

Students as readers:

Building reading identity in one full-primary school

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<https://doi.org/10.18296/rep.0084>

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2025

Contents

Executive summary	v
Research questions and design	v
Research findings	v
<i>Growing variation in the development of reading identities over time</i>	v
<i>How to foster students' identities as readers</i>	vi
1. Overview of the research	1
Background to the research	1
<i>Pūtoi Rito: School Communities of Readers PLD programme</i>	1
Importance of the research	2
Research questions and design	2
Limitations of the research	3
2. Students' identities as readers	4
Year 3 students as readers	4
Year 6 students as readers	5
Year 8 students as readers	6
Reflecting on the decline in reading engagement over time	7
3. Fostering students' reading identities	9
The PLD on teachers creating readers	9
Reflecting on the concept of reading identity	9
How to foster reading identity	10
<i>Listening and responding to stories read aloud</i>	10
<i>Time for choosing books</i>	12
<i>Recreational reading in class</i>	14
<i>Talking about books with others</i>	16
<i>Talking about reading identity</i>	18
4. Discussion	21
References	22

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a small, exploratory research project carried out by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) for the National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa (the National Library) in 2025.

Research questions and design

The research involved a case study of one full primary school participating in the pilot PLD programme Pūtoi Rito: School Communities of Readers offered by the National Library in 2025. The programme aims to support reading for pleasure by strengthening knowledge, pedagogy, practice, collaboration, and resources in school communities.

This research focuses on reading identity—an important component of reading engagement. The concept of reading identity encompasses seeing and knowing oneself as a reader. Reading identity is important because reading for pleasure is associated with achievement, wellbeing, empathy, perspective taking, and social, public, and economic participation (Boyask et al., 2021; Djikic et al., 2009; Education and Research Unit & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2020; Jerrim & Moss, 2019; Mar et al., 2006; National Endowment for the Arts, 2007; Oatley, 2008, 2016; Sullivan & Brown, 2015; Wilhelm, 2016; Wolf & Stoodley, 2018). To date there has been little research on students' reading identity in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The two overarching research questions were:

- What typifies the reading identities of students by the end of Years 3, 6, and 8?
- How do teachers foster students' reading identities?

This research used a single case study design (Punch & Oancea, 2014; Yin, 2003, 2018) and involved observations of PLD sessions, participation in project hui, and focus group interviews with a sample of school staff and with students at Years 3, 6, and 8.

Data analysis involved a grounded approach that began by looking for themes in the data and coding against these. As new themes emerged data were re-coded against them using an iterative approach.

Research findings

Growing variation in the development of reading identities over time

Teachers drew from their experiences teaching at a range of year levels and schools to describe the knowledge, beliefs, and practices typical of students as readers by the end of Years 3, 6, and 8. There was general agreement that by the end of Year 3, students were typically enthusiastic readers who knew the topics and types of stories they liked reading or listening to and some could name an author they liked. By the end of Year 6 a gap had emerged between those who did and those who did not read for pleasure. Those who did could typically talk about the topics, types of texts, authors, and series that they did and did not like and say why, access the books they wanted, and describe

their practices as recreational readers. Those who did not read for pleasure could, like the Year 3 students, identify the types of texts and stories that they liked. By the end of Year 8, the gap between those who did and did not choose to read had become “wider” and “entrenched”. Year 8 students who saw themselves as readers could typically talk about the topics, types of texts, authors, series, and genre that they did and did not like and explain why, access the books they wanted, and describe their knowledge, beliefs, and practices as recreational readers, and reasons for these. These students tended to have peers who they talked about books with, and got book recommendations from. In contrast those Year 8 students who did not read for pleasure struggled to identify books they enjoyed other than those a teacher had read to them at school, a book or series they had read as a much younger person, or books that involved diagrams or illustrations supported by small amounts of text.

There was alignment between the knowledge, beliefs, and practices described by teachers and by students at each of the three levels. However, due to the small and exploratory nature of this study, generalisations cannot be made from these findings and further research is needed.

How to foster students’ identities as readers

The school staff involved in this research used ideas of their own and built on ideas from the Pūtoi Rito PLD to foster their students’ identities as readers. Teachers modelled, explicitly taught, and provided their students with opportunities to practise what it means to be a reader through a range of activities. These activities included listening to stories for pleasure, choosing books of interest, reading for pleasure, and talking with others about books. These activities are consistent with those identified in the international and national research literature as important for student engagement and motivation as readers (see, e.g., Batini & De Carlo, 2025; Boyask et al., 2021; Cremin et al., 2023; Ivey & Friddle, 2025; McDonald et al., 2023, McDowall, 2021; Merga, 2023; Rodriguez Leon et al., 2025; Tregenza et al., 2023). In addition, the findings from this study suggest that time spent talking about reading identity may strengthen students’ reading engagement and their understanding of themselves and others as readers.

1. Overview of the research

This report presents the findings of a small, exploratory research project on fostering students' reading identities, carried out by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) for the National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa (the National Library) in 2025.

Background to the research

The research involved a case study of one full primary school participating in the pilot PLD programme Pūtoi Rito: School Communities of Readers offered by the National Library in 2025.

Pūtoi Rito: School Communities of Readers PLD programme

Pūtoi Rito: School Communities of Readers is a pilot, research-based, professional learning and development (PLD) programme for schools. It draws on insights from the Pūtoi Rito Communities of Readers initiative¹ and the National Library's experience working with schools to develop reading cultures.

The Pūtoi Rito programme aims to support reading for pleasure by strengthening knowledge, pedagogy, practice, collaboration, and resources in school communities. There are two frameworks underpinning the programme. One is the Reading Community Framework² which focuses on school library and community connections, leadership and expectation, reading environment, knowledge and practice, access, reading experiences, and home-school partnerships. The other is the Teachers Creating Readers Framework,³ which focuses on teachers as readers, creating a classroom reading community, and creating a school-wide reading culture. The PLD also involves use of several teaching and learning resources created by the National Library for use in schools. These include Reading Identity Cards and Chatterbox⁴ which provide statements, questions, and activities that teachers can use with students to reflect on, develop, and share ideas about themselves as readers.

Once school interest, readiness, and ability to commit to the Pūtoi Rito Schools programme is ascertained, the programme includes a mix of core and co-created components including:

- regular meetings between National Library reading specialists, the regional facilitator, and the school leadership team and library staff
- staff PLD sessions—a mix of core and tailored reading PLD depending on the school's vision (for example, reading aloud, teachers creating readers, home-school partnerships, and genres/text type)
- regular meetings between National Library reading specialists, the regional facilitator, and the school leadership team and library staff

1 See <https://natlib.govt.nz/about-us/collaborative-projects/communities-of-readers/putoi-rito-communities-of-readers-reports/putoi-rito-communities-of-readers-summary-of-findings-2019-2024>

2 See <https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/reading-engagement/creating-a-reading-community/a-school-reading-community>

3 See <https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/reading-engagement/strategies-to-engage-students-as-readers/teachers-creating-readers>

4 See <https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/reading-engagement/strategies-to-engage-students-as-readers/reading-identity-cards-and-chatterbox>

- a workshop to create a vision, areas of focus, action plans, and measures of impact (drawing on findings from the school culture review tool⁵ completed by the senior leadership and library teams)
- reading loans
- facilitator support including for the school library.

