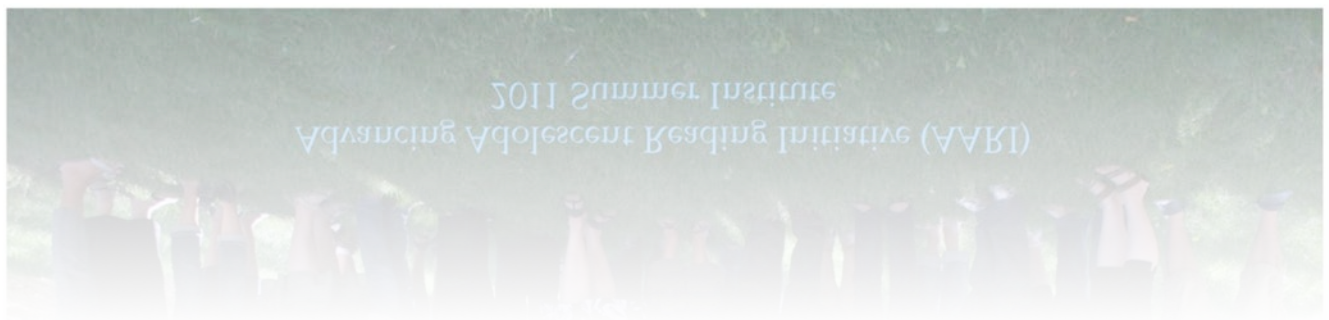




Advancing Adolescent Reading Initiative (AARI)
2011 Summer Institute



Summer Institute 2011

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For three days in August, twenty-four secondary school teachers from across the province of Alberta gathered together to study adolescent reading at the University of Alberta. Held at Lister Conference Centre, the summer institute was the first component in the Advancing Adolescent Reading Initiative (AARI), a two-year capacity building initiative sponsored by Alberta Education (High School Completion Strategic Framework) and developed under the supervision of the JP Das Centre on Developmental and Learning Disabilities at the University of Alberta (<http://aari.educ.ualberta.ca/>). AARI is a comprehensive training program focused on developing advanced knowledge of the language, comprehension and discipline-specific reading demands experienced by adolescents in secondary schools. The initiative is ongoing: each of the participating teachers has made a two-year commitment to participate in the AARI program pilot

The 2011 summer institute was a great success! Over the course of the three days, participating teachers had the opportunity to reflect upon the importance of adolescent reading proficiency and to understand some of the issues related to adolescent reading and what might be done to support struggling readers. The institute also provided an opportunity to test-drive the online learning system and to build a sense of community amongst the participants. Developing a community of learners is especially important for the AARI program; much of the program will be completed online and the participating teachers come from all over Alberta. Twenty different districts, and 24 different schools are represented in this first cohort.

This document includes highlights of the three-day institute and a sampling of responses from teachers in the first AARI cohort.



Day One:

- The institute opened with a welcome breakfast. In addition to the 24 participating teachers, representatives attended the breakfast from the Education Faculty at the University of Alberta and from Alberta Education. The breakfast allowed both the University and Alberta Education to affirm their commitment to the AARI program, to participating teachers and to student success and high school completion. Participating teachers were given the opportunity to hear from the Honorable Dave Hancock, Minister of Education; Dr. Jacqueline Leighton, Chair of Educational Psychology; and Dr. Lynn McQuarrie, Director of AARI.
- Some of the most important parts of the first day were in orienting the teachers to the AARI program, building community and establishing norms and expectations for the online program. This was accomplished through icebreakers, discussions, question and answer sessions and small group presentations.
- Throughout the day, AARI teachers were given the opportunity to work in the online learning environment. They learned how to post their pictures, build a personal profile, access readings and video supports, partake in forums and collaborate with other AARI participants.



Day Two:

- Day two introduced the participants to Dr. Barbara Ehren (University of Central Florida), an internationally recognized expert in language and literacy and adolescent reading. Dr. Ehren conducted a morning workshop with the AARI teachers setting the context for the program, providing rich detail from her experiences as a teacher, as a consultant and as a researcher, and integrating the experiences of the participating teachers into her presentations.
- In the afternoon, Dr. Ehren gave a public lecture on "How Prevailing

Myths Thwart Literacy in the Secondary Schools". This lecture was open to students and professors from the University of Alberta and interested parties from Alberta Education and local school boards. Dr. Ehren's lecture was well attended and was recorded as a resource for the AARI program.

Day Three:

- On day three, Dr. Ehren looked more closely at the language underpinnings of adolescent literacy. She helped teachers understand that many of the processes we take for granted as successful adult readers and subject specialists are very pivotal for struggling adolescent readers.
- In the afternoon, Dr. Ehren asked teachers to more closely examine the demands of the texts and tasks they use in teaching secondary students. Each discipline presents different reading challenges related to vocabulary, text structure and requisite cognitive processes.
- The day concluded with a Q and A session with Dr. McQuarrie. This discussion gave participants an opportunity to learn more about the expectations and parameters of the AARI program.

