Creating Space for Ownership

A Photo Tour of Reading Classrooms

In this chapter, we take a step into classrooms where students already have ownership of their reading lives. I find it incredibly helpful to visualize what classrooms look like, sound like, and feel like when attempting to take on a shift in my own practice. There are several photos to examine and charts to study through the lens of admiring readers. Imagine this chapter as a tour where we begin with the whole class instructional space, move to small group spaces, and then move to students’ reading spaces. We will end the tour by zooming in on student work. Each of these four stops along the tour will include photographs of physical space, resources, and student work along with my commentary. We are moving along the gradual release of responsibility model from more teacher modeling to shared experiences to independence. Let’s take a walk.
Reading is a not a linear process but feels like layers of an onion (a spiral) where each layer gets deeper at the core.
When I visualize what a Reading Workshop classroom space looks like, I see it as a spiral. There are layered spaces that serve different purposes—whole group instructional areas, small group spaces, and individual student reading areas—and at the core is the work students do.
Readers are spread out throughout the classroom and are engaged in independent reading and thinking.

The teacher meets with a student in the back of the room to review her goal for herself as a reader. Each student sets his or her own goal and places it on the class goal chart.

The teacher is able to take time to work with individual readers because the rest of the students are engaged in their reading experiences and are independent enough to work without interrupting their teacher.

The reader who is meeting with her teacher uses the goal to direct her own reading conference.
Gail created a comfortable class meeting area so there would be space for modeling and shared experiences. By meeting together, the entire classroom community gathers to see demonstrations up close, discuss a read aloud book, or work together toward shared goals.

There is a handy basket of books that Gail loves and can use to model and show her reading process.

Gail includes a stool for a student to sit on up front and be a model too. Students, not just the teacher, have space to share what they do as readers.

An easel is front and center so Gail can model what she does as a reader and create collaborative charts with the students. The easel paper is empty because she shows her process in the moment in front of her students.

This is like a set for “Reading With Gail” where she has all her reading tools to be a model reader.
Pam’s space is informal in nature and more like a space you would want to read in at home. There are cozy leaning pillows and a rocking chair.

Previously created charts are displayed by the meeting area so Pam and the readers can review them together. These charts help Pam mentor her students in making choices about how they will use their reading time.

The meeting area is surrounded by the classroom library. Simply by being surrounded by books, this area reminds students that there are hundreds of books to explore and enjoy.

Pam’s library is organized in a few ways. The top shelf with the narrow yellow bins is for students’ books and reading tools. Each student has his or her own reading bin, which contains books, a reading notebook, sticky notes, and writing pens. The blue bins of books are organized by theme, topic, or genre. The students participate in organizing books into these bins.

While many of the books in Pam’s classroom library are leveled, the books are not organized by level. The levels are written inside the cover for those who need that support.

Students can organize books in ways that are engaging and authentic. In some schools, I have seen students label baskets of books as “Books That Are Now Movies,” “Books That Will Make You Cry,” “Adventure Books,” and “Books You Will Want to Reread,” in addition to genre-labeled baskets.
Pam keeps her own reading notebook like her students. That way, she is not just telling students what she would do, but modeling what she is doing.

Pam personalized some of her reading notebooks and asks her students to do the same. This way, students have ownership of their notebooks and bring who they are into the reading classroom.

Reading notebooks are used as tools to deepen comprehension, not as assignments to prove to the teacher the students did the reading. Students choose when to write about a book and how to write about a book, and keep their purpose in mind as they read. This is all modeled by Pam first so students understand how to make these choices.
The students in Gail’s classroom also personalize their reading notebooks. This information helps Gail know student interests and lets readers help each other find books on topics they care about.

By personalizing the notebooks, the students and teachers know these books belong to the reader and are not for the teacher.

Four main purposes for writing in the reading notebook are modeled so students can make choices about what they will write based on why they are writing. The four purposes include writing to clarify, writing to remember, writing to deepen thinking, and writing to prepare for conversations. Students choose how to write in relation to the purpose for why they are writing.
Students wrote about their thinking in their reading notebooks. Students chose the ways they wanted to document and keep track of their thinking.

