills training using controlling teaching practices. Such practices will unintentionally limit students' opportunities to engage in meaningful reading and hamper their reading enjoyment. We used data drawn from a case study based on repeated observations and interviews to describe how students' voices were utilized to drive the development of new reading practices that promoted reading for Year 4 students in a low SES school in Queensland, Australia. This case study illustrates how seeking, honoring, and acting on students' voices enable disadvantaged students to re-engage in reading with enjoyment.

**Case Vignette: Silent Reading—For Promoting Reading Engagement or Compliance to Classroom Rules?**

"The class enters after lunch break. They are talking noisily as they enter the classroom. The teacher (T2) stands at the door and tells them softly it is time for silent reading. He says, 'I am looking for the first five people to be reading silently.' Some students move to their desks, retrieve a book, and begin reading immediately. A majority move to the back of the room and start sifting through large plastic tubs that are full of books. The noise level reduces as the students select their books. T2 moves back to his desk and observes the students. He rewards five students by telling them they can select a friend and sit

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in a beanbag to read. Another five students are still sifting through the books, while two of the boys at a beanbag talk rather than read. T2 does not seem to notice these students are not reading. He is now sitting at his desk marking test papers. A girl gets up from her seat with a book, approaches T2, and begins to ask a question. However, he interrupts her, saying pointedly, "I am marking." She returns to her seat. T2 does not appear to notice the girls on the beanbags have moved so that he cannot see them. They chat. Isaac sits at his desk. He does not have a book so he plays with his pencil case and his hair. He intermittently chats to the students seated at his table. The teacher's laptop makes a loud noise. Many students stop reading and look up. T2 looks around the room and notices Isaac isn't reading. He moves to the back of the class, gets a PM level 2 reader, and gives it to Isaac without saying anything and then resumes marking. One boy is asleep on a beanbag, two girls have a conversation at the book tubs, and another boy flicks through the pages of his book, but does not read. T2 looks up again and this time asks Isaac to bring his book to the front. Together they sit and read the book. Although many students chat and giggle, T2 ignores them. After 28 min, the students are instructed to put their books away."

In this vignette, the teacher (T2) focused on superficial engagement in reading. Reading as a valued activity in this class was reduced to a form of behavioral management where the teacher was satisfied when students were holding a book. Students took advantage of this situation to chat, to rest, and to move around while the teacher was marking. The teacher did not read himself. He singled out Isaac and read with him because Isaac did not meet the minimum expectation of behavior engagement. A key question from this vignette is whether this form of engagement will ensure students have genuine opportunities to read and to read for understanding. This vignette was taken directly from an observation report of an Australian Research Council-funded project that looked specifically into classroom reading behaviors among economically disadvantaged students in schools situated in high-poverty suburbs in Queensland, Australia. Similar reading lessons were observed repeatedly in the participating schools over the duration of the 3-year project. The key questions are how to promote reading engagement for students coming from low SES backgrounds and in what ways their opportunities to read in school might be better supported.

As a special case of learning engagement, reading itself requires attention because reading is critical for academic success and participation in work, civic, and social activities. Without sustained engagement in reading, children find it difficult to cope with the increasing cognitive demand of academic and literacy tasks as they progress through the school years. Situating reading in the twenty-first century context, Alexander and colleagues (2012) draw our attention to reading as a goal-directed, strategic, and critical activity in which engagement is a significant element. Ng and Graham (2017) concur and argue

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that special attention is required to assist struggling readers and support their motivation to pursue reading and to develop capabilities that allow them to engage in literacy-rich economies as participating and literate actors.

In this chapter, we focus specifically on economically disadvantaged students who learn to read under the limitations of various constraints posed on them as a result of their socioeconomic conditions. While it is clear that these students need support from teachers to motivate them to read and to assist them to develop relevant strategies and skills, we have often seen teachers who decide to dumb down the curriculum, focusing intended learning activities on the development of basic reading skills and using controlling teaching strategies and the provision of extrinsic rewards to motivate reading engagement. Such practices make reading a chore as students are required to work routinely on repetitive practice tasks and comprehension worksheets that often do not interest them. Opportunities to read for enjoyment are limited. Inevitably, disengaged reading behaviors like those described in the vignette can be expected in these reading lessons. It is therefore unlikely that reading achievement gaps between disadvantaged and advantaged students can be narrowed if these practices are allowed to continue (Ng & Graham, 2017). To search for more engaging reading practices, we draw on data from a longitudinal study that examined effects of professional development to focus teachers on developing supportive practices to engage these students to read and open up new reading opportunities.

## Reading Motivation and Engagement

Reading is an effortful activity for meaning-making that is characterized by deep memory processing, connecting to background knowledge, monitoring, choices, and commitment (cf. Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2004). Students' reading motivation is critical for engaging in reading. A reader who is motivated will be likely to read more and to spend time and effort in reading, even when it involves challenging materials. Expectedly, reading motivation predicts reading achievement (e.g., Retelsdorf, Köller, & Möller, 2014) and better reading comprehension (e.g., Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007). Research (e.g., Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2009) has also shown that reading motivation accounts for unique variance in reading comprehension over and beyond that explained by other variables.

Reading motivation is a conceptual explanation of readers' "personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading" (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 405). This generic definition allows for different conceptualizations and measurement to be applied to research of reading motivation. In a conceptual review on research on reading motivation, Conradi, Jang, and Mckenna (2014) discussed research on cognitive enablers such as self-efficacy, agency, goals, and interest and showed how each of them promotes reading engagement. More

specifically, students' reading self-efficacy, defined as students' perceived abilities to complete a specific reading task, has been studied extensively. Students, who feel efficacious about their reading, read more and better, expend more effort in reading, and persist longer when reading difficult texts (e.g., Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Nes Ferrara, 2007; Schunk, 2003; Solheim, 2011; Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2009). Similarly, students who read as a result of personal interest in a topic or reading for enjoyment are typically engaged in reading with high levels of commitment and persistence. Additionally, students' intrinsic motivation for reading is positively related to reading performance (e.g., Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; Taboada et al., 2009; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006), and it contributes to the prediction of reading comprehension at various levels, even after controlling for other significant factors such as past reading achievement levels (cf. Guthrie et al., 1999; Taboada et al., 2009). Research by Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried (2001) and Wang and Guthrie (2004) provided empirical evidence about the long-term effect of intrinsic motivation on reading. Specifically, their research showed that students' intrinsic motivation in Year 7 relates to later reading achievement levels in Years 8 and 9.