Importance of the research

In the past 15 to 20 years there has been a range of initiatives designed to lift the reading achievement of New Zealand students. Over this time, there has been evidence of a steady decline in students' reported enjoyment of reading, and time spent reading outside of school hours—both within and across year levels of the primary school (Education and Research Unit & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2020).

These findings suggest that we need to pay attention, not only to developing students who *can* read, but also to developing students who want to read, and continue to do so over time; that is, students who *are* readers. This is an important goal because reading for pleasure is associated with many benefits including wellbeing; empathy; perspective taking; public, economic, and social participation; and academic achievement (Boyask et al., 2021; Education and Research Unit & New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2020; Djikic et al., 2009; Jerrim & Moss, 2019; Mar et al., 2006; National Endowment for the Arts, 2007; Oatley, 2008, 2016; Sullivan & Brown, 2015; Wilhelm, 2016; Wolf & Stoodley, 2018). Reading for pleasure is also a valued end in, and of, itself. To date there has been little research on students' understanding of themselves as readers in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand or on the approaches used by teachers to help students to develop their reading identities. This study explores some possible directions for further research on fostering reading identity in primary school settings.

Research questions and design

This research focuses on one component of the National Library Teachers Creating Readers Framework—reading identity. The concept of reading identity encompasses seeing oneself as a reader, knowing oneself as a reader, and being a reader. Findings from international and New Zealand based research suggest that teachers who read for pleasure can play an important role in fostering students' reading identities (see, e.g., Cremin et al., 2018; McDowall, 2021).

The two overarching research questions were:

- What typifies the reading identities of students by the end of Years 3, 6, and 8?
- How do teachers foster students' reading identities?

The research uses a single case study design. Case studies are often used to explore change or innovation in a particular setting. Case studies allow us to provide an example of practice as well as explore the complexities of the context within which this practice occurs (Punch & Oancea, 2014; Yin, 2003, 2018). A single case study design enables us to draw on many sources of data to develop a nuanced picture of the topic of investigation—in this case, how a school can foster the reading identities of its students. Case studies assist in creating generalised propositions or theories (e.g.,

5 See <https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/reading-engagement/creating-a-reading-community/a-school-wide-reading-culture/school-reading-culture-review-tools>

examples of factors that support an initiative to work well) as opposed to generalisations about a population (Yin, 2018).

The participating school was located on the outskirts of Wellington. The school had a roll of over 400 students, with over half identifying as Pākehā/European, over 10% as Māori, over 10% as Asian, under 10% as Pacific, and under 10% identifying as “Other” ethnicities.

The data collection involved:

- researcher observation of PLD sessions run by the National Library facilitator during Term 1 of 2025
- researcher participation in planning and reflection hui run by the National Library for school leaders during 2025
- three focus group interviews with a sample of four teachers from the Years 0–3 syndicate, five teachers from the Years 4–6 syndicate, and six teachers from the Years 7–8 syndicate
- three focus group interviews with a sample of six Year 3 students, seven Year 6 students, and eight Year 8 students⁶
- an interview with the school librarian.

The focus group interviews occurred in July 2025. At this point there had been two whole-staff PLD sessions. The first was based on the Teachers Creating Readers Framework, with a focus on reading identity. The second was based on the Building Communities of Readers Framework.

The interviews with students focused on their reading identities and involved each student creating a poster about themselves as a reader, which they shared with the group at the end of the session. The staff interviews focused on their perceptions of students’ reading identities by the end of Years 3, 6, and 8, and how they, as teachers, supported their students’ as readers.

Data analysis involved a grounded approach that began by looking for themes in the data and coding against these. As new themes emerged data was re-coded against them using an iterative approach.

Limitations of the research

As students with strengths and interests in reading are more likely to have agreed to participate in the study, the sample is likely to be skewed towards more capable, confident, and engaged readers. Due to the extremely small and exploratory nature of this study findings cannot be generalisable. However, this single case study can assist us to create generalised propositions or theories, about fostering students’ reading identities (Yin, 2018).

6 These three levels align with the Phases of Learning endpoints in the new curriculum statements.

2. Students' identities as readers

This section presents teachers' perceptions of students' reading identities by the end of Years 3, 6, and 8. It also presents the ways in which a small sample of students at these levels described themselves as readers. These three levels align with the Phases of Learning endpoints in the new curriculum statements.

Year 3 students as readers

The Year 0–3 teachers considered that by the end of Year 3, students would typically know the book topics they did and did not like, the difference between fiction and non-fiction, and which of these text types they preferred. These children could select books they liked reading or listening to. Teachers considered that some of these students—especially those with older siblings—could name a series, or an author they liked, and some genres such as fantasy.

They can select the kinds of books they like. So, they know the sort of book and the kind of book that they could read. They know their interest, and what engages them. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

I would think some of them know authors by then but not necessarily lots. Yeah, and that probably comes down to us as much as anything as promoting authors, too. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

They know the types of books like ... picture books and they know the difference between fiction and nonfiction. They know genres, as in like fantasy books ... Like reading *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, they know it's kind of like a fantasy-based book. And we talk about books based on real things. Yeah, like, I'll say, is this book real or made up? And how do you know? (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

As illustrated by the comments below, the Year 3 students we spoke with demonstrated the ability to do all these things. They talked, drew, and wrote about what they liked reading or listening to, and why, where, and how they liked reading, as well as the things they did not like.

I like reading Babysitters Club. I don't like reading *Five Nights at Freddy's* because it's scary. I like reading graphic novels. I like reading by myself. I read in bed. I like reading with my grandma and my sister. (Year 3 student)

My most favourite book is *A Diary of a Minecraft Zombie*. I do not like *Dog Man* because it is boring. I like to read on the bed and sofa. I like scary books. I get ideas from my friends on which book I will pick. I mostly like to buy books from the Warehouse. I am seven years old. (Year 3 student)

I like *A Pigeon Finds a Hotdog* cos it's funny, but not silly. And it's sad when Pigeon cries, but it has a good ending cos they both have hotdogs. I like reading at Wellington library cos I like books on superheroes and Super Mario Bros books. Cos Mario and Luigi are superheroes, and Mario can kill King of the Koopa and Bowser. (Year 3 student)

Year 6 students as readers

The Year 4–6 teachers considered that by the end of Year 6, some students could talk about the topics, types of texts, authors, and series that they did and did not like and explain why, access the books they wanted, and describe their beliefs and practices as readers. However, other students no longer chose to read and had not really developed as readers since Year 3. These teachers described a greater range in students' understanding of themselves as readers, and the emergence of a “gap” between those who saw themselves as readers and those who did not.