How did participating teachers respond?

I very much appreciated the expertise of all the people involved. Very important to me is what we are implementing is based in research... research focused specifically on adolescents. There were opportunities to network, to share best practices, and to establish relationships that will make the next two years all the more enjoyable and fulfilling.

(participant response)

Following the institute, the twenty-four teachers were invited to provide feedback to the AARI through an online survey. Eighteen of the twenty-four teachers completed the survey.

Survey response indicated that participating teachers:

- Overwhelmingly appreciated the usefulness and relevance of the workshops (78% were **very** satisfied)
- Were pleased with the number of opportunities for discussion and interaction (89%)
- Felt that the institute did a good job in setting the stage for the AARI program (89%)

When asked which aspects of the institute they found most useful, participants most frequently mentioned the atmosphere and interaction, the expertise and ease of the guest speaker, and the chance to collaborate with colleagues from around the province:

- *I found the opportunity to discuss with our colleagues was very useful, since many of us were on the same page of what we were experiencing in our schools and our classrooms. Also, the opportunity to take a closer look at our curriculum and what we are asking our students to take on. In other words, I really enjoyed the opportunity to use what we had been talking about in a practical and hands on manner.*
- *It was most useful being able to take information and discuss it within our groups and to go further with it by considering what implications the information has in our classrooms and at our schools.*
- *Dr. Barbara Ehren did a fantastic job giving us an overview of reading and setting the stage for what we would be later delving into.*
- *There was very little that I didn't find both useful and engaging. I guess deconstructing the reading process was very helpful. I feel as if I have been given a firmer grasp on the invisible world of text and reader interface. I have already begun to consider how to use the information we received.*
- *Loved the interaction with teachers from other subjects/areas of province. Dr. Ehren was amazing! Her presentation and ideas were great and practical. The enthusiasm of the staff involved was very empowering.*
- *The atmosphere was extremely positive and comfortable. The material covered was thought provoking and applicable. I appreciated the clarification of expectations, anticipated workload etc.*
- *Dr. Ehren was aware that we were teachers and she didn't assume anything. She presented the material in a realistic and uncomplicated matter. Her enthusiasm was evident and We all left knowing we were on the same page.*



Participants were also asked to share any insights or “Aha” moments from the institute. Here is a sampling of their responses:

- *[I realized] That there is hope that I can make a positive difference as a classroom teacher and that much of what I've already been doing is good practice and through this experience I will be a better teacher.*
- *It was nice being told most high school teachers are focused on subject area and that it is not our fault that students are having difficulties. Even though you tell yourself it is not your fault, you still feel a certain amount of guilt when you are unable to reach a student. Now I can help be part of the solution by building my capacity in addressing literacy needs and also teaching in my focus area.*
- *[My aha is] that strategies are only useful when the student is INDEPENDENTLY being strategic with their skills!!*
- *I never realized how important it is to discuss and truly digest information with students. I am going to be a lot more careful with managing discussions in my classroom. As well, I am going to ensure that my students have every opportunity to understand the readings / text we go over.*
- *[My biggest insight was] Probably the fact that so many people are willing to commit two years to such an intense project when there is no monetary or academic award in the offing. Our reward; our potential to help some of our most at-risk students succeed!*
- *Sometimes an epiphany isn't a "rude or ecstatic" awakening, but the clarity of an accumulation. I have long since felt that literacy was being both underdeveloped and myopically channeled into one teaching realm. The fact that researchers are now going to help teachers refocus the need for literacy OF all subject areas is of vital importance and personal benefit. I feel "lightened" and "enlightened". I guess the epiphany would be that it is a global thought and broad-scale initiative as opposed to a personal feeling.*
- *De-bunking the myth that literacy is only taught in elementary school sticks out in my mind. Also, looking towards the future for your students was very important - we are not just educating students, we are educating future citizens. In that event, we better make sure that they are prepared to face the working world.*

Thank You's:

It was a great experience. I really feel like I learned a lot about literacy. It definitely set the stage for the upcoming program. I also liked the choice of presenter - Barbara was very engaging and dynamic.

This institute was without a doubt the best PD I have ever attended! Thank you for all of your efforts and work. They are most appreciated!

I am very excited to be a part of this initiative, and I am hoping that this will be the beginning of change in our school systems!

(participant responses)

The AARI is pleased with the result of our first Summer Institute. The institute provided teachers with a practical first step in their ongoing study of the language, comprehension and discipline-specific reading demands facing adolescents in secondary schools. We look forward to continuing the journey with these teachers for the next two years as they complete their studies in Adolescent Reading.