Students reread their reading notebook entries and then formed claims they could support with evidence from the text. They formed their own claims based on what they learned from the novels they read.

Students wrote their own literary essays on Chromebook computers using Google Docs to collaborate and get feedback from their book club members.

Students shared their literary essays as well as their thinking processes with each other. Both the reading notebook and the digital notebook were used by students for different purposes. Students wrote about their thinking as they read in the reading notebook and wrote more formally for an outside audience in the digital notebook. They view the reading notebook audience as themselves and the digital notebook audience as other readers.
In Laura’s fourth-grade classroom, students are taught different ways they might choose to write about their reading. Using her own reading notebook, Laura models each one.

This chart shows how Laura mentors students in how to make choices about keeping track of their thinking. Students can then decide what will help them better understand particular books, and what works for them in general. Over time, students are introduced to more choices, and invent their own ways.

Students wrote their choices and why they were making them on a sticky note. Then they added the sticky notes to the chart. These helped both Laura and the students recall their intentions.

Even though this choice chart is intended for students, it also helps Laura informally assess the types of choices students are making. She can reflect on the types of choices individuals and the entire class tend to make.
These are two examples of students’ choices about how they want to use their reading notebooks and the work they need to do as readers. Notice how each reader uses her own words to articulate what she is going to do and how she is going to do it.

These two students think not just about what choice they are making and how they are making it but also about why they are making this choice. Nicolette is going to make a timeline so she can track the “down times and up times.” Meghan is going to create a positive and negative chart to get to know the characters at the start of a new book.

On any given day, students will be doing different types of writing about their reading based on who they are as readers, what their book requires of them, and their reading process. Students can track the types of writing they tend to do and how each one works for them. All of the choices are driven by purpose.

*Student Choice Examples From the Reading Notebook Choice Chart*
Pam explained how this graph of monthly books read came from her students. “During a morning meeting, a member of our class said that the town’s public library had this challenge to see how many books the town could read. It was a few hundred. I said, ‘Well, we read so much in here, I bet we read more than the whole town!’ The class jumped on it. A few volunteers went to talk to the librarians. Our class total blew theirs out of the water. However, then the class said we should continue to keep track and see if we could ‘beat ourselves.’ That’s when we started tallying our reading approximately monthly.”

By following her students’ lead, Pam used her students’ sense of competition to help them read more. They set the goal, and she helped them track it.
Pam’s reading curriculum is divided into units of study where the entire class reads a genre or studies a topic or theme. For example, the class has a unit of study where the students focus on characters, a unit of study on researching topics of interest, and a unit of study on how to read nonfiction. Toward the beginning of every unit of study, the students in Pam’s class create personalized goals for themselves that go along with the theme or topic of the unit.

These goals are often developed with support from one another and their teacher, but the students ultimately create their own goals in their own words.

By displaying the goals, all the students in the class can help one another and remind one another about what they are working toward throughout the entire unit.

At the end of the unit, the readers can take these off the wall and reflect in writing or conversations about how they progressed and what they learned.

A little bit of color adds a lot of personalization to these goals and offers readers another vehicle for sharing their goals.
In Chris’s seventh-grade class, the students generated their own informational reading topics. The students chose what they wanted to study.

Chris’s students met as a group and shared their topics as Chris listened and created this chart. The chart is also set up to connect to argument writing around these topics.

By being mentored to choose their own topics, the students were engaged and developed ownership of them. Because the topics were publicly displayed in the classroom, students began to form partnerships and small groups around similar topics on their own.

None of the students in this class forgot their articles or notebooks, and none asked, “How many articles do we have to read?” because they chose the topics and wanted to learn about them.
The students in each book club in Gail’s classroom are given a blue shallow bin to store their materials. Gail does not dole out materials or collect them. The readers are in charge of organizing and keeping track of their own tools.

Sometimes ownership is created by giving students tools that are theirs to use and organize.

A book club meets together at this small round table. Notice the teacher’s chair is not here too. This is the student club members’ space for reading, writing in their notebooks, and later discussing their interpretations of the book.