I would think for some of them, they're probably not very much further ahead than those in Year 3. Whereas for other kids very much so, they'll have found they like fantasy, for example, and they'll be off reading anything they can get their hands on. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Also just feeling confident when they go into the library that they're going to be able to choose something. Yes, there's other children who really still don't know how to. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

I think there's probably an even bigger range. And that's not what you want to happen. Yeah, a large number of children at either end. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

The range described by teachers was evident in the Year 6 student focus group. For example, a less engaged reader in the group identified books read by his teacher as favourites and could identify genres he liked, but did not see himself as a reader:

Favourite books that I like are *The Dragon Defenders* and *The Wild Robot*. Why I like these books is because I like adventure and both of them are adventure. My favourite author is James Russell. I don't really read much. I will read when it's quiet, in my bedroom. My Nanna is the only one in my house who reads. My genre is adventure and humour. (Year 6 student)

Another less engaged reader also listed a book read by the teacher as a favourite, along with joke books, sport topics, and early picture books such as *Going on a Bear Hunt* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

In contrast are excerpts below from the posters of two Year 6 students who did see themselves as readers:

James and the Giant Peach is one of my favourite books. I get my books from the school library, the bookstore, and the mall. I like action, mystery, and science facts books, and I like sports books like football [books]. I want to read a murder mystery book by David Williams and *Wings of Fire* (fiction version) and *Tweet*. I'm the only one in my family that reads. I tell my Mum about the books I read. I look at the author's name and look through the pages and look at the back [to help me choose a book]. I don't like reading when I am getting forced to and the other person is choosing the books. I focus on reading when I think about the book being a movie. I like eating while reading and listening to music. And I like reading *Grow a Garden*. (Year 6 student).

My favourite book is *One of us is Lying*, by Karen M. McManus and *Faceless* by Alyssa Sheinmeil. Most of the time I spend awake in bed is dedicated to reading. I read every night for at least an hour. I don't think there is any place better to read than in bed. My family are like reading influencers. They always keep me reading. I remember the first time I read a book and actually liked it. I was around four years old when my kindergarten teacher picked up a book and started reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. When I was very young, my parents took the family to London. I remember my Nanny's house and the way every wall had a bookshelf full of books, stood against it. I love mystery and comedy stories—they're my favourite kind. The best part of a book for me is when there is a cliffhanger at the end of the chapter. (Year 6 student)

Year 8 students as readers

Teachers from the Years 7–8 syndicate considered that by the end of Year 8, the gap between those who did and did not read for pleasure had become “wider” and “entrenched”.

By the end of Year 8 they have categorised themselves [as] ‘I am a good reader [or] I am a bad reader’, and it’s entrenched. [When do you think that happens?] Well, with some children it’s before they come into Year 7 or 8. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

They know if they hate reading. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Yeah, they know if they hate it, and they know if they love it. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

These teachers observed that Year 8 students who saw themselves as readers could typically talk about the topics, types of texts, authors, series, and genres that they did and did not like and explain why, access the books they wanted, and describe their beliefs and practices as readers, and reasons for these. These students tended to have peers they talked with about books, and shared book recommendations.

I think they could probably say, what genres, they know. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Yeah, and the ones who would say that they like reading would then list off all their favourite authors and series. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

And their favourite series, yeah, series are big. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

In contrast teachers observed that when asked about books they liked, those Year 8 students who did not read for pleasure tended to name a book their teacher had read to them at school, a book or series they had read as a much younger person, or books that involved diagrams or illustrations supported by small amounts of text.

The range in Year 8 students’ understanding of themselves as readers was evident in the student focus group responses. One student who did not see himself as a reader spent the focus group session drawing a picture of a book with a caption “I am indeed a book. Please read me. I am good.” Another less engaged reader just wrote two genres: crime books and mystery, and one title: *Chicken Jockey*. A third less engaged Year 8 reader wrote:

Favourite books/series: *Vagabond* by Takehiko Inoue, Harry Potter. Favourite genre: horror, fiction history, action. Least favourite book series: Percy Jackson. Least favourite genre: mystery. I don’t like reading that much because I usually unfocus even if it’s a book I enjoy. Then I need to read the page all over again. (Year 8, student)

In contrast, the following excerpts come from the more engaged readers in the group:

My favourite genre is sci fi/fantasy, fiction. My favourite spot to read is in the sun. I also like audio books but I don’t listen to them much. I like reading because it distracts me from real life. Favourite books: Artemis Fowl series, Hail Mary, Cherubs series (Class A), Harry Potter, *The Light Chaser*, *Creaking Cat News*, The Scythe series, *Diary of a Village Surfer*, *Baby Zeke*. Dislike: *The Three Body Problem* 2 and 3. (Year 8 student)

I enjoy reading every night. I do most of my reading on my Kindle. I like the spy genre and stuff based on things from World War 2. I try to find really good books that actually make me worry, and like be immersed by the main character, even though I know they have plot armour. To find really good books, I just see what my friend says he’s reading and then buy it. Favourite books/series: The Toll, Thunderhead, Scythe, Cherub (All of the books), *Class A*, *Maximum Security*, *Divine Madness*, *The General*, *Brigands M.C.*, *Big Hate*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *Breaking News*. (Year 8 student)

I started reading because my Mum reads a lot and it really helped me to start reading. I can read in many environments, like I can read in loud or quiet spaces or inside or outside. I can't read a book if I have already watched the movie because I already know what's going to happen. I do not like action or mystery books because they take too long to get good. I read a lot to my younger sister because she is learning to read, and I really like helping her. My other sister and my dad do not read books at all. My Dad has too much work and my sister just doesn't read. I like sad books and happy books, but I also like horror books. I typically read in my free time, but I do lots of sports and activities. (Year 8 student)

Reflecting on the decline in reading engagement over time

The school librarian was in the unique position of being able to observe and interact with students as readers at all levels of the school. Like the teachers cited above, she commented on the initial enthusiasm students had for books on entering school. She also commented on the decline in some students' engagement with reading by the end of Year 6, which became entrenched for these students in Years 7 and 8.

They start out and they're thrilled and excited that they can read, and that they're allowed to choose their own books and get books out for themselves and all that kind of thing. They're delighted by that. And they get to about 9 or 10. Yeah, and it [their enthusiasm] just jumps off the cliff ... When they're younger, they're not necessarily actively avoiding reading where some of the older ones are. I'd like them to see themselves as readers. (Librarian)

The librarian considered this drop in engagement at around ages 9 to 10 was due to increased device use, competing demands for students' and parents' time, and a decline in the stamina needed to persevere with dense or longer texts.

