

# 2011 Survey Results

In the first three months of 2011, the J.P. Das Centre conducted an online survey to gauge secondary teachers interest and background in Adolescent Reading and to ascertain the most effective way to offer professional development in this area. The survey identified the concerns of Alberta's teachers have about adolescent reading and their receptivity towards future professional development offerings. For Advancing Adolescent Reading Initiative (AARI), the survey provided valuable feedback on three essential questions:

1. Is there a need for the Advancing Adolescent Reading Initiative?

Yes. Respondents indicated that there are many obstacles for adolescent readers in content area classrooms and that support and strategies are needed to address these obstacles.

2. What kinds of reading issues are most imperative to deal with?

Respondents identified a wide range of issues from word decoding and fluency deficits to issues with comprehension and motivation. Most teachers indicated that they wanted to help "struggling readers" but felt that they lacked background knowledge and skill to deal with the range and depth of reading issues seen in their classrooms.

3. Will a combination of online modules, summer institutes, and weekend seminars work for a select cohort of interested teachers?

Yes. Respondents were receptive to intensive and comprehensive training provided certain supports are in place - supports that involve time, resources and credit. The central component of this training would need to be online modules; the majority of teachers indicated they wanted and needed the flexibility that online studies afford.

## Who answered the survey?

Overall there were 289 completed surveys and another 68 partially completed surveys. The survey respondents came across the province. There were 30 different centres represented with Calgary having the most respondents (98) followed by Edmonton (68).

Survey respondents were secondary teachers and administrators from a wide variety of subject areas. Of these respondents:

- ❑ 32% of the teachers had 1-5 years experience, 20% 6-10 years, 48% more than 10 years in the classroom.
- ❑ 70 % of the respondents had B.Ed, 24% Masters, and 1% had their PhD.
- ❑ 30% had taken some kind of course or professional development on adolescent literacy.

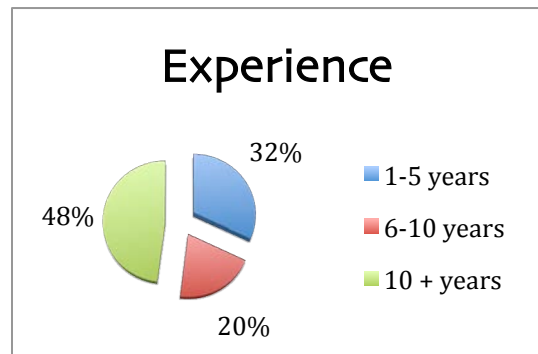


Figure 1

***Of the respondents, 98% said they had noticed struggling readers in their classroom and felt it was a significant issue.***

## What do teachers identify as the most significant reading difficulties?

*"Many students struggle in a variety of areas. A few struggle with basic decoding, more with vocabulary and a very high percentage with reading comprehension. Time spent at school reading is minimal and the variety of engaging text at a variety of reading levels is non-existent. Teachers of secondary education are not prepared to identify and deal with the issues related to low levels of reading ability because they are subject "specialists" and no courses were ever encouraged or offered throughout their university education. Although it is "everyone's" job to teach literacy in secondary schools, the reality is "no-one's" responsibility. Both teacher and school accountability in this area is lacking."*

*(respondent quote)*

Respondents reported a wide range of reading difficulties in their classrooms. Most concerns fell under one of the following headings:

- ❑ Word attack/decoding (some students do not know grapheme-phoneme correspondences and are guessing or giving up on words)
- ❑ Fluency (some students struggle in reading aloud and can not keep up with assigned readings)
- ❑ Vocabulary (some students do not possess the vocabulary range necessary for subject specialty studies)
- ❑ Comprehension (some students can read the words but do not understand what they are reading)
- ❑ Motivation/engagement (some students tune out due to frustration or lack of interest)
- ❑ Language acquisition (some students do not know enough English)

A number of teachers reported that many students have not developed strategies to help them overcome reading challenges, and when faced with new vocabulary or lengthy texts, these students simply give up.

## What is currently being done to address reading issues?

Most respondents (74%) indicated that they provide some type of reading instruction to their students. More specifically, respondents shared that they use strategies to help students specifically with:

- Word attack/phonics/decoding – reported 30 times
- Fluency – reported 9 times
- Subject specific vocabulary and definition building – reported 62 times
- Comprehension (before, during, and after strategies) – reported 72 times
- Text features – reported 19 times
- Context clues – reported 16 times
- Study skills (highlighting, summarizing) – reported 33 times
- Test taking – reported 5 times
- Spelling and grammar – reported 2 times

Respondents listed a variety of teaching supports including KWLs, graphic organizers, think-alouds, note-taking strategies, discussion strategies and many other tools that help students make sense of text.