Additionally, educational researchers (e.g., Ng, Bartlett, Chester, & Kersland, 2013; Nolen, 2007) have explored the positive effect of mastery goals on reading and reading engagement from an achievement goal perspective. Students who read with mastery goals are concerned about their comprehension and understanding (Meece & Miller, 2001). Much of their reading focus is on improvement and learning new knowledge. Research evidence has demonstrated that students who hold mastery goals for reading monitor their reading process, use effective comprehension strategies, and achieve deep levels of understanding (Botsas & Padeliadu, 2003; Meece & Miller, 2001; Nolen, 2007).

Aligning with these cognitive models, reading motivation can be conceptualized as multidimensional (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). For example, the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) contains a set of scales based on different dimensions of reading motivation (efficacy, challenge, curiosity, involvement, importance, recognition, grades, social competition, compliance, and work avoidance) which can be collapsed into cognitive variables of competence beliefs, extrinsic reasons, and social purposes for reading that have been adapted from major models of motivation (Klauda, 2009). Conceptualizing reading motivation as multidimensional highlights that students are motivated by various factors. Some read to develop their understanding, others read for enjoyment, while others read to demonstrate their abilities.

Despite differences in conceptualizing and measuring reading motivation (cf. Conradi et al., 2014), describing students' motivation for reading using a range of motivational dimensions provides a better understanding of how students engage in, and disengage from, reading. In particular, reading motivation includes both affirming and undermining motivations, and often these contrasting motivations are related (Schaeffner & Schiefele, 2007), suggesting that both forms of motivation are operating simultaneously among students. In addition to the dominant cognitive dimensions of reading, social dimensions, such as collaboration, have been increasingly

observed. This suggests that there is a need to look beyond an individual's mind frame and examine how reading is supported through social processes, such as promoting interaction and discussion in class, and to understanding the affective dimension of reading motivation (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009).

## Motivating Students to Read

Given the significant impact of these motivational variables, it is important to create an instructional context that supports reading motivation so as to facilitate reading engagement and enhance reading achievement. A major form of support is to use texts that students can read successfully, willingly, and with interest. In this way, students' senses of self-efficacy, interest, and personal relevance can be enhanced. Allowing choices of material for reading in relation to what and how to read sends an important message to students about their own agency as readers. In addition, there is a need to consider whether reading materials are personally relevant, how well they reflect students' personal experiences, and to what extent they accommodate diversity and prior knowledge. The extent to which students are given a chance to share, collaborate, and discuss their reading is an important instructional consideration for supporting reading and reading motivation from a social perspective. Focusing students on the importance of reading and communicating high expectations helps to promote students' motivation to read. In short, a supportive reading context promotes reading motivation and sustains reading engagement, which is likely to enhance reading achievement.

The development of reading intervention programs has drawn heavily on reading motivation studies. For example, Guthrie and colleagues (2007) designed the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) program to enhance students' reading motivation and provide instruction on reading strategies for comprehension in science and social studies. Empirical evidence supports the CORI program as effective in promoting reading motivation, engagement, and achievement (Guthrie et al., 2007). Another example of intervention is the Finnish Joy for Reading program (Ukkola & Korkeamäki, 2017) that specifically targets the development of reading for enjoyment utilizing a community-based approach to support, drawing from schools, libraries, and clubs in local communities.

## Economically Disadvantaged Students and Reading

While cognitive models have provided an empirical foundation for designing instructional interventions, the effort thus far to transact such knowledge into effective practice has not been consistent nor readily realized for students who are at risk of reading failure or who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Klauda and Guthrie (2015) found that low-achieving students did not benefit from reading motivation as

much as typically achieving students did. They argued that the connection between reading motivation and engagement should not be assumed for low-achieving or struggling students, most of whom are classified as at-risk and as coming from economically and culturally disadvantaged backgrounds. Certainly, more studies are needed if we are to understand better when and how reading motivation and engagement operate among these disadvantaged students. This is particularly important, as mounting evidence demonstrates that disadvantaged students from high-poverty backgrounds often lack motivation to read and tend to disengage from reading readily. These children may have avoidance motivation, a source that will reduce their time and effort for reading (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Blackberry & Ng, 2016).

Poverty impacts negatively on opportunities to read and hampers reading development and engagement. Students who come from poor families have limited language exposure, few chances to engage in vocabulary learning and joint reading activities at home compared to those from affluent backgrounds (Rashid, Morris, & Sevcik, 2005; Walker, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994). They come to school with a weaker language base and less-developed literacy skills compared to their middle-class counterparts. Many students who come from migrant or ethnically diverse backgrounds, such as Indigenous Australians, Hispanic, and African-Americans, as well as Asian migrants, are still in the process of developing their English language skills, while their mother tongue may act as a barrier to reading and writing in English. Their cultural resources may not be valued or considered relevant in literacy learning in school (Compton-Lilly, 2006, 2007). This puts disadvantaged students in a challenging position when they are required to understand, participate, and collaborate in literacy tasks that demand a level of language exposure and cultural understanding beyond their experience.

Complicating these issues in reading development are adversities derived from financial hardship, limited community resources, broken relationships, health issues, depression, and a lack of hope for better futures. In addition, disadvantaged students may have problems associated with their cognitive functioning including short attention spans and difficulties in regulating their concentration, monitoring work progress, and generating personal perspectives (Alloway, Gathercole, Kirkwood, & Elliott, 2009). Classrooms where these students seek out opportunities to learn and flourish are often under-resourced, with fewer books and limited access to digital technologies, and staffed by teachers with insufficient training to prepare them to work effectively with disadvantaged students. The literacy learning activities in these classes are often repetitive, rote-like, and unchallenging. In short, multiple risks are present in the individual, classroom, and in- and out-of-school contexts which hamper reading development and engagement for students from low SES backgrounds.

Nevertheless, schools and teachers still can play a significant role in rectifying negative consequences of poverty for reading development. Crowe, Connor, and Petscher (2009) discussed curriculum as a conduit for improving reading for poor students. Designing appropriate instructional strategies, such as using skill-based reading groups (e.g., Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta-Hampston, & Echevarria, 1998), can improve poor students' literacy skills and achievement

(Pressley et al., 2001; Foorman et al., 2006; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, and Hutchins (2011) studied large cohorts of low SES schools in rural regions in the United States. They found that students' schooling experiences, including teachers' positive perceptions of their ability, a sense of school valuing and belonging, and preparation for post-secondary education, predicted positive educational achievement and aspirations for rural youth from high- and low-poverty communities. Ng et al. (2013) have developed a reading intervention that utilized motivational support through email contacts with retirees to support disadvantaged students to learn structured strategies for reading. The important message is that schools and teachers using evidence-based practices can shape instructional contexts for better literacy outcomes of students from poor families.

