



# Choice and Volume in Reading Matters!

by LAURA ROBB

*An advocate for student choice and volume in reading, Laura Robb continually lobbies for using the finest authentic and culturally relevant books for independent and instructional reading. Laura's more than forty years of teaching and coaching teachers has revealed three elements that can create schools full of readers: a principal who values reading, skilled teachers, and an abundance of books!*



## **LITERACY CHAMPION: LAURA ROBB**

With more than forty-five years of teaching grades four to eight and coaching teachers in kindergarten to ninth grade, Laura Robb continues to train teachers in using books to develop students' reading identities and personal reading lives. Annually, she returns to schools to support students in grades four on up that read three or more years below grade level, by offering students choices of culturally relevant books they want to, and can read, and developmental word study. NCTE honored Laura in 2016 with the Richard W. Halle Award for Excellence in Middle Level Education. Robb also received Scholastic's Hero Award and Nassau Reading Council's Literacy Award.

## **One to Know: Why Choice and Volume Make a Difference**

"I hate reading."

"Boring!"

"[Reading] makes me sleepy."

The comments are from intermediate and middle school students reading three or more years below grade level, responding to the question: *How do you feel about reading?* At first, you might bristle when you read them. Deep in our hearts, we teachers always hope that students enjoy reading, and often, these responses leave us frustrated and that's understandable. However, the goal is to move beyond personal frustrations to how to best serve these students.

During my teaching career, I've had the privilege of working alongside teachers and administrators who have successfully made reading books part of the lives of students who didn't see themselves as readers. I've learned with and coached teachers who have made a 360-degree turnaround from using computer or basal programs or four required novels, to integrating reading choice and volume into independent and instructional reading (Allington & Frazen, 2021; Miller & Sharp 2018). Choice matters and invests students in reading books as they explore their interests in topics, authors, and genres. Volume in reading also matters: the scientific study conducted by Samuels and Wu in 2004 shows a strong correlation between the amount or volume of reading students complete and their skill development and achievement. A culture of reading can flourish when principals annually fund culturally relevant classroom libraries and school media centers and organize professional learning choices that continually develop teachers' ability to respond to all students' reading needs in student-centered classrooms.

## **What to Do: Engaging and Motivating All Students to Read, Read, Read!**

A first step to engaging and motivating students to read is for teachers to have culturally relevant classroom libraries and time to read self-selected books daily for 15 to 20 minutes. Invite students to suggest books they'd like to see in the classroom library and transform it from *my* library to *our* library. You can have a suggestion box to collect students' ideas or post a large chart titled, "Books to Add to Our Class Library." Start every class with independent reading of self-selected books and take a few minutes to "book talk," and then display new additions to the class library.

Bring choice to instructional reading by organizing a genre and/or theme-based reading workshop that offers students books they can and want to read, learn from, and discuss with a partner or small group. Students can develop their own interpretive discussion questions and/or use literary elements to discuss fiction, biography, and informational texts. You can gather books for these instructional reading units from your school library and by requesting funding to purchase additional books. During a six-to-seven week unit of study, students can read several books, discuss them, reflect, and then share with peers using technology and/or readers' notebooks.

Now take a moment to imagine, as Richard Allington suggests, the reading progress that would occur if students have books they can read and learn from all day as they move from subject to subject (2007). Such an increase in reading volume can transform students into passionate, lifelong readers who develop empathy and compassion for diverse cultures and lifestyles and truly become the thinkers and problem solvers the world needs.

## More to Know and Do

Creating schools full of readers won't happen in a few months or a year. It is an ongoing school-wide initiative led by a principal, in partnership with teachers, who values reading books, recognizes students' diverse reading interests and abilities, and annually funds books for all subjects. Such a principal empowers leadership among teachers and invites them to develop professional learning experiences that impact their instructional moves and students' desire to read. Developing a school-wide culture of reading is an endeavor that views students' literacy development as a core belief and, through professional learning, increases teachers' knowledge of how to use outstanding, inclusive books to develop lifelong readers.

## References

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