Vocabulary acquisition (and understanding) was also mentioned as a concern for many of the teachers. More specifically respondents cited subject specific terminology and the specificity of verbs used in test and assignment questions as two specific concerns.

## What challenges do teachers face?

Respondents were asked to indicate the major challenges were that they faced in trying to help their struggling readers:

- 85% said that the demands of the curriculum left them with little time to help their struggling readers.
- 35% said that the school timetable made it difficult to arrange time to help these students
- 48% said that they didn't feel confident enough to help with reading issues. They need more knowledge, training and support.
- 63% said that there were just too many struggling readers to devote enough time to. (see figure 2)

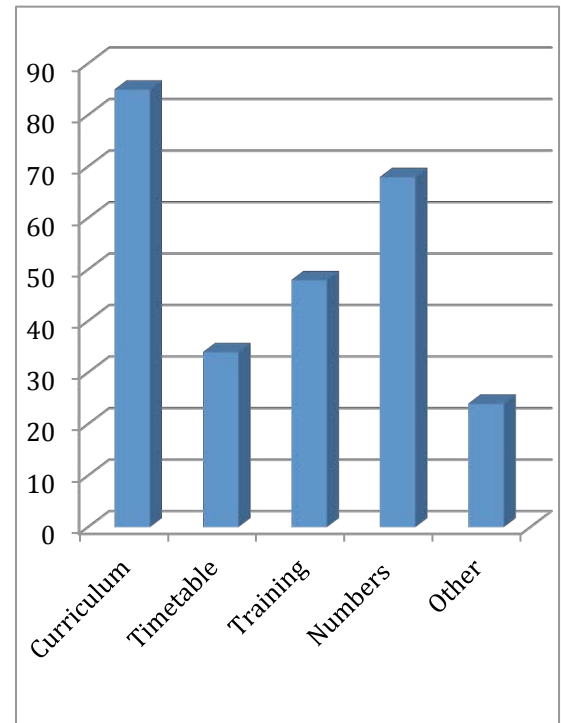


Figure 2: Challenges identified in percentage.

## What training do teachers have?

The survey revealed that 30% of the respondents had taken courses or professional development on adolescent literacy. Of the 280 who responded to this question on the survey:

- 80 had taken one in-service or course on Adolescent Reading,
- 39 had taken 2,
- 20 had taken 3,
- 8 had taken 4, and
- 3 had taken 5 in-services or courses on Adolescent Reading.

When asked to relate the approximate duration of the in-service or course:

- 71 respondents had one hour of professional development on Adolescent Reading,
- 36 had two hours,
- 15 had three hours,
- 7 had four hours, and

- 1 had at least five hours of training or instruction in Adolescent Reading.