To enhance teachers' capabilities in developing and rebuilding a learning environment aimed at re-engaging poor students with reading, it is important to recognize and address negative influences on reading and reading engagement in school. Issues such as lack of resources, lack of access to quality teachers, and limited family or parental involvement in school are important school-level influences that have contributed negatively to engaging poor students in reading. In addition to these well-documented issues, there are dominant discourses that put most of the causative blame on students themselves while limited effort has been made to secure and enhance their participation in reading education and in improving their reading engagement in school. Students' voices and perspectives seldom have been used to reform reading practices. This is a missed opportunity and resource that can be utilized by informed reform-minded teachers to improve reading.

It is important to assert that students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have the right to express their views about all the matters that affect their development, including reading engagement in school (UNICEF, 1989).

## Student Voice as an Academic Enabler for Reading Engagement

The research on student voice and using it to guide school reform has gained momentum in the past two decades in Australia, Britain, and the United States (e.g., Fielding, 2001; Levin, 2000; Mitra, 2004; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). Educational researchers such as Fielding, Levin, and Mitra have discussed the importance of student voice, utilization of students' perspectives for reform, and the possibility of engendering a cultural shift based on their voices. Student voice epitomizes involvement, participation, and, more importantly, a shift of power dynamics where teachers respect and endorse students' rights, knowledge, and agency. When teachers value student voice, they are likely to listen and respond to students' spoken and unspoken concerns, needs, and critiques. Whether student voice is sought through dialogue, collaboration or sharing of the leadership role, or

in different discourse forms such as storytelling, exchange, and critique, voicing is no doubt indicative of active engagement (Cook-Sather, 2006). Mitra and Gross (2009) distinguished different types of student voice activities using the "pyramid of voice" framework wherein voicing activities are classified into three levels—"being heard," "collaborating with adults," and "building capacity for leadership"—depending on how students are expected to be involved. As can be imagined, a deeper level of engagement in the form of partnership and agency is required by students at the upper levels of the pyramid of voice.

Student voice is a concept that has played a significant role in progressing pedagogical development. For example, Ranson's pedagogy of voice (Ranson, 2000) has built on student voice and advocated the need to include students' perspectives in the course of teaching. Seeking students' perspectives is a critical part of constructivist learning process where students construct their knowledge through conversation (Bruner, 1996). In addition, dialogic learning has inspired sociocultural theories of learning wherein the development of knowledge and new understanding are dependent on students' active exchange and dialogues (Van der Linden & Renshaw, 2004). In short, student voice is not a new concept and has been used quite extensively in advancing pedagogical research.

An important consideration when using student voice in progressing reforms and changes is that student voice is not an objective entity. To understand students' voices, there is a need to consider relevant sociocultural contexts that influence them. In the current case, students' reading engagement is constrained by important contextual factors, such as the valuing of reading at home and what opportunities are provided to read with peers in school. It follows that students' voiced perspectives and viewpoints may reflect such influences, which can go beyond the immediate classroom context and include effects, both positive and negative, derived from home and out-of-school contexts, such as reading through social media (MacRuairc, 2011). Using student voice to promote reading engagement for disadvantaged students requires careful consideration about how embedded contexts may influence students' expressed concerns, suggestions, and viewpoints.

There are benefits for incorporating students' perspectives in researching reading and reading engagement. First, disadvantaged students hold important and valuable knowledge about reading and how they experience it directly. Important insights about the effects of different types of reading in school can be developed by taking students' vantage points. Acknowledging their voices empowers these students and helps their teachers find effective ways to address these constraints and to capitalize on available affordances. Listening to them also endorses their authority and accepts their role as significant in improving classroom reading practices (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Listening to them will help teachers reflect on the design and implementation of reading programs, develop new practices, and use these results derived from students' perspectives to improve reading and reading outcomes.

Second, endorsing student's voices not only will empower them and promote participation in their own education; it also will avoid a deficit perspective toward reading education that inadvertently positions disadvantaged students as incapable of reading and achieving reading outcomes (Ng & Bartlett, 2013). Finally, listening

to students' voices can aid teachers' professional reflection and lead to more collaborative and solution-oriented environments for the learning and teaching of reading. In the context of developing engaging reading practices, listening to students' voices is a critical step in unfolding both intended and unintended consequences of reading activities and assessment.

## Orienting Teachers to Students' Voices

In a longitudinal project, the first and second author followed a group of Year 5 students from disadvantaged backgrounds in low SES schools in Queensland, Australia, over a 3-year period. The research focus was their classroom reading engagement. Over this period, selected students were interviewed, their reading classes observed, and their teachers' views about these students' reading engagement recorded.

Toward the end of the project, participating teachers and the research team collaborated on a professional development partnership that aimed to help teachers develop new engaging practices to support and enable their students to read with purpose and enjoyment. Seeking students' participation in the reform process was used as a means of developing engaging reading practices. To help teachers tune into the needs of students, the project provided participating teachers with professional workshops reflecting on interview and observation data collected from their classrooms. The selection and development of the professional learning materials were intended to arouse teachers' understanding of students' needs and the urgency of revising reading practices. In the sections below, we first explained the steps that we used to help teachers to tune into student voice, and thereafter, we present a case study of a teacher's year-long engagement in reforming reading practices in response to student voice.

### *Step 1: Reflecting on Research Findings*

A viable way to help teachers value students' perspectives is to provide them with an opportunity to reflect on students' comments and responses to their own teaching practices. In a professional workshop, the teachers were shown excerpts of observation reports and students' interview transcripts. They were challenged to think about why students had responded or behaved in the way that they had, as revealed in the reports and transcripts, and whether their perspectives about reading should be taken into consideration during the reformative process. By way of illustration, we challenged teachers to consider carefully the statement, "I am bored with reading" in one of the interview transcripts. The teachers were directed to consider various contextual factors and conditions including the nature of the reading task, the timing of the reading lesson, the extent to which students were allowed to read together,

and, specifically, the specific student's reading performance and home environment. This reflective process helped teachers understand students' perspectives and recognize the potential of using student voice in reforming reading instruction.

### *Step 2: Scenario-Based Learning*

It is important that teachers are given an opportunity to share their own views and have their voices heard in the promotion of reading engagement. We engaged participating teachers in a discussion about classroom reading scenarios that depict unsuccessful classroom practices and problematic reading behaviors based on the data from an earlier interview about, and observations of, their practices. In each written scenario, teachers were provided with detailed information about the reading context such as descriptions of reading activities involved, time and duration, and actions of, and interactions between, teachers and students. Teachers worked in a group to discuss the nature of the reading problem(s) from the perspectives of students and that of a teacher and suggested ways that the practice or promotion of reading within the context in each scenario may be improved. Two important outcomes that arose from the scenario-based professional dialogues were that teachers (1) were keen to improve their practices, having recognized the authenticity of the scenarios and recognized that they had experienced similar problems in their teaching, and (2) understood the significance of student voice and were keen to utilize this concept to improve reading practices.