I think at that point maybe the drive for device, the competing demands on time. And you do have to have perseverance to get through a book. I know for myself, too, my own attention span. At the moment, I'm chewing my way through something for my book club, and I'd much rather be reading something from the young adult section which moves at pace. So, I get it. And I do find, myself, that I spend too much time on my phone and not as much time as I used to reading. And that instant gratification thing you get when you're scrolling through, and you go, 'Oh, that's interesting! Oh, that's interesting! Oh, that's interesting!' If you don't get that with your book, you go, 'Oh, that was a bit boring', and you put it down. (Librarian)

Comments from the group of Year 6 students supported the librarians' conjectures. Although many of them said they enjoyed reading, time on devices and other out-of-school activities competed for their time. Reading was not necessarily a priority unless the book was "really exciting".

I see my switch on charge sitting there on my computer on charge, just sitting there, and waiting to be used. (Student, Year 6)

I don't have much time in my week to read properly. I have gym until six, three days a week. (Student, Year 6)

I like to read, but like, if I can do anything I want, then I wouldn't pick reading. I would play video games, or I would get my friends, and go walk some dogs and make some money, because I'm saving for a drum kit. (Student, Year 6)

Sometimes it is hard to focus on the book. Sometimes I lose my focus and start just playing around ... Sometimes when I'm reading Harry Potter, or something because it's so late at night, because the chapters are so long ... And then I actually miss what's happening like the words, just don't go into my head ... especially when you're tired, because you read slowly, yeah. (Student, Year 6)

Teachers also observed a general decline in reading across the school overall, commenting on the “dwindling” number of children reading for pleasure at school. The following conversation come from the Years 4–6 syndicate teachers focus group interview.

We’ve got some children who are incredible readers ... the children who are devoted, and you see them scattered around the school sometimes at lunchtime, and they’ve got a book. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Yeah, it’s a small proportion of children. And I wonder if it’s like dwindling. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Yeah. I’d say we used to see more kids around the school just choosing to read than we see now. I think, on a wet day it’s been a little bit surprising the lack of reading. I feel like that was your first ‘go to’. You were like, ‘I’m going to draw, or I’m going to read’. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Some teachers wondered if the temporary location of the library in a dark corner at the back of the school was a factor in the “dwindling” numbers of readers and hoped that its relocation at the centre of the school in 2026 would make a positive difference.

[The library] is pushed at the back of the school now. It used to be just there, with people reading in the middle of the school. But now they’re reading in the corner in the damp and dark.

In summary, teachers identified a range of factors contributing to the decline in reading for pleasure including the busy pace of family lives, the advent of new technologies, and environmental factors.

3. Fostering students' reading identities

The first part of this section describes the whole staff Pūtoi Rito PLD session on teachers creating readers. The second part describes teachers' reflections on the concept of reading identity, based both on their own ideas and those covered in the PLD. The final section describes teachers' ideas of how best to foster reading identity in the classroom—based again on the PLD and on their own teaching experiences.

The PLD on teachers creating readers

One reason the school's senior leadership team decided to participate in the Pūtoi Rito pilot programme was because, although they considered their students to be “largely capable readers”, their students did not always enjoy reading or see themselves as readers.

Our children are capable readers but a lot of it is quite functional. For large numbers it's, 'I read what I need to'. We want to encourage reading for pleasure. Our children become less engaged as they get older. (Senior leadership team member)

The senior leadership team also saw alignment between their current focus on student wellbeing and the Pūtoi Rito focus on reading for pleasure.

We are all about reading engagement, and it fits well with our focus on wellbeing. A book is great for your reading and it's great for your mental health. (Senior leadership team member)

The first whole staff PLD session occurred in May and was based on the National Library Teachers Creating Readers Framework. This PLD session covered the ways in which teachers, as readers can:

- read, and model independent reading; know children's and young adult literature; and identify as readers, and know themselves as readers
- create a classroom reading community by knowing their students as readers, reading aloud to students, providing students with access to a range of literature, engaging students in reading, and supporting independent, free choice reading
- create a schoolwide reading culture by promoting the benefits of reading for pleasure, working with staff and whānau to support reading for pleasure, and discussing reading with students and staff.

In this PLD session the National Library regional facilitator ran a series of activities with staff using the Reading Identity Cards, and the Chatterbox reading identity resource. These activities involved teachers reflecting on themselves as readers individually and with colleagues.

Reflecting on the concept of reading identity

I asked school staff for their reflections on the concept of reading identity—based both on their own ideas, and those introduced as part of the PLD. Responses were varied. For some, a focus on reading identity was an important part of their current teaching practice. For others the PLD was a reminder of knowledge and practices they had focused on in the past. Some teachers said they had not considered their students' reading identities before—the concept was a new one for them.

I've always read with the kids and had the expectation that there are books everywhere, and that's part of what we do at school. There's always been a class novel or class picture books, even in Year 6. If you go up to the library same thing, just sit down and pick up a book with them. We do like, 'Sell my Book'. They just literally sell the book like, 'This is great, this is who I think might enjoy it'. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

It just made me pay attention to reading identity, because I never really considered it. You know, I wasn't really paying attention to that. So, it has been interesting to talk to [the students] more about books outside of instructional reading time. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

So yeah, just thinking about being a role model [as a reader]. I thought, you know, the biggest thing I can do is read to them and have books around and go to the library and things like that. But not about the fact that you yourself [can be a role model]. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

Some teachers wondered whether their students would even understand the concept of being a reader especially in the context of schooling.

I don't know how many of them would be able to ... If you said, 'Oh, everybody, close your eyes, put your hand up if you're a reader,' I wonder how many of them would go, 'Oh, yeah, I'm a reader.' Like, I wonder if that's something that isn't taught specifically. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Kids often have perceptions of what you want them to say or know. And so it's like, 'Oh, *am* I reader? Does she mean, am I the best reader in the class? Or does she mean, can I read anything?' (Teacher, Year 4–6 syndicate)

How to foster reading identity

I asked school staff how best to foster their students' reading identities—based both on their own teaching experiences and on the PLD. There were common themes in the responses from teachers of all class levels. These included: reading aloud to students; providing choices of what to read, and time in class to read it; opportunities to talk about books; and opportunities to talk about being a reader. Through these activities, teachers could model being a reader themselves (that is, their own reader identities), provide explicit instruction about what it means to be a reader, and provide students with opportunities to put into practice what it means to be a reader.

Listening and responding to stories read aloud

Teachers observed that reading aloud to students not only supported their students' academic learning—through exposure to new vocabulary, language features, text structures, genres, and ideas—but also fostered their reading identities.

