In October 2015, the Randolph County School System adopted a new literacy program called Reading Fundamentals for all middle school ELA classes. One of the goals outlined in the program is to create a positive "reading environment" which fosters a love of reading. This year, Uwharrie Middle School teacher Danielle Scott took advantage of an empty classroom next to her own classroom to create such an environment.

As a former first grade teacher who always had a reading corner established in her classroom, Ms. Scott knew how much even the "big" kids needed a special place of their own to read. After discussing her vision within her PLT, they immediately agreed on the plan to create a 6th grade reading room unlike anything that had ever been established at UMS.

The Lead Teacher and teammates unified as one around this project - Talk It Up Café - to develop lifelong readers. The focus was to collect books for the café for students to read and talk about. Ms. Scott created a www.donorschoose.org project that requested a variety of books on diverse topics covering a mixture of genres and formats. The total amount needed to fund the books was $1,282.00.

Ms. Scott proudly reports that the book project was fully funded on March 10, 2016. In addition, Ms. Scott’s teammates rallied to compete in a homeroom book drive in which the class that brought in the most books won a snow cone party. To their surprise, over 2000 books were donated to the café.

The team also reached out the community for support. Fortunately, some local businesses donated carpets, rugs, carpet squares, and furniture. Ms. Scott set up the café like a book store. Students volunteered to stay after school to help alphabetize the new books and organize the renovated room. The name for the café was formed after Ms. Scott read inspirational quotes from authors who have themselves motivated many individuals to read. She selected a few of these quotes and posted them throughout the room.

The Talk It Up Café officially opened in February. Students can now take any book they want to read. Students’ only requirement is that they read it and/or return it or another book in its place. Ms. Scott says it is truly is amazing how absorbed into their books students have become in this comfortable, risk-free and engaging environment. Adhering to the Randolph County School System’s “Bring-Your-Own-Technology” policy, students are also allowed to bring a tablet or phone on which to read, if that is their preference.

One of the students said, "I think Talk It Up Cafe is very useful and helps you read what you want to read. For me personally, it helped me feel more confident about reading and sitting down with a book for longer periods of time. At the beginning of the year, I did not want to read. Now, I enjoy reading and I could read all day long. I have been able to find my just right book."