### *Step 3. Voice-Seeking Heuristics*

Teachers were provided with training in relation to different ways to elicit student voice with a deepened understanding of the political nature of student voice. Teachers were warned against simplistic views about student voice and of the danger of equating voice to an individual while omitting the need to situate such a voice in the context where different parties contribute to its formation, interpretation, and even distortion. There is a need to carefully reflect on issues related to the imbalance of power, the tendency to select students who are well-behaved or good achievers, and the additional contextual constraints that may hinder the voicing and listening processes and the extent to which these issues need to be addressed in order to facilitate speaking and listening. Teachers were encouraged to seek student voices from multiple individuals to capture diverse and disparate views and experiences using different channels (e.g., forum, individual chat, questionnaire, observation) at different points in time. It is important to verify their understanding of students' perspectives through different methods including careful observation; noting of verbal and nonverbal responses including facial expression, gestures, and gazes; speaking with others, repeated talk and discussion; and, most importantly, using relevant

details derived from contexts and situations to frame their understanding. In effect, these guiding heuristics helped teachers avoid manipulative and tokenistic treatment of student voice (Fielding, 2004). It also enabled teachers to understand the importance of situatedness of student voice, hence the importance of continuously seeking students' perspectives as well as their voiced and unvoiced responses, across multiple occasions relevant to learning to read (Bragg, 2010; Fielding, 2004).

## An Example of Student Voice-Enabled Change

In this section, we describe a case study of a Year 4 teacher, Naomi (pseudonym), who worked in a state primary school located in a high-poverty Australian suburb where low SES students not only performed poorly in reading but also disengaged often from it. Naomi was one of several teachers who partnered with the research team to develop new practices to engage students to read and who used student voice as a guiding principle in doing so. Naomi found that seeking, utilizing, and building upon student voice to develop engaging pedagogical practices were challenging. She had never thought of seeking student participation to develop reformative pedagogy. However, she understood the significance of student voice following the training and wanted to capture the potential of this concept to develop new practices to promote reading for enjoyment for her students who often refused to read or avoided reading altogether.

The construction of this case study involved data collected over an academic year in Naomi's class, involving interviews with Naomi and most of her students ($n = 20$), records of professional meetings, classroom observations, and a collection of documents. Using multiple data sources facilitated triangulation of data from the perspectives of students and that of the teacher and ensured trustworthiness of results. This case is illustrative of how student voice may be used as an engagement enabler to develop engaging practices to promote reading for enjoyment. Pseudonyms were used in describing this case of student voice-driven change for promoting reading engagement.

### *The Context*

Building on its history of over 90 years, Kingford Primary School had a tradition of personalized learning. Its inclusive education program won an award from the state education department. Being set in a multicultural community, Kingford Primary School enrolled students from culturally and linguistically diverse families. The school's mission was to help all students to be successful and to develop their personal well-being. These foci aligned with the aim of the project, in which the school's teachers would seek partnership with students to improve their reading and reading engagement. As expected, students in this school had not done well in

national tests of literacy and numeracy. In the previous four rounds of national tests, students of Kingford Primary School in Years 3 and 5 performed poorly when compared to their advantaged counterparts in schools located in high SES suburbs.

The principal was supportive of the current project. Not only did he release several of his teachers from teaching duties to join the professional training, he also participated in some of the workshops with them. His leadership was vital for nurturing the university–school partnership in the project and enabled several of his teachers, including Naomi, to join the student voice study for reading improvement.

Naomi held a bachelor degree in primary education. At the time of research, she had 23 students in her class, 15 of whom were classified as English language learners from minority backgrounds. The research team had worked in this school for more than 2 years, and quite a number of students in Naomi's class had participated in previous studies about their reading in school and at home. Based on these previous student accounts, most of Naomi's students did not read at home due to a lack of reading resources and, more importantly, due to the fact that reading was not a valued practice in their families. Some parents did not sign a consent form for their children to borrow books from the school library fearing that their children might lose the books, resulting in them being financially responsible for the replacement of the book. This had made library visit for these students in Naomi's class rather unmotivating as they could not borrow any books. As a migrant herself, Naomi related to her students and understood their difficulties in learning and the lack of familial support that many of them experienced.

## *Initial Thoughts*

During the first research meeting, Naomi indicated that she had been thinking about the scenarios that they had worked through during the professional development workshops and the reading problem in her class, in particular, a lack of engagement of most students during silent reading. She indicated she wanted to make silent reading more purposeful for students and to develop support for them to become engaged and independent readers who would read with enjoyment. However, she was unsure about what "engagement" would mean in her class.

> I am a little concerned about what engagement might actually look like in a classroom. This year I have a class of 23 students with a range of reading decoding and comprehension abilities. While I have seven students comprehending "at" or "above" chronological age, the remainder of my students were reading at an instructional level below benchmark.

Naomi was concerned about her students' low levels of reading achievement, which might pose difficulties for them when attempting to engage in reading. This then became a focal point of discussion between Naomi and several other teachers attending the research meeting led by the research team. As a group, the teachers shared ideas about reading engagement and discussed the relationship between low achievement and reading engagement. A key question was whether disadvantaged

students could develop sustained engagement in an area of learning where they were performing less well, in this case, reading in school. This discussion challenged teachers' beliefs about disadvantaged students and their understanding of conditions that may contribute to students' low achievement and lack of engagement in reading. They affirmed their students' capabilities and shared observed occasions where low-achieving students showed keen interest in reading, as well as reading situations where their students were likely to disengage. Naomi spoke specifically about the need to avoid holding a deficit perspective and warned about the danger of attributing students' failure to read to deficiencies in skills, motivation, and other personal capabilities. Naomi focused her sharing on students' reluctance to read during silent reading and her intention to turn this daily event into an enjoyable time that promotes reading engagement.

> It was about mainly improving my practices with regard to whole-class reading. Not so much the small guided reading groups but more shifting away from the current silent reading and giving my students a little bit more of, ah, like, fun, that fun element in reading. So yeah, just improving, just helping them to become lovers of reading.