I think arguably, what you read to them is the most important thing, like that's when they get really engrossed in either a picture book, or your class novel, and then they want to read more like that. So that's arguably the most powerful thing and being thoughtful and selective about what you read to them. I try not to read something that they all read at home, anyway. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Reading aloud to students provided opportunities for teachers to model, and for students to experience, the joy of reading.

There's that sheer joy just of reading aloud to them and hoping that if you're modelling that, you're going to pull them in as well. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

I put a lot of enthusiasm and character voices, and like make it really engaging for them. So, if I put the book down, they're like, 'Oh, I want to read another.' (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

I read a chapter book every single day with them, even if it's just listening and eating their lunch. They get exposed, and they're all invested in the book. They're like, 'Oh, I saw this book in the library', or 'We have it at home'. They are the conversations that we have. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

I think sometimes it's them recognising how good a good story can be. You, as a teacher, you need to sell that from the beginning. But you also have huge power to sell that as a teacher. We underestimate that. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Books read aloud prompted some children to find a book they loved and to read it for themselves—sometimes for the first time.

I read the class *Refugee* last year, and all my kids, if you go and ask my Year 7 boys what their favourite book is, they will say *Refugee* ... It's stunning. It's a stunning book. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

One teacher described how some students in her class wanted to buy their own copy of a book she was reading to them when it became available as part of the Ashton Scholastic scheme.

It still surprises me like the book we're reading in class at the moment has just come in the Scholastic, and they were like, 'We can get our own copy of it!' And we've literally just finished the book, so they don't need to read it. It's a Kiwi book about a dog, and all sorts of crazy adventures. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Reading aloud provided teachers with opportunities to model the knowledges, beliefs, and practices shared by those who identify as readers, and to provide students with opportunities to engage in these themselves. For example, teachers described modelling how sometimes it is worth giving a book a go, even if it is not immediately appealing; that readers can enjoy reading a book more than once; that readers have a variety of preferences about what, how, and when they like to read; and that readers can choose to give up on a book half way through.

After the first [PLD] session we had, I talked to my class about what was drawing people to books. So, we talked about covers and titles. And then today we went back to it. I started reading them *Toothy and Cat*. It's out of a collection of stories. And I said, '*Toothy and Cat*???'. And I was like thinking aloud, 'That sounds like something I might not be that interested in. But you guys wait, just wait. It is! It is completely different to what the title seems like! Just little things like that, thinking aloud, about not being interested in reading a story about a cat, but it ends up being about this homeless guy who lived in a cave. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

You know how you read them a book like a picture book, and then they're like, 'Oh, we've had this'. And I'm like, 'Well, actually, it's good, isn't it? It's great to hear a book more than once'. So, I've been saying that sort of thing. Yeah, 'I haven't read it. So, I'd like to read it.' (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

Knowing that enjoying reading doesn't have to mean that, like for our age, that you read chapter books. Like you can enjoy comics or nonfiction, sporty books or audio books or graphic novels or newspaper or yeah. And it also doesn't mean that you have to like every book. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

[Being a reader] doesn't mean that you have to like every book. Like our class book that we did last term. A few chapters in, and I said, 'I've enjoyed it so far but actually, you know I am not enjoying it as much as I thought I would.' Like just giving the opinion that you're allowed to not like a book. Yeah, it's okay. And you're allowed to go about halfway through [and then stop]. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Teachers also set aside time after reading aloud for students to share their opinions about the text with others in the class.

I started asking them most days after I read my picture book if they liked it. So, 'Thumbs up if you like it, thumbs sideways if it was okay, thumbs down if you didn't like it. And it's totally fine, whatever you think. But then tell me, 'What did you like about it?' And I started modelling certain things that I liked

about books. And so, you end up with really cool things that *they* like, even about the illustrations. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

Whole-class conversations about books read aloud also enabled students to experience, in a supported environment, what it is like to participate in a community of readers.

They sit up on the steps, and then they come up because they want to look at the picture even closer, or point to something, or go back two pages and have a look at something—they're engrossed in the book. And then notice what's going on in the illustrations, and you know how it's led to something. And I need to go back and check how that happened, or what did we miss? So, I love it ... And they notice stuff that I don't! (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

And it's talking. It's just that awareness and actually noticing and actually talking about it with them. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Reading aloud to students, for pleasure, followed by talk about the text was an inclusive practice because it made space for all children to be readers, regardless of their decoding abilities. Several teachers observed that their students who struggled most with decoding, were often the most attentive, and engaged when listening to texts read aloud, and the most responsive to discussions.

Sometimes I've noticed that even my really low readers, the ones that you don't think are listening [are the most attentive]. Like [student], is really low in learning things. But then, when I read the chapter book, he's the one who'd have his hand up and be able to tell me everything that's been happening in the storybook, which is amazing. Because you don't realise those kids are sitting there listening and engaging ... It surprised me because I was like, 'Where did this come from?' I didn't expect him to do that. But giving him that [experience]—that you actually *can* do this. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

Kids that aren't necessarily your readers, you know, or have weaker reading skills have been the most attentive to my reading aloud. They're the most engaged, like gasping, you know, if something happens, or like laughing, or getting the most into it, if I ask a question. They have the highest level of engagement and comprehension. So, it's just challenged my assumptions about kids, which has been very good. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

I just remember a book that I read to my class last year, and this real crazy plot twist where the main character's brother was actually the villain, and just like the collective gasp in the classroom when that happened. It was not the ones who are always choosing to read a book themselves, but they were following the story. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Time for choosing books

Teachers from all levels of the school found that providing students with choices about what to read not only engaged students but also helped them to build an understanding of their reading preferences. Many teachers had a selection of books displayed in their classrooms for children to choose from and read, and all classes had a time scheduled for visiting the school library.

They're more engaged in the texts when they have a wider choice of books like the ones off the library shelf, because it's usually nonfiction and other stuff in there, too. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

Creating the options where they can look at something they are interested in and take it out and identify that. That's also learning. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

One of the Year 0–3 teachers observed that students perceived books found in the school library as being qualitatively different from books used for learning how to read.

With the [levelled] readers, maybe they see them as what you do with the teacher or at home 'when Mum makes me do homework, and I can't do that'. And with a picture book, well, 'My teacher knows I

can't read that, because, gosh, look at all those words. But I can still *enjoy* it.' Yeah, it's sort of not high stakes in the way [school readers are]. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate).

Having freedom around which books to choose sometimes meant students selected books for recreational reading which were well beyond or below their assessed decoding or comprehension abilities. A challenge for some teachers, especially those in the Years 0–3 syndicate, was balancing the need to ensure students had books at their assessed reading level, with the need to give students the right, as readers, to choose books for themselves. Some teachers had found ways of supporting the two important goals of learning how to read (using level-appropriate texts) and learning how to be a reader (supporting student agency and the autonomy to choose). One solution was to use different books for different purposes.