## What areas of Adolescent Reading are teachers most interested in?

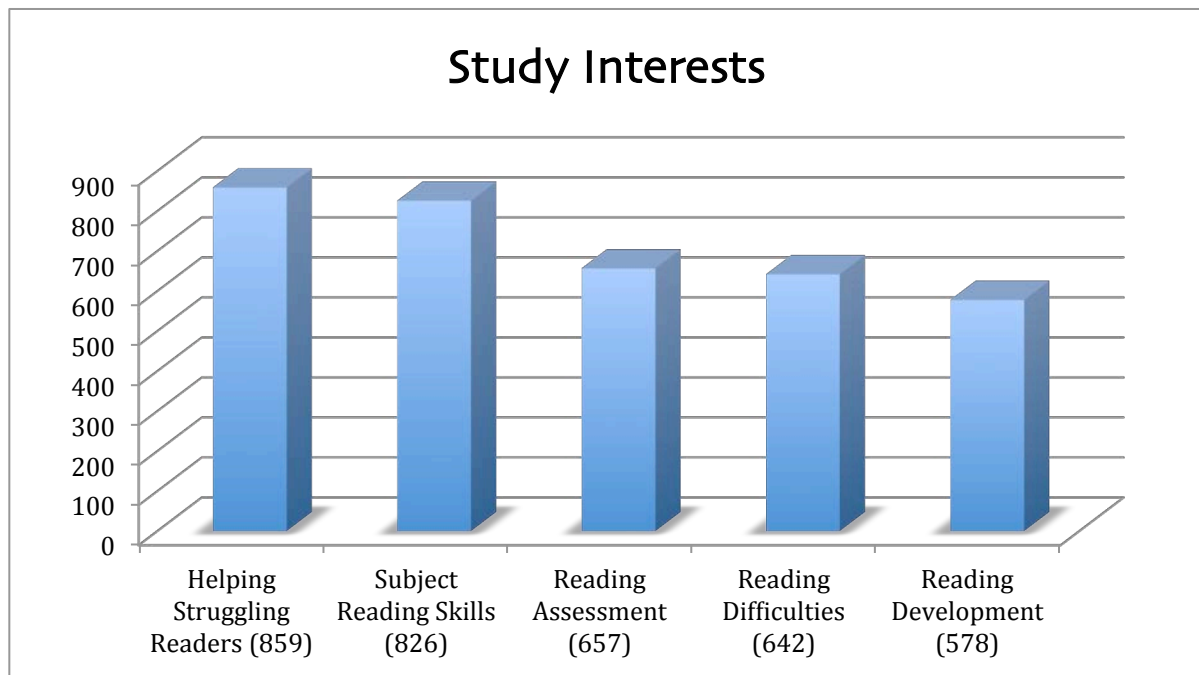


Figure 3: Score is a weighted calculation. Items ranked first were given a higher value; the score is the sum of all weighted ranks. 278 total respondents.

Respondents were asked to rank order their interests related to adolescent reading. The two main concerns were supporting struggling readers, and acquiring expertise in subject-specific reading skills and strategies.

In the space provided for interests/topics not listed on the survey, several respondents related their interests in learning more about:

- Literacy skills for alternative learning programs (online learning, e-reading, internet research, etc),
- Workshops on teaching late immersion reading skills,
- The use of assistive technology in supporting struggling readers, and
- Training for Francophone teachers.

## What would motivate teachers to participate in Professional Development on Adolescent Reading?

*"I would need to be convinced that I would be learning innovative and effective methods for teaching reading. And that the presenters were actual practicing teachers. I would also like to hear pros and cons of approaches. I would be leery of anything that appeared to be tied to any one method, approach or series of professionally created support materials. I want something real."* (respondent quote)

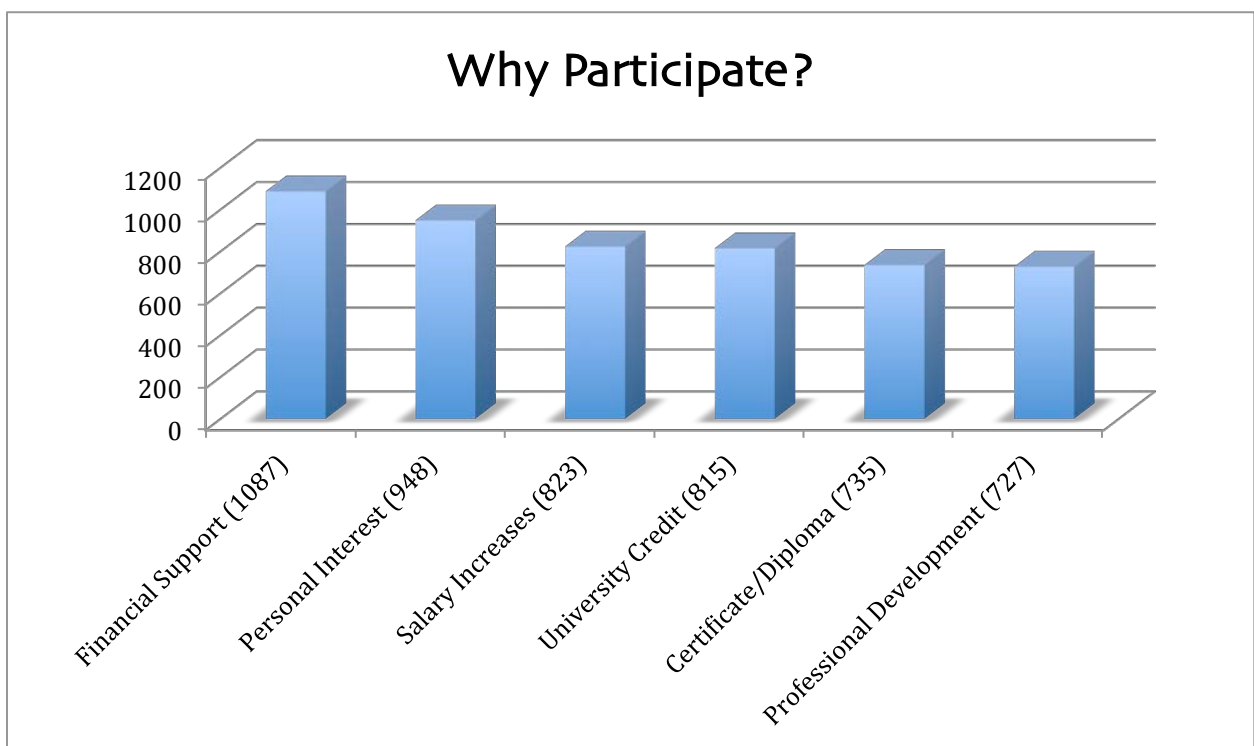


Figure 4: Score is a weighted calculation. Items ranked first were given a higher value; the score is the sum of all weighted ranks. 278 total respondents.