## *Partnering with Students and Honoring Their Voices*

Naomi recognized that she had an educational problem. Previously, the school practice relied on the assistance of a literacy coach to demonstrate effective instructional practices. Naomi had benefited from professional engagement with the coach. Nevertheless, silent reading was not the focus of this type of professional engagement due to the assumption that silent reading is a student-led reading time and teacher intervention or control seemed inappropriate.

Naomi considered it vital to talk with her students to seek their perspectives and views about silent reading. She arrived at this decision following the professional meeting with the research team. Several strategies were developed in relation to how she could effectively gather students' input about silent reading based on the guiding heuristics for voice-seeking. She started with speaking to the class in an open forum asking students to share their views and make suggestions to improve. As expected, her students who were unfamiliar with speaking publicly about their views did not respond enthusiastically during the open forum. Naomi reflected on her unsuccessful experience with the team, and it was collaboratively decided that speaking to students individually and observing them in different reading situations would be a better approach. Naomi was reminded of voice-seeking strategies including the importance of building rapport, communicating her genuine interest in students' views, allowing students to share freely, and promising to honor their views and to make changes. Students' accounts of this personal chat are unanimously positive, and they were pleased to talk about their likes and dislikes about silent reading with their teacher. The following excerpts testify to students' positive feedback.

Miss asked what I like to read. And I said I liked reading dinosaurs. (Nathan)

I was happy. No one asks me what I would like to read. Miss asked me. I told her I liked comic books. (Peter)

She cared about us. She asked me what I would like to read. (Carissa)

Naomi noted students' suggestions for changes. Following the heuristic, she observed students in different reading situations to ensure accurate understanding of students' sharing and that their suggestions for change were genuine. For example, many students shared that they disliked the classroom collection and suggested books that they would add to it. To verify this suggestion, Naomi observed students' reading during library visits to see if their choices matched their suggestions to include in the classroom collection. This voice-seeking and verification process took a month to conclude. Naomi consolidated a list of changes that her students suggested for the reading sessions and discussed with the research team about whether these changes were possible and reflected on the voice-seeking process before developing a plan to honor students' suggestions. Below is a list of changes that Naomi intended to implement in her silent reading sessions.

- Students are free to choose a spot to read in the class; they are no longer required to read in their own seat, but they can still do so if desired.
- Students can read with a friend or a group of friends; they are no longer required to read on their own, but they can still read alone if they choose to do so.
- Students are allowed to share their reading with friends provided that their discussion does not interfere with others' reading; they are no longer required to keep quiet during reading.
- Silent reading would be moved to the morning before the first break when students could read with a fresh mind.
- Students were provided opportunities to share with the teacher their reading materials.
- Students were allowed to read materials they brought from home and the library; they were no longer required to choose books from the classroom collection.

These changes were based on students' feedback and suggestions in response to the question about what could be done to make reading better during silent reading sessions. These changes endorsed student autonomy in enabling reading choices in relation to what to read and in what manner students read during the silent reading sessions. Responding to the research team's advice, Naomi held a meeting with her students to share the changes that she gathered from students and her plans to change. All the students were excited about the changes with some raising questions about whether they could still read alone as one of the suggested changes was to read together with friends. Naomi assured the class that both individual and group reading were encouraged. During this sharing session, Naomi also reinforced her intention to focus students on reading and reminded them that silent reading was time for their own personal reading and that discussion and collaboration were acceptable as long as students did not interrupt others' reading. Following this meeting, Naomi wrote up an action plan to guide her own implementation using an action plan template that the research team shared with her and other teachers.

During the implementation phase, Naomi explained that there was a need for continual "tweaking" during the change process. She gave an example of helping students who were unable to borrow books from the library. Naomi shared that students who were not allowed to borrow for whatever reason, parents wouldn't sign the borrowing form, then I would let them get the books out under me." In addition, Naomi shared that she needed to remind students about what they were expected to do. Naomi commented that "I set the expectations there and I kept saying to them—because reading is cool. You might not think that now but by the end of this time I want you to know—I want you to feel that."

## *Accounts of Improved Reading Engagement: The Teacher and Observation Results*

During the second semester, repeated classroom observations were conducted, following the implementation of these changes, which verified that the reformed silent reading sessions were effective in supporting and sustaining reading engagement. Naomi's students maintained a rather quiet classroom during silent reading sessions even though they were allowed to talk about their reading in the new arrangement. The time that students needed to start reading was shortened. Many were unwilling to stop reading at the end of the silent reading sessions resulting in Naomi's subsequent decision to extend the silent reading time to 30 min each day. Students were eager to share their reading and talked about what they had read. Initially, students were allowed to share with the class about their reading at the end of the silent reading session. Subsequently, due to time constraints and students' keenness to share, Naomi had set aside extra time at the end of each school day to facilitate the sharing of reading. These observed changes support the claim that students' reading engagement had improved following the implementation of student voice-based changes.

During an interview following the changes, Naomi shared with the research team her perspective about students' improved reading engagement. She highlighted some observed behavioral engagement including reduced noise levels, sharing of reading with peers, persistence of reading (issuing the same book from the library until finished), concentration during reading, bringing new reading materials, and willingness to share reading with her. These engagement behaviors were absent at the beginning of the academic year. More significantly, Naomi reflected on her own behaviors as a reading teacher. Prior to the change, Naomi was concerned about discipline and noise levels while omitting the need to encourage students to read. Following the change, Naomi was more concerned about students' reading. She explained that, "I've pulled back" and refrained from focusing on discipline and affirmed that "the reward really was reading."

Naomi herself was a reader (not a controller) in this evolving reading community. She found more time to read to the students, and, during the second observation, she was seen reading *Anna Hibiscus* written by Atinuke, a series of books set

in modern Africa about young Anna Hibiscus, her large extended family, and their fantastic day-to-day adventures. Naomi explained that she "chose this text as it explored cultural differences yet presented themes that were both universal and child-centered." She commented, "my students relished being read to and often shared their own like experiences after I had read sections to them." In the interview, she shared that she had read *Oliver Twist* and often read some of the texts to her class, which sparked students' interest in this book. On one occasion, some of her more capable readers got into an argument because they each wanted to issue *Oliver Twist* from the library for their personal reading during silent reading sessions. In addition to reading to the class, in our repeated classroom observations, Naomi was often seen reading with individual students or small groups. One student told us, "I like how Miss sometimes comes to us, and we tell her interesting facts, or we can read to her a favorite part of the book." Below was an excerpt from one of the classroom observations of Naomi's class following the changes.

> The teacher (Naomi) continued to move around the room and talked to students about their reading. "What do you think about...?" Naomi would ask her students to initiate a chat. Students were eager to respond and often heard saying, "that's what I think…." Naomi was friendly, quiet, and calm. This was rather different from what Naomi's focus on maintaining classroom discipline during silent reading sessions at the beginning of the year. The students seemed happy to talk to her as evidenced by their relaxed body language and the mutual smiles that are exchanged between Naomi and her students.