We have books in the book box. But allowing them to go and pick a special book [from the library] for them to have in our classroom ... and then they just keep in their territory [for recreational reading]. And that's them taking accountability for what they are interested in, which is cool. And there's a lot of talk, they love talking about books and characters, and their interests and things as well. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

I've opened out the scope of books, so I'm like, 'You can read the library books on the library shelf at silent reading time', which historically would be books at their level. So, I'm letting them do that, just encouraging them to read. And not just at reading time. Like, it's so wonderful if you're reading, I'm never going to say no, if you choose, reading as an option when you finish your work. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

I taught myself to not say anything [about the books students picked from the library], because some are just looking at pictures and things. They'd pick out the school magazine and look for people they know. And I was thinking like, 'Oh, you should be reading'. But actually, no, that's the way of them. And they're picking up things that they like. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

A related challenge was how to extend the range in students' reading diet in terms of topics, genre, text type or difficulty, without limiting their autonomy and freedom to choose. This required deeply knowing students and knowing texts.

If they go to graphic novels, I don't try and dissuade that at all. But I go, 'How about you only take one graphic novel? Or 'If you're enjoying this in graphic novel form, I have that as a novel. If you're enjoying this, imagine how much more you would enjoy the story. (Librarian)

Teachers described how visiting the school library helped students to see themselves as readers. Teachers modelled use of the library as readers themselves, taught library skills, and provided students with opportunities to get books for themselves. One teacher made a conscious effort to regularly refer to the school librarian, her role, and how she might support students as readers.

I promote her as being a librarian. So, as we left to go to the library today, I said, 'Let's just go to the library' and say, 'Hi, how was your holidays?' You know, if we need new books we can go and ask [Librarian]. And 'Oh, hasn't she chosen us really good books?' So, it's the whole idea of being a librarian. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

The school librarian supported students' use of the library to meet their own purposes. When classes visited, she promoted new books that had arrived, read excerpts from them, and showed related information using digital resources, such as online clips. The librarian highlighted the importance of teaching students how to select a book they would enjoy reading. She observed that students who spent their whole library session "trying to find Wally" leaving little time to choose a book were unlikely to enjoy reading it.

It's been interesting watching the way they select books. If they've spent the whole time, you know, finding Wally, and now, 'I've got a minute to find a book', of course you don't enjoy reading because you don't spend any time selecting what it is you want. So, I'm trying to discourage that behaviour. (Librarian)

I had a kid who, I've been told needs to get a novel out today, and he likes sport. And he just walks around. He's not even looking at the books. I'm saying, 'You're never going to choose a book like that. You're not even looking at and not even touching them'. And he said, 'I'm judging them by the covers'. I said, 'We've discussed this,' and I found him a novel about soccer playing ... It's trying to find the right book. So, I try and sort of dig into what is it that you like to do? What is it that you like? Do you like fantasy? Do you play sports? (Librarian)

Sometimes the librarian designed fun activities to teach students how to choose books. A recent example was wrapping books up in plain brown paper with only the first line visible, so that students had to choose a book based on its content rather than its cover. According to teachers this was a successful strategy.

She wrapped the books in brown paper, and she just had the opening line on it. So, they picked the book based on the opening line. They couldn't see the cover, and they couldn't see what it looked like. And I had a lot of readers ... I've never seen [student] go and read, and she was so excited, and she didn't want to open it. I was like you have to open it. And then she opened it, and she was so excited. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Teachers from all levels considered that having a library and paid school librarian was an important aspect of engaging students in reading.

We're pretty lucky that we have library time, really, because many schools don't. Some schools don't even have a library. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

She'll promote the books and then help some kids to pre-order the book. I think, having an actual librarian in the library. I've just come from [another school] and we had a fabulous library ... and I loved it but I didn't have the knowledge ... But the value, the difference [of having a librarian]. I've only been here two terms, and the difference. Having that person in the library with enthusiasm. That's amazing. And I think for every school it should be compulsory for them to have a librarian like [Librarian]. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Just her knowledge and enthusiasm. And yeah, she knows the library inside out, whereas we as teachers don't. Yeah, she plays little clips of the books and interesting things. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

She's so dedicated, and she is so much about reading in the library and making it good ... She always shows the new books on display, and she'll read from those quite often. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

There's a big gap in my knowledge, and if you don't know the books yourself, you're not going to read them to your class. I think that's where [Librarian] can be really valuable as well. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Recreational reading in class

Some teachers saw providing opportunities for recreational reading in class time as a way of validating students as readers who have the autonomy to choose and read what is important to them.

I was really encouraging them to get books out at our school library and then have some time after morning tea to then read those books that you've chosen and thought about choosing. And they're not just a random one. You picked it off the shelf like you want to read that. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Teachers also commented on the importance of participating in recreational reading time themselves because for some students this was the only time they saw adults reading for pleasure.

I think the kids need to see teachers sitting around reading. You know, monkey see, monkey do. Certainly, if I'm having silent reading, I'm reading a book. And here I know some of the teachers do that with their kids. When their class is doing silent reading, the teachers have got books out too. I've really tried to emphasise how important that is. (Librarian)

When you say to your kids, 'Right, we are having ten minutes' silent reading,' then you actually should be role modelling it yourself and reading rather than doing emails. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

I read out loud to them all the time, or have a class novel, and I know that's some of my favourite time is reading out loud to kids. But yeah, actually seeing me just sit down and enjoy a book is a different, it's a different thing, you know. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Some teachers had stopped participating in silent reading time because of time and workload pressures. Following the Pūtoi Rito PLD, one teacher decided to pick up this practice again, and was surprised about the positive impact it had on her students.

When I started teaching, my mentor teacher said, 'When the kids silent read you should silent read, too'. And I did in my first year, and then I stopped, because there were all these other things to do ... So, I think it was the last week of last term, I grabbed a book off the shelf, and I started reading it while it was silent reading time. And I tried really hard to not look up and to just be immersed. And then when I closed the book three kids came up to me and asked, 'What's that book?' And they are like, 'She is so into that book that it must be incredible!' So, it shows how they actually do look at what we do and want to emulate that. And it made me feel bad about 10 years of not silent reading in front of them. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

As well as modelling reading for pleasure during silent reading time, teachers modelled and explicitly taught other practices that readers engage in, such as using a bookmark to keep their place, or looking after books, especially if they belong to someone else.

