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Topic: Alone or Choices

More Choices for Wade

At reading time, the ten year-old students in my “Bluebird” group gather in a circle, carrying their textbooks and workbooks. That is, everyone joins us except Wade. I spend the first ten minutes (at least) of every class, searching through our Serendipity Pod, (These are the days of open space, non-graded learning.) under desks, and in the converted refrigerator box “study booths”, looking for my reluctant and struggling reader.

When I finally coax him to our group, we spend another ten or so minutes hearing Wade pout and rant about how babyish and dumb the stories are. I can hear his gruff, pleading voice. He’s right of course. This text is totally inappropriate for a fourth grader, but as a first-year teacher I am clueless as to how to proceed. His reading level has been diagnosed at first grade, which Wade also knows. And this is the only material that has been made available to me.

Reading continues to follow this pattern for many weeks. I ask for ideas from my teaching team but nothing appears to help Wade become motivated to learn to read. An English teacher from a near-by high school calls our team to ask if one of her students, who wants to become a teacher, can volunteer her time each day. I think, *A t least I will have someone who can chase Wade down while I begin reading with my group and perhaps the individual attention may encourage this unenthusiastic reader.*

Cathy spends some time with Wade and quickly discovers he loves baseball. Their conversation takes her to talking about sports in general and Wade is quite knowledgeable. Cathy has an idea. She calls up an editor at “Sports Illustrated” and asks what is the average reading level of the articles. She’s sorry to hear that the magazine is written at the fifth grade level! But, Cathy decides to take a chance.

The next day she comes to class with a stack of “Sports Illustrated” magazines. Sitting down with Wade, they look at pictures and Cathy tells him her idea to have him learn to read using these magazines. He dives right in. Wade loves the stories, knows many of the names of the athletes from other sources. He is rapidly reading.

Then, this intuitive teacher tells him that he’s reading a magazine that is written at the fifth grade level! Wade becomes ecstatic. His body language changes. He holds his head higher and his body more erect as he prances about the pod carrying his magazines around for anyone to see. With his burgeoning confidence, he begins to tackle other reading material and turns an important corner in his life.

Wade will stay with us for two more years, as he is part of our multi-age, multi-grade class. Our kids stay with my five member teaching team for three years. It is truly gratifying to see Wade become a confident reader. I am just beginning to learn the complexities of helping students learn to read. But I have had one very worthy success. My confidence is bolstered. Wade’s life-choices have just exploded.