Naomi reflected on conditions that she found difficult throughout the implementation process, which included a crowded curriculum and established routines. She summed up these challenges in terms of time. "I have to find time. And I found the time" was her solution. She gave an example about visiting the library. Recognizing the library's role in silent reading, and as both a rich source of reading materials and a place for enjoyable reading, she found time to bring her class to visit the library once a week, something that previously had not been possible due to the need to follow an established routine. Another point of reflection was reading for learning. Acknowledging the role of reading to learning in other areas, Naomi described how the reformed silent reading promoted learning beyond reading itself and aided students' learning in other curriculum areas. Below is an excerpt where Naomi explained how she capitalized on students' interest as shown in the books they selected to read during silent reading and linked them with learning in other curriculum areas. At the end of the excerpt, Naomi explained that using students' reading focus during silent reading facilitated curriculum learning that she might have been able to cover.

> Like, for some reason at the moment my kids are into dinosaurs during silent reading. They're into dinosaurs. So I've now grabbed Walking With Dinosaurs. So we watched a little bit last week. I didn't plan for that, but I found the time somehow, but they can't wait to watch a little bit more of that. I've just found I'm able to link into other KLA's quite easily. They can't wait to get down to the library. They did not know that what they read help them learn in another area… this is their focus, and I could use that to help build on those other areas that I have missed out on or I do need to catch up on.

In short, Naomi changed the way she conducted silent reading which, to a great extent, promoted students' reading and helped her teaching as she developed new ways to link silent reading with other curriculum areas. From an engagement perspective, this made reading meaningful and worth pursuing. At a reflective meeting with team toward the end of the study, Naomi shared with us two important observations that suggest students' sustained engagement in reading, viz.,

> A lot of my students have taken upon themselves to participate in follow-up tasks to do with their texts. I have seen students write interesting facts as they read, draw favorite pictures, and watch videos on YouTube at home about something they read in silent reading sessions.
>
> Another observation, which I mark as probably one of my most proudest moments as a teacher. is the fact that while my students really enjoy listening to me read to them, we have reached a point where I now have to take turns to read with some of my less-engaged readers, and if I read a bit more than they like, they comfortably remind me that it is their turn to read.

## *Accounts of Improved Reading Engagement: Students' Views*

What did Naomi's students say about the new silent reading sessions? To understand students' experiences, 20 students who provided parental consent were interviewed. The focus of the interview was to understand students' experiences during the change and what might have contributed to their improved reading engagement.

Students' accounts of improved reading engagement were unanimously positive. Many indicated that they had read more since the implementation of the new arrangement and would want to spend more time reading. One commented, "to make reading better, I wanted to read until second break," which meant a reading session of over 2 h. All 20 students reported positive experiences derived from the change process. Their accounts shared a unanimous voice about improved reading engagement, aligning with Naomi's description and reports based on repeated classroom observations. Students talked about what they liked about the new reading arrangement and explained why they were more inclined to read. A thematic analysis of these interview transcripts based on several rounds of reading and coding resulted in two broad themes that students considered important for explaining their improved reading engagement, viz., (1) choice and control and (2) reading together.

### Choice and Control

Choice and control covered what students could read and where they could read it. Previously, they had no choice in what to read or in how they read. Students were expected to read from the classroom collection, a limitation to which many students expressed disdain. In relation to how they read, students used to read in their own seat and maintained quiet while reading to themselves. Interacting with others was

not acceptable in the old practice. In short, the old practice did not afford students any choice and/or control. Research has shown positive effects on reading as a result of the provision of choice and control (Baker, 2002; Guthrie et al., 2013; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). In addition, studies on autonomous reading motivation have shown that when students' choices are supported in the reading process, they are more likely to engage in reading (e.g., De Naeghel & Van Keer, 2013). The interviewees shared these research-based positions and considered the choice and control afforded in the new practice as contributing to development of an engaging reading environment. All students shared the importance of finding a place where they would feel comfortable to read in class. The excerpts below suggest that a choice in relation to where to read was related to personal comfort.

> Because if you don't get to choose where to sit, you sometimes might get upset and we don't want to be sitting at that place.
>
> I like being on the carpet and lying down because like in school we always sit at our tables or like on the mat and if we can lay down and yeah.
>
> Choosing where you can sit it's like amazing because when you just sit at your desk for like half an hour, it gets very slow and they might hurt you. But sitting in a place that you're comfortable makes reading more fun.

These students wanted to feel comfortable when reading. Paul suggested that Naomi should consider having "a reading place," like a reading corner he used to have in prep where they could lie down on cushions. However, most students talked about the personal comfort in choosing a place to read in the class, at a deeper level, having such a choice was somehow related to trust. In the excerpt below, Carissa talked about different choices she could make in relation to reading and that having trust from the teacher made her "feel like at home."

> Researcher: Anything else that's made it better?
>
> Carissa: You can lie down.
>
> Researcher: That's good.
>
> Carissa: You can choose anywhere you want around the classroom, you can do anything, it has to be reading, you can even do games.
>
> Researcher: So the teacher trusts you to do the right thing?
>
> Carissa: Yes. That's important. I feel like at home.

Another important way to support students' choice in reading is the selection of books. An important change was the variety of reading materials accessible during the silent reading sessions. Students were allowed to bring books that interested them, either from home or from the library. For example, a number of them shared with us their interest in reading comic books and "Horrible Histories." Allowing students to read materials that they find interesting is a research-informed practice that aligned with students' proposed changes in silent reading. In the excerpt below, John explained in a graphic way how he would feel if he was to read a book that he did not like.

> Sometimes when you're reading a book you don't like, it just makes you like feel scared because you really want to throw it, but you're just looking at it, looking at everyone else, and you start to feel like real dizzy. So I leave my book on the floor and go out and wash my face.

The classroom collection offered limited choices and failed to appeal to students' reading interests. Naomi responded to students' suggestions and made an effort to update the classroom collection to include books that students found interesting by borrowing these from the library. One student commented, "I like it even more now because we get to go and choose new books from the library and our classroom collection each week." Nevertheless, several less-engaged students in the class showed interest in reading only comics and sport magazines. Peter was one of them. He talked about how pleased he was when he could read comic books he had brought from home during silent reading sessions:

Researcher: I noticed that you read a lot during silent reading time?
Peter: Yes. I love reading now.
Researcher: Can you tell us why?
Peter: Miss allowed me to take my comic books to school. I find novels and other stuffs in the class boring. I don't want to read them. I would just pretend.
Researcher: But you don't pretend reading your comic books.
Peter: No. I like them. I want to share them with my friends. I have learnt new words from them too.
Researcher: That's great. Could you do this last year?
Peter: No. Definitely not.
Researcher: What if you were not allowed to read comic books? What would you do?
Peter: I would not read. I would leave the book open.
Researcher: I saw you reading a dinosaur book with a friend last week.
Peter: Yes. I finished my comic book and my friend wanted me to read his dinosaur book together. It was quite fun actually.

