

Spending The Day With Donalyn Miller

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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My students need to read...but my students don't like to read. How do I get my students to like reading?!

On March 31, at the Hilton Garden Inn, Saskatoon, the SSLA hosted Donalyn Miller as our 2017 conference speaker. Donalyn, author of "The Book Whisperer" and "Reading in the Wild" spoke to the group about *Voice and Choice: Fostering Reading Ownership*. It was a full and thoroughly engaging day spent talking about our students, books and reading, and libraries. It does not get better than that if you are a teacher who is passionate about literacy! We left full of new ideas - for our libraries, to get kids reading and for sharing books.

The slides Donalyn Miller used in her presentation can be found at the following link and will give you examples of many of the strategies and ideas mentioned in the article.

<https://www.slideshare.net/Donalynm/voice-and-choice-fostering-reading-ownership>

When it comes to achievement, reading is key to students' success. To get students reading, we need to foster a love of reading and books. Donalyn Miller stated that giving students choice and ownership over their reading will increase their motivation, interest and self-efficacy. She shared many wonderful strategies for providing these for our students. Two areas she focused on in particular, were libraries and sharing reading.

Libraries

While she spoke primarily about classroom libraries, Donalyn was quick to point out that school libraries as well as trained teacher librarians are key to our schools and to students' reading. Students need access to books! I found myself making all kinds of connections and brainstorming ways to bring some of the classroom library ideas back to my school library. One quote that stood out to me:

Students' voices should be louder than ours.

- **Diversity:** We must remember that we are buying books, not for ourselves, but for our students.

- What are **their** interests? Consider the interests of your students and the topics they write and talk about.
- Can our students see themselves in the books we have for them to choose? It is so important for students to have reading material in which they can find themselves and read about characters to whom they can relate.
- Do we have a variety of topics and genres? Students should be exposed to all kinds of genres and topics and not be limited to those that we, as teachers, are most drawn to.
- Do we have ways to “match” students to books? Some students are passionate about certain topics, and we should have ways in place to connect those students to what they love.
- **Currency:** There is nothing wrong with the classics, but we want our collections to relate to our students today.
 - Can our students relate to our collection?
 - Are the books they can choose from current and timely?
 - Are the books engaging and relevant to their lives?
- **Organization:** According to Donalyn Miller, if kids have to dig through 15 books they don’t want to find one they do, they are going to gradually become less invested and interested in doing so.
 - Have students organize the classroom library each year. This gives them a sense of ownership and involvement. We have to let go of our own need to control what it looks like and how it is set up.
 - We may not be able to give this total control over in a school library, but of what CAN we let the students take ownership?
 - Can we make school libraries easier for students to find the books they love and foster their ability to choose appropriate reading material?

Sharing Books

Donalyn spoke of many fantastic ways for students to share what they are reading. This sharing not only gets kids “talking books”, but it is a way to encourage each other to read, to turn other students on to different genres, and to build confidence and self-efficacy. Examples of these strategies can be found in the Slideshare link above.

- **Three Text Classroom** – Providing for whole class, book clubs, and independent reading.

- **Preview stacks** – This is putting your knowledge of books together with your knowledge of the child and providing them with 5-6 books to preview and choose from.
- **Book talks/Book commercials** – These are done by students and can be done a number of ways, but they are done regularly. Students sign up for them when they have a book they have read and want to share. Book lists can be generated from these talks and shared with parents for summer reading or for the next grade coming up the following year.
- **Read alouds** – These are not just for primary classrooms!
- **Book displays** – Let the students create the displays (at least sometimes!).
- **Shelfies** – These are book tags the students have created for their favourite books which hang from them with a review that can be read when browsing the shelves.
- **Reading Doors** – Providing fire regulations permit, decorate your classroom or library door with books that the students and teachers of that room are reading right now.
- **QR Code Book Reviews** – QR codes which have short video reviews done by students are placed inside the covers of library books which can be viewed by those considering that book.
- **Reading Graffiti** – Make a wall of black paper with quotes, book reviews, and all manner of reading sharing done “graffiti-style” with metallic sharpie markers.
- **Text and picture apps** – Use text/picture apps such as “Word Swag” and “Over” to create book covers, image reviews, book posters or other sharing activities.
- **Review Club** – Create a book review club for your avid readers. New books that come into the classroom or library are read by this group who do reviews, rate them for language, theme, grade-level, etc. based on criteria. They have regular meetings and run as any other extra-curricular club.

Thank you to Donalyn Miller for a wonderful day of learning!