Even though these students are in the same book club and reading the same book, they take notes in their reading notebook in different ways. They choose how to track their own thinking.
Book club members Charlie and Olivia set intentions for themselves in terms of the conversational skills they want to work on.

These two readers are in the same book club but set different intentions for what they would like to work on during their club conversations.

Students’ intentions often stem from what they have seen their teacher model, what other readers and clubs have modeled, and feedback from each other.
Laura calls a small group of readers over to a carpeted area of the classroom to model a strategy for them.

Notice how Laura is on the carpet with the students. She is at their eye level, talking to them as a reader herself.

Laura took notes prior to this lesson so she could offer the readers feedback. She referred back to these notes to give specific and growth mindset comments.

All of the students in this small group brought their books and reading notebooks with them so they could practice and apply what Laura was modeling for them in their own books.

These students read at different reading levels, and Laura is supporting them in a strategy she believes they all can benefit from learning. She is not teaching the content of a book and instead is teaching the readers a strategy. After modeling, she mentors them as they apply the strategy in their independent books. They begin transferring what she modeled in her book into their own books.
These readers look focused, engaged, and comfortable independently reading. Just like adults, many students prefer to read in a cozy area and not at a desk.

These two readers are partners who meet daily for a few minutes after independent reading to discuss and check in. By sitting near one another, they can easily transition into a discussion by simply turning their bodies around.

These readers have all of their tools near them and set up their area each day to prepare to read.

When it comes time to have a discussion, they will simply turn and face one another. These students select their own topics for discussion and apply what their teacher modeled in terms of how to have productive conversations. They know how to listen actively, respond to clarify, and build on each other’s ideas.
These four readers are all busy, focused, and working toward their goals.

Notice how each reader seems to be doing something a bit different based on what each one needs in the moment. One reader is stopping to jot a note in his notebook. Another reader is flipping back to a page in her book to reread an important part, while the others are moving forward in their books.
Readers in this classroom make choices. They choose what to read from the classroom library. They choose where they read that will allow them to stay focused. They choose the tools that help them remember their thinking.

Notice one reader has her reading notebook out and another reader has a Chromebook computer and digital notebook out. They use these notebooks to write down and revisit their thinking. They often refer to these notebook entries when they have book club discussions with classmates.
In John’s second-grade classroom, he displays clear charts that students can refer back to while they read. He makes sure the charts are visible to all students while they read.

By using the exact words a reader might use when thinking about a text, he is offering a support that students can try out independently. He already modeled how he uses this language as a reader.

Over time, this chart might grow even more. Students can contribute other ideas for this chart and add what else they say to themselves as they read. For example, students might add phrases like “I am wondering about . . .” and “Now I know . . .”
Students’ notebooks are a bit different because students made choices about what they look like and how they are organized.

By keeping a notebook and not worksheets for the teacher, the students develop ownership of the work they do as readers. A worksheet is for the teacher. A notebook is for the reader.

The teacher models different ways she tracks her thinking by showing T-charts, columns with categories, and timelines. By modeling strategies for tracking thinking in writing, she is setting them up to be independent. When students are handed a worksheet or graphic organizer, they become dependent on us to give them tools in the future. Making their own graphic organizers in the notebook allows students to be more independent.

Notice how this reader used sticky notes to tab off the sections of her notebook. She also placed sticky notes on the front cover to remind her what she chose to work on as a reader and book club member. Many of these notes include conversational phrases she wants to try when the club meets to talk.
The students in Pam’s class learned what mindset is and then created a class chart as an artifact they could refer back to throughout the year. By teaching what mindsets are, Pam helped the readers in this class to understand that they control their attitudes and beliefs.

Each student wrote an example of either a growth or fixed mindset belief or behavior. The class discussed each one, sorted the examples by type of mindset, and then glued them on the chart.

Readers in this class use this chart when setting goals, reflecting on their process, and giving feedback.
The students in Laura’s class reflect on their reading process after talking as a class about the importance of taking risks and having a growth mindset.