Undoubtedly, Peter was more engaged in reading, though his love of reading was confined to comic books. Endorsing his choice affirmed his reading engagement and might provide an opportunity for teachers to expand his reading interests in the future.

## Reading Together

Another major change in the practice was that students could read together with friends. Previously, students were expected to read silently and alone. Naomi responded to students' requests to allow them to read together. All the students were conversant about various benefits of reading together, which included sharing and learning, building confidence, and motivating each other to read.

Reading together offered an opportunity for students to learn from each other and to share their reading. In Naomi's class, a group of boys loved reading about dinosaurs and shared this interest with each other. Nathan, one of these boys, discussed his urge to talk about dinosaur books.

Researcher: Why is it good for you?
Nathan: Because I talk a lot. If we do silent reading, I can't like talk as much and like it's not enjoyable enough. So, if I was read with group of people, I can talk.
Researcher: And what would you talk about?
Nathan: Because I like dinosaurs and I get dinosaur books and like my other friends they have dinosaur books so then we talk all about them.

Matty, who befriended Peter and invited him to read a dinosaur book with him, as shown in the excerpt above, was diligent in jotting down notes about dinosaurs, making his own facts book about them.

> Researcher: Please tell me why you like reading together in a group.
> Matty: Yep.
> Researcher: What is the reason?
> Matty: Yeah. Because I've got like a lot of facts about dinosaurs, real facts and fake facts and I can talk about them.
> Researcher: Right. So, you were writing notes down. What were you writing them for?
> Matty: I like more information about my dinosaurs. I created my own facts book.
> Researcher: And were you going to present those to someone?
> Matty: Yeah. I talk about that in my group. They loved it.

Like Matty, Maria also diligently made notes about what she had read and shared these with others. Maria commented that

> I like quiet reading now because when we read our book, we can write it down on a piece of paper and we can make it into facts or fiction diaries and we can use that to share with other people who have not read the same book.

Helping others to learn goes beyond books and reading for personal interest. Sharing in this class involved understanding cultures as Naomi's students came from different minority backgrounds. Students often brought culture-related books to share. The excerpts below indicate that reading together provides opportunities to learn about other cultures and languages.

> I like it because we're from different cultures and they can tell you something new about their culture when we read together.
>
> When you're reading, if people don't understand English, you can read it in English as well and learn other people's languages.
>
> I like reading together and we share books from our own culture.

Reading together offers opportunity to learn from mistakes. These once-disengaged readers were rather conscious about the mistakes that they made while reading. They felt more confident in reading when they could learn from each other. Students pointed out that they could learn about how to pronounce difficult words by listening to others' reading and were able to learn from others' mistakes. The bottom line as Nathan pointed out was, "when you read it by yourself, you don't know if you've made a mistake or not and you don't learn from it." The following excerpts show that these students were rather strategic in relation to developing their confidence in reading by learning from others.

> It's good for me because when we get to read, we can read to other people and we can share about how we read and what we have read and our mistakes and you can learn from that.
>
> Sharing your own reading will make some people smarter, and they will tell somebody else that things so they will get smarter.
>
> Reading with other people is cool because sometimes we make mistakes and people, they can tell you. But when you read to other people, you cannot be scared of sharing with other people. So, you can build your confidence when you're with other people.

Reading with others offers a chance to regulate one's reading motivation. Quite a few students commented that they could share a book with others when they felt

bored. This was a strategy that the team observed several times. When students did not feel like reading, they would pair up with other students who were willing to read together. The boys' group who shared an interest on dinosaurs went one step further by creating their own game to keep themselves motivated to read. The excerpt below is Nathan's explanation of how the game worked.

> We read our dinosaur books. We would get the atlas and go at the back and it's a game. Whoever finds the flag is the make them fun flag. We have to try and read the book first. We change it around sometimes find the colors of a flag and name the country.

Taken together, students' accounts affirmed their improved reading engagement. These students clearly articulated the reasons why they engaged in the new silent reading sessions. Choice, control, and opportunities to collaborate in reading were important enabling conditions that supported their engagement. Their accounts corroborated that they held unique knowledge about ways to improve their reading and prepared to work with Naomi and others to make reading enjoyable and engaging in the class.

## Opportunity to Read: Student Voice as Engagement Enabler

Student voice is a unique engagement facilitator, an inherent social structure which hinges on interactions between students and the teacher. The case study above shows that using student voice to develop engaging reading practices relies on teachers listening to students' views and perspectives about reading and engagement and finding ways to respond to them. Students in Naomi's class have shown that they hold unique knowledge and opinions about reading and strategies that can enhance their reading engagement, further supporting the notion that it is critical to listen to these young readers when searching for ways to improve reading and reading engagement (Mitra, 2006; Daniels, Kalkman, & McCombs, 2001; Pope, 2001). Students' responses and suggestions have provided Naomi with insights into (1) why students attempted to avoid reading during silent reading sessions and (2) what engaged reading looks like from the students' perspectives. Based on students' voices, engaged reading involved choice and control during the reading process, opportunities to share reading, and partnering with the teacher and peers during the change process. In this sense, student voice-driven change did not just initiate and invite student engagement but also sustained it through collaboration and partnership with teachers and their peers.