I've got a selection of those [chapter books] on the library shelf. I just say, 'Bookmark it and put it in your cubbies. Don't put it back on the shelf'. So that they are sort of getting the idea of going back to one, now that some of them are more capable of reading longer stories. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

I give the kids a big talk at the beginning of the year about my special books because I've paid for them myself, or they were my children's books. And I've got my kids, names and stuff in them. And the kids are really careful with them, like I've had them for years in the classroom, and they're not wrecked ... But it's the fact, I think that it's my collection of books that they kind of get into reading them. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Several teachers described how since adopting structured literacy approaches, several years ago, there had been a general shift away from having recreational reading time in class. Some teachers were aware of research literature suggesting that recreational reading was not the best use of time for students who struggle with learning how to read. However, these teachers were also aware of the need for reading breadth and saw independent reading as a good way of supporting students to build their reading mileage. As shown below, teachers from the Years 4–6 syndicate had an extensive conversation about this.

It's been interesting having done the structured literacy journey ... For a few years, there was a bit of a lean away, well actually a big lean away from doing silent reading time in classes with the theory being that if they can't decode it, and they can't read it they're practicing the wrong thing or will get stressed and anxious when they're doing it. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

They find that a lot of children just aren't on task during that time ... And it's that Matthew effect. So, the kids who are really good readers, they get better. But your kids, who aren't good readers—independent reading is arguably not the best. But how do we make sure that they're reading enough is still my question. And independent reading, if it worked really well, would be a really good way to do that. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Silent reading used to be something that we did every day. And then I was like, 'Oh, I feel like I'm doing the wrong thing'. So, I kind of pulled away from it. And so, it's been good having these sessions [with the National Library] and thinking about well, 'What is the place for that?' (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Since the PLD some teachers had reinstated time for recreational reading in class and found that it was working well.

They're really getting into their silent reading. Like they love it. Even today on the first day back, they will all just sit there and just read. Like, they love it! (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

Other teachers had started providing students with options—to read their own book independently, to read with a small group, or to listen to a story read aloud. This approach provided more confident and capable readers with the opportunity to read independently if they wanted to and to build their reading mileage without disadvantaging those students who wanted more support.

I normally use that [silent reading time] as a time to pull them down for something they want to read about: 'Who wants to come and read this? Who wants to come and listen to this?' Or I read with them. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Yeah, it's a great idea. We used to do that at a school I worked at previously—the same thing with the class read. The kids would opt in across the syndicate. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Reflecting on the dilemma about the place of recreational reading in class time, one teacher concluded that what is most important is selecting the pedagogical approaches that best support different teaching and learning goals.

It's all about exposure to different kinds of texts and different structures. And then also kind of reading for depth ... But yeah, it's like how best to use what is very precious time. What's interesting with that is, it depends on what your goal is. Like, is it to make them a better reader? Or is it that there's all these other social and emotional benefits they can get from reading. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Talking about books with others

Teachers observed that providing students with opportunities to talk informally amongst themselves about books helped them to develop their reading identities.

I think today's age is all about socialisation. When the National Library came in and showed us that graph. What takes over when they hit 10, 11, 12? It's social media. So, you think about them reading, they'll be reading something together, and then they'll go off and talk about it. 'Did you read that part ...' and that kind of stuff. So anytime we can make something social, I think that's where we get the winner. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Some teachers provided set times for students to talk with each other, either formally or informally about books.

They all bring their [library] books in on Monday, so they might as well sit down and talk about the books that they've taken home, so that other people interested can go to the library and say, 'I want that book'. Yeah, just creating that interest. (Teacher, Years 0–3 syndicate)

I'd buddy the kids up and they'd share with each other a book that they read, and that quite often inspired others to read, because they'd hear what someone else was reading and saying, 'Oh, gosh! Are they reading that? Actually, that sounds quite good,' and catch the enthusiasm, too. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Teachers could model what it means to be a reader by listening to and participating in, these conversations—not as a teacher of reading, but as a fellow reader, interested in sharing ideas about books. Teachers from the Years 7–8 syndicate described a range of ways in which they participated in these types of conversations.

I used to get them after we've done silent reading at least once or twice a week after we'd read for, say, 10 min or 15 min, to share what they've been reading ... I said to them, 'I love this activity because I often take your books home and read them'. Because when I've heard about what each of the children in my class are reading, I'm like, 'Oh, that sounds cool. I'm going to grab that book and get it out of the library'. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Today choosing the novels, I held it up and I read [the blurb]. And I said, 'I'm actually taking this home right now tonight because I want to read this one,' and quite a few of them then had a look, and then they've actually chosen that book. So yeah, it is about transferring your enthusiasm. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

The kids will be reading a book, and I'll go, 'Have you got up to this bit,' and they'll go, 'No,' and I'll go, 'Oh, you're getting to the good bit, you're getting to the good bit. Let me know what you think!' (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

I've got a group of about 6 or 7 girls, my class. They're all reading the series *Keeper of the Lost City*, I think it's called, and it is a fantasy series. It's like they've got their own little book club. They just share the books around and talk about them. And they're like, 'I can talk to you about this, but I can't talk to you about this, because I don't want to spoil it'. And I don't think it's anything I've done. But it's quite cool, because now I'm more conscious, I'm trying to get involved and ask them what it's about, where they're up to, and then just have those reading conversations with them. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Teachers also shared their own reading lives with students by talking about the books they were enjoying reading.

I told them in detail about that [book I was reading], and they were dead quiet. I was like, this book is so good. I told them in detail the whole story. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Some teachers had set up activities to encourage interactions between students around books. For example, one teacher encouraged her students to write comments in books she had bought for this purpose. Students could respond to the book and to other students' comments written in the book. These comments sometimes resulted in further conversations between students about their shared experience of a book and enabled collective meaning making to occur across the class over time.

Some of the author visits we've had, I always go and buy one of the books and read it, and then I get kids to write comments on it. And the kids like finding the comments. There was one Daniel Schuster book, and I had a real non-reader who was absolutely enamoured with him and started reading his books. And he's now an avid reader. It's so interesting. Yeah. And he's written comments in the back of the book. So, the kids like that. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

Some of the Years 4–6 and Years 7–8 teachers had scaffolded students into working as a supported community of readers through activities such as novel clubs.

We've been doing novel club where the kids have quite a lot of choice. Rather than them, choosing the book and then me making the group, they made the group and then chose the book. So, they were genuinely with friends. They want to be with them ... So, they choose their group, and then they have some books, and they, as a group, choose what one they want to read. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Teachers found that when students had choice about what to read and who to read it with, they supported each other as readers, and that working together as a group was motivating, even for less able or reluctant readers.

The cutest thing this year was, some of my boys got together, and they would read a page each out loud. You don't have to do it out loud, and I never would have expected that from them. But they're very diligently reading through, because they had that choice ... But the whole point is that they generally have supported each other. They might not get the whole thing. But they're going to get some of it and hopefully enjoy it. I have not had a group yet that hasn't wanted to do it and hasn't been really engaged in it. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate).