Since these reflections are not for the teacher, but for the reader, students respond with honesty. They reflect across the year and notice how their mindsets change or develop across time.
Reflection is built into the end of each unit of study, as in the case of this research reading unit. In this example, the teacher asks the students a few reflective questions to gather feedback about the impact of the learning from the students’ perspective. The students, not just the teacher, have a say in assessing their learning.

This student wrote, "I would like to do this type of learning. It's like choosing between working in an office or doing your dream job if you just try harder and put in more effort. The office builds a fixed mind and the dream job a social, hard-working, open mind." This reader makes a connection between the jobs you take later in life and the type of mindset you carry.
Laura’s students wrapped up their research and informational reading unit of study by discussing their beliefs about an inquiring mind. They wrote their beliefs on sticky notes, then participated in conversations with one another. They take time regularly to examine and discuss their beliefs.
The students often make connections to where and when the skills they are learning may help them later in life. They see the work they do as readers and thinkers as preparation for their future adult lives. Reading and reflecting are viewed as life skills and not just school tasks.
This reader chose how he wanted to set up his reading notebook and how he needed to write about the book and his thinking. He began by taking one of his sticky note ideas and then placed it at the top of his page to write longer about the idea.

Notice how he expands on his idea about the character and develops several interpretations of what is really going on in this part of the book.

The reader uses a visual of a web to list character traits. This reader knows that characters can have many sides to them and often display more than one trait.

The reader considers how the setting is impacting the character and how the choice the author made to include the number 13 could symbolize being unlucky.

In this one reading notebook entry, the reader demonstrates a deeper understanding of the book and how he is meeting many of the standards in this one entry.

Notice how this student’s entry looks very different from his classmate’s notebook even though they are reading the same book and in the same book club. These students have ownership of what they write down, and how they write it.
This reader set up her notebook to keep track of her thinking and the text evidence that supported it. Notice how she uses a combination of sticky notes, arrows to show the flow of her process, and labels to annotate her writing. She seems to have steps to her process: jot on a sticky note, write more about her thinking, and document the text evidence that supports it.

After rereading these thinking and evidence entries, the reader synthesized the information and made a list of “things to know about” the character. This shows her thinking and writing process and allows her to draw conclusions about the character.

The reader uses this list as conversational points to bring to her book club when it is time to have a discussion. She shows up prepared with ideas worth talking about.
This seventh-grade student in an inclusive classroom chose how he wanted to track his thinking across an independent book. We can see he is visualizing the scenes, understanding literally what is happening, and also interpreting the character’s motivation and reactions.

On the bottom left where the student drew the rat, he is considering symbols—the rat—and size to interpret power dynamics. The student is interpreting the character’s feelings and experiences in the words next to the image.

The student’s choice to organize his thinking in this way reveals much about how he thinks about books. From looking at this entry, I see he chooses important events (see page numbers and event summaries), visualizes (see the sketches with labels), interprets the relationships between characters (see his writing in most boxes), and bases his interpretations off of text details such as what characters say and do (see sketches and writing).
Conclusion

In this chapter, we took a tour into reading classrooms where students own their reading lives and teachers take on an admiring lens. If you are feeling inspired by what you have just seen (as I am), the remainder of the book will teach you how to create similar reading environments and readers in your classroom. In order to create classrooms where true ownership is happening, we teachers may need to take on different roles that encourage readers to do more, learn more, and read more. The next chapter focuses on how to take on the role of being a miner, uncovering your students’ reading processes.
What if you could have an owner's manual on reading ownership? Consider *Mindsets & Moves* your guide. Here, Gravity Goldberg describes how to let go of our default roles of assigner, monitor, and inspector and instead shift to a growth mindset. Easily replicable in any setting, any time, her 4 Ms—MINER, MIRROR, MODEL, MENTOR—ultimately lighten your load because they allow students to monitor and direct their reading lives.


“Thoroughly grounded in current theories, which are clearly explained and illustrated with stories and examples, this book is practical with excellent examples of lessons, anchor charts, and all the necessary details. Gravity makes visible her own learning and self-corrections in teaching. Reading Mindsets and Moves is time well spent.”

—Peter Johnston, Author of *Choice Words* and *Opening Minds*

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