



Paths to reading

A principal in Central Okanagan intervenes to reinforce respectful behaviour. She also uses that interaction to review the student's progress from non-reader to competent and avid reader in a single year.

by Wendy Briggs

Two lunch hour supervisors met me leaving the staff room after lunch. They were upset that a grade 6 student had been disrespectful during lunch time and he was waiting for me in the office. Apparently he had not removed his hood when asked and then when they sent him to the office he was reading inappropriate subject matter. One of the supervisors had taken the book away because she was worried about the war theme of the book and how it would upset the younger students. I asked Coco to come in to my office to discuss what had happened.

Coco's first comment was, "I didn't know it was a crime against humanity to wear my hood at lunch in the classroom." Often Coco did not sleep at night and was exhausted during the day. He has a different rhythm than many as he has great


difficulty with sleeping, especially when it is dark. We have a nearly daily conversation about his sleep. I explained that as far as I am aware it is not a crime against humanity to wear a hood at school but when a supervisor asks him to follow a school rule, he should be respectful. Sometimes, even though we don't agree with what our superior asks us to do, we do it to keep the peace. On our own time, we can do what we think is best. We talked about how even as the principal, I have to follow rules, sometimes even if I don't think they make sense, especially when my superiors make the request.

Then I asked him what he was reading that had been so inappropriate. We went and found the books to have a look. There were three thick

books, one about war, one about wizardry and yet another about his favourite topic, wizardry. Last year at this time, Coco was a non-reader. Now, he had three thick books that he was reading from our library. He asked, "How could a book that I took out of our school library be considered inappropriate? There are way worse and more gruesome books on the shelves in the library." When we had a look at the book we noticed no pictures, only words and wondered how this could have bothered the younger children to make the book be taken away.

We asked Coco how he had gone from not being able to read last year to being a competent and avid reader this year. He talked to us about joining a fandom, being keen on what he wanted to read and loving reading. We asked him about the intensive reading support program that he had attended. He told us that it helped him to get the basics and then he took off reading what he loved to learn about, war and the dark and gruesome. He then explained how he could read now but that he was still "bad at math and other subjects." We discussed how reading helps us to do all other learning and that now that he could read well, he would rapidly catch up in all other subjects. We told him that he was a super star and that others needed to hear about his incredible success to give hope to other non-readers and teachers.

As Coco's wise grandfather told him, "Once you learn to read, you will love it so much that you won't be able to stop."

So please be careful who you take a book away from. 

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