We've got this other kid who's just started school. He's Chinese, and they literally just went in [to the Internet] excitedly and translated the book into Chinese so that he wouldn't miss out on novel study. That was really cool. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

I've got a kid in my class who's just the most reluctant reader ever, but because he is reading a book about war, and all these other boys are excited, and the rest of the boys are reading that book, too, he sat down for like half an hour and was excited to read a book. I was like, 'Whoa!' watching. So that was quite cool to see with the novel study. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

One teacher considered that for book clubs to work effectively students needed enough time to talk in depth about what they were reading with each other.

It's going to be like one group meets every Monday, one group meets every Tuesday, so that the group meeting session can be as long as it needs to. It's not going to be rushed, because sometimes it can be—like I've in the past rushed it. And then you just don't get the quality discussion. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

At the time of the student focus group interviews the Year 8 students had just started doing group novel studies and spoke enthusiastically about this experience.

We're doing novel study. Yeah, we read a book with like a group we get to pick. There's like a couple of options. And then we get to pick a book that we want to read, and then we read it with people. I quite like it, because then we can talk about the book with other people, and they understand what we're saying. We have like a meeting at the at the end of the week. Yeah. And then, like, talk about the book. (Student, Year 8 student)

Talking about reading identity

Teachers enabled students to strengthen their identities as readers through opportunities to listen to stories read aloud, choose books that interested them, read for pleasure during class time, and talk both informally and formally with others about books. In addition, some teachers found that setting aside time to focus specifically on reading identity, helped students develop understanding of themselves and others in the class, as readers.

Most teachers said that the Pūtoi Rito PLD prompted them to talk with their students about being readers in new ways. Some teachers, especially those in the Year 4–6 and 7–8 syndicates, had tried using the Reader Identity Cards with students in their classrooms and found them useful for initiating conversations.

What's been cool is using those reading identity cards. Each time I do 3 or 4 cards and get some really good discussion, and then I will answer the card myself. We'll talk about my answer, and then they can share theirs if they want to. I noticed my little reading quirks as well and then have a little laugh about those with the kids, about how I have to finish a book, even if I hate it and things like that. And then we get these little debates going. It's really fun. And I think that helps me engage in those conversations with the kids. And they get to see you as someone who does actually read. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

These teachers liked the inclusive nature of the cards which enabled all students to participate and feel validated as having a reading identity, even if they did not like reading or did not think they were very good at it.

I'm getting involved in the discussion and getting the kids to start talking to each other. And I like that it doesn't assume you like reading, because some kids don't like reading. You don't have to like reading to answer the questions. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

We did one [Reading Identity Card] that was like, 'What book would you recommend to others?' And you know, one of my non-readers, highly dyslexic, he was like, 'Oh, the football stars ones,' that [Librarian] recommended and got him onto the series. It's just a little book about a football player. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

The ensuing conversations with students made some teachers more aware of how few students saw themselves as readers or had reading role models at home.

[Using the Reading Identity Cards made it] very evident that school is potentially the only place a lot of them read or saw reading happen with adults. The card about, 'Who are your reading models outside?', they were like yeah, 'We don't see anyone read'. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Just the number I thought weren't reading, I was right ... Maybe 6 to 8 [students in my class] had a strong identity of, 'I read. I love it'. Yeah. And the rest were like, 'Oh....' (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

I've made assumptions about kids assuming they're readers. I assumed [student] was a reader just because he's got a very good vocabulary. He's got very good general knowledge, his siblings are readers, he's quirky. He's not sporty or into other things, you know. You just assume. Yeah, you do think you know who reads. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

As a result, some teachers had re-looked at how to support their students who did not identify as readers.

I've definitely re-looked at some [students] and rethought about how I can inspire them in my classroom, especially boys and girls that just don't want to read. (Teacher, Years 7–8 syndicate)

One teacher who had recently been teaching overseas, noted that at her last school understanding what it means to be a reader, reading for pleasure, and talking about being a reader was part of the curriculum from the earliest levels and so students were familiar with these ideas.

This is my first year back in New Zealand from overseas for a while, and we did do that [focus on reading identity] at school. It was the whole way through. And so, the kids would talk to you about what they enjoyed and what genres. Whereas a lot of my kids [in New Zealand] are kind of like, 'What's a genre?' But, if it's something that you talk about from when they are little, as with anything, the kids do develop that quite quickly. (Teacher, Years 4–6 syndicate)

Other teachers reflected that the explicit focus on mathematics identity common in New Zealand classrooms could be applied to reading.

I guess at the beginning of the year, most of us would do like 'Me and numbers', or 'Me as a mathematician', or whatever. It's pulling that [idea] over to 'Me as a reader'—'These are some of my favourite books I've ever read, this is what's next on my reading list, or this is my favourite movie so I should probably read the book.' (Teacher, Year 4–6 syndicate)

We do that heaps with maths because that was a thing for such a long time that heaps of kids struggle with, right? Well, it's kind of falling off the literacy side of things now. It's the same thing as 'Me as a writer'. (Teacher, Year 4–6 syndicate)

These findings suggest that talking specifically about reading identity in inclusive ways may help students to better understand themselves and others as readers.

4. Discussion

As discussed at the beginning of this report, there is a decline in students' enjoyment of reading and in time spent reading outside of school. This decline was evident at the case study school. The staff at this school wanted to build a reading community to support engagement in reading.

An important component of reading engagement is reading identity. The teachers involved in this research used ideas of their own and built on ideas from the Pūtoi Rito PLD around how best to support all students to see themselves as readers. These teachers modelled, explicitly taught, and provided their students with opportunities to practise what it means to be a reader through a range of activities.

Some teachers were aware of research findings suggesting that activities such as reading aloud to students and recreational reading in class may not be the best use of time for accelerating the achievement of students struggling with reading. Following the Pūtoi Rito PLD some, who had moved away from these activities, began to reconsider their reasons for doing so. As one of the Years 4–6 syndicate teachers observed, teacher choices about which pedagogical approach to use in any given situation “depends on what your goal is”. The goal of learning to read is important. So too is the goal of becoming an engaged and lifelong reader. It is therefore necessary for teachers to have at their disposal a range of pedagogical approaches for an effective school reading programme and an understanding of when best to use them. And perhaps most important of all is an understanding of the interdependence of reading engagement and reading achievement.

According to the teachers in this study, listening to stories for pleasure, choosing books of interest, reading for pleasure, and talking with others about books provide valuable learning opportunities that enable students to see themselves as readers. These activities are consistent with those identified in the international and national research literature as important for student engagement and motivation as readers (see, e.g., Batini & De Carlo, 2025; Boyask et al., 2021; Cremin et al., 2023; Ivey & Friddle, 2025; Merga, 2023; McDonald et al. 2023, McDowall, 2021; Rodriguez Leon et al., 2025; Tregenza et al., 2023). In addition, the findings from this study suggest that time spent talking specifically about and building reading identity may strengthen students' reading engagement and understanding of themselves and others as readers.

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