However, not all voice-seeking and sharing activities are equally engaging. The extent to which it is hinges on the types of responses and actions that students are expected to provide during the student voice change process. Table 5.1 shows this voice-engagement relationship based on the "pyramid of voice" framework (Mitra & Gross, 2009). When student voice is sought through a tokenistic approach, students' active engagement is discouraged as the teacher manipulates the way in which students' voices are sought and used. Students tend to engage passively

**Table 5.1** The relationship between student voice and student and teacher engagement

| Student voice | Key concepts | Student engagement | Teacher engagement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tokenistic use of student voice | Manipulation and tokenism | Passive engagement; students play a passive role, complying to teachers' request for information; students usually do not understand clearly why their views are sought and for what purposes | Teachers seek students' input with no genuine intention to honor students' voices; use student input for purposes other than addressing students' needs; treat students as a source of information, reinforcing power imbalance |
| Being heard | Seeking and listening | Responsive engagement; students share their views, experiences, and preferences | Teachers seek and listen to students' views and experiences; teachers use students' voices to address educational issues and problems that matter to both parties, but may not necessarily honor students' input; treat students as a valuable source of information |
| Collaborating with teachers | Mutuality, collaboration, and participation | Active engagement; sharing of ideas and views; teacher-led changes; mutual trust and respect; students work with teachers to make change; collecting data and implementing solutions; carrying out change plans; developing partnership with teacher and peers | Teachers seek, listen, and honor students' input; develop effective ways to ensure collaboration; treat students as partners; respect and act on students' suggestions |
| Building capacity for leadership | Leadership, critique, and problem-solving | Active engagement for change; student-led changes; shared commitment to deepen democratic learning and living together; collaborate on action plan; inject student voice into decision-making; create student leadership positions | Teachers support students' leadership role; student-led decision-making; treat students as leaders |

(Mitra & Gross, 2009). It is unlikely that students would feel willing to enthusiastically share their views. Nor would they be engaged cognitively in seeking solutions or making suggestions. Such an approach reinforces the power hierarchy and imbalance and will be likely to reinforce alienation between students and teachers (Quinn & Owen, 2014). Smyth, McInerney, and Fish (2013) warned that students' voices often are used to serve "performative imperatives of the system" (p. 309) rather than the needs and benefits of students.

When students' voices are heard, students are more likely to feel that they are respected which contributes positively to their self-esteem and sense of belonging (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). Student engagement is promoted through teachers'

authentic listening to their personal experiences, preferences, and viewpoints. Engagement is supported as a result of teachers' genuine interest in students' experiences. At the level of collaboration, students feel empowered as they collaborate with teachers and their peers to find better ways to conduct meaningful activities in school that matter to both parties. A high level of engagement will be involved when students attempt to work with each other to share, evaluate, and weigh up different suggestions for improvement. Engagement at this level is promoted through collaboration and interaction underpinned by positioning students as collaborative partners (Rudduck, 2007). At the leadership level, students are expected to take the lead to challenge established practices and proposed different ways to improve them in school or other learning settings. This form of agentic engagement involves critical views and decision-making abilities. Students are given a high level of respect, autonomy, and power in order to successfully play a leadership role in the instigation of change (Mitra & Gross, 2009).

The case study in this chapter is illustrative of student voice change at the collaborative level. Naomi positioned students as partners to develop engaging reading practices. In this partnership, students shared their reading experiences, offered suggestions for improvement, and enacted the changes with Naomi and peers in the class. As a collaborator, Naomi initiated the voice-seeking process and responded to students' suggestions through a plan of change that she shared with students and gained their support to implement.

A notable point is teachers' increased engagement when collaborative and leadership forms of student voice are used (see Table 5.1 final column). In this case study, Naomi changed the way in which she interacted with students using strategies (forums, individual chats, observations, and collaborations) that acted to ease the tensions of power imbalance. In particular, endorsing students' suggestions for improvement boosted the spirit of collaboration in the class and instilled a sense of shared understanding in this reading community. Naomi's engagement with students became more personal and involved. Not only did she understand her students better, she addressed their needs and cared for their reading to an extent that Naomi had begun reading with them and made pedagogical decisions such as allowing students extra time to share reading that prioritized students' needs, interests, and benefits. Student voice-enabled change in this case, leading to stimulated and sustained engagement for both the teacher and her students, alongside the development of a sense of ownership of learning for both parties, as reading, and engagement in reading, had become more meaningful (cf. Baroutsis, McGregor, & Mills, 2016).

The student voice process as a social structure has created a workspace where the teacher and his/her students can collaborate to develop new practices for valued educational activities. In the current case, reading engagement, though considered problematic for many students at the beginning stage of the change, was not taken as an individual's issue; students' deficiencies in reading skills, motivation, and/or achievement were not the focal point of conversation during the change process involving Naomi and her students. In conversing with her students, Naomi subtly sent the message that she cared for them and intended to build a new reading environment where these once-disengaged readers could engage willingly in reading. In

doing so, Naomi admitted that she had the responsibility for improving the reading environment. Accepting professional responsibility is an important point of departure for effective use of student voice to promote student engagement. Our case study illustrated this important point as Naomi began the change process with a sense of guilt, admitting that she had failed to support her students in silent reading. Thus, student voice-enabled change is not just about seeking, listening, and responding to students' views but also about how the teacher understands and enacts his/her professional responsibilities.

## Conclusion

Creating opportunities for disadvantaged students to read is critical to sustain not just reading engagement but also engaging in future schoolwork and employment, as high levels of literacy skills are foundational to sustained academic, civic, and economic participation in knowledge economies. In the current culture of performativity where the focus is on achievement and scores, student voice has generally been ignored and perhaps, in most cases, silenced. Students, especially those who have not been performing well in literacy tests, are considered educational objects that teachers need to "work on" in order to narrow the literacy gap and, hence, excluding these students from the process of decision-making, central to their sustained engagement in literacy learning.

In this chapter, we put forward an argument that seeking, acknowledging, and responding to students' voices in improving classroom reading practices are critical for creating genuine reading opportunities that engage disadvantaged students and re-engage those who find reading in school uninteresting. This participatory process does not just enable teachers to understand disadvantaged students' needs and partner with them in improving reading practices; it also empowers students and advances their agentic engagement in reading that builds on choice, control, and sharing. From a student voice perspective, disadvantaged students are not a problematic educational object that requires teachers alone to act as fixers. Instead, they are important classroom partners who have the right to voice their concerns and should be allowed to play legitimate roles in the instructional process. Obviously, this participatory process itself is engaging for both students and teachers, with the resulting changes in practice successful in the promotion and maintenance of reading engagement.

Student voices can be used as an engagement enabler to create opportunities for reading in disadvantaged classrooms. However, teachers and educators should also be warned that student voices can be manipulated; tokenistic treatment of student voices will discourage participation and engagement (Fielding, 2004). Treating student voice as a singular, consistent, and unchangeable entity is conceptually flawed (Cook-Sather, 2006). Also significant is the recognition of complex power relationships embedded in each voicing relationship and whether these voices are being heard in the class, among students between students and teachers or between

children and other adult carers. Trust, respect, and care are foundational to the genuine invitation of student voice to improve reading and reading engagement. Naomi has shown us how reading practices can be reformed by seeking and acting on students' voices in the collaborative process supported through her trust, respect, and care for her students. Accepting teachers' professional responsibility to promote reading and reading engagement is an important starting point in voice-seeking and voice-responding journey for re-engaging students to read with joy.