When asked what would attract them to commit to a professional development program, the respondents asked for:

- Support (money, resources and time),
- Engaging professional development that would be differentiated to their personal interests,
- Practical and proven strategies, and/or
- Credit or credentials (for academic or salary purposes).

In addition to the four major themes listed above (support, interest, practicality and credits), teachers suggested a number of other incentives that might help them commit to a professional development program:

- En français (s'il vous plait!),
- On-line delivery,
- Time off from their regular schedule to dedicate to this study,
- Optional components (If there is a series of workshops, being able to take only part of the series, i.e. an opt-out opt-in idea.),
- Collaboration (Meeting up with a cohort group.), and/or
- Practical research (Possibly having applicants select a student and tracking progress with students.)

## What are the preferred delivery methods for teacher P.D.?

*"I am very much less likely to make such a large time commitment if I am unable to do a lot of the scheduling myself. I have other school commitments, family commitments and summer PD to attend. I would be open to asynchronous online delivery that is in small groups that can set their time-line with a tutor (We decide that Thursday nights are good for us as a team, for example.)"*  
(respondent quote)

*"My experience has strongly demonstrated that junior and senior high school teachers need to be shown how to model strategies/think alouds/small group instruction, then go out and do it, then come back to discuss how it went. Simply participating in lectures does not transfer well into the classroom. If it is not valued (and indeed meets some resistance) at the school/admin level it risks not being implemented. For theory type courses, the lecture format is fine, but if we want teachers to teach 21st century skills of collaboration, etc.; students working through modules on their own is really poor role modeling. Why not practice what you preach?"*

(respondent quote)

Respondents were asked what their preferred delivery model for professional development on Adolescent Reading would be. Their preferences are displayed in the graph below (figure 3).

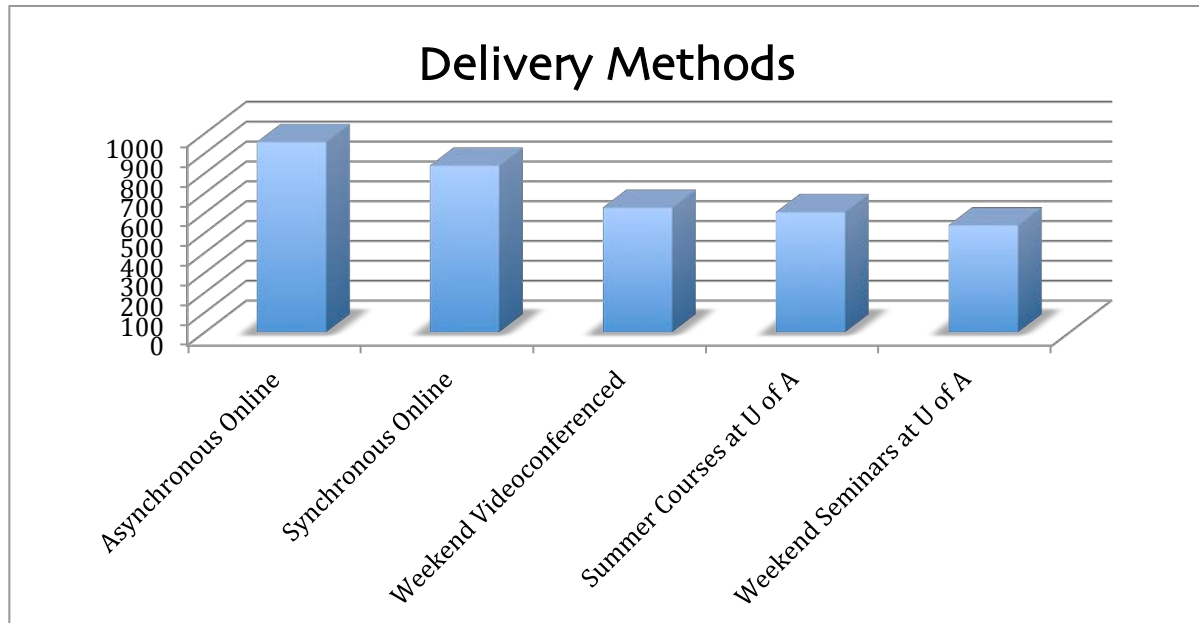


Figure 5: Score is a weighted calculation. Items ranked first were given a higher value; the score is the sum of all weighted ranks. 267 total respondents.

The response to this question reinforced respondents' desire for a flexible professional development model. The results showed that a successful program would largely need to be conducted online, with some face-to-face collaborative components.

When respondents were asked their preferred topics for weekend seminars or summer courses (2 different questions), they reiterated the same topics of choice in the very same order as had been done when asked about preferences for online modules:

1. Teaching struggling readers (approximately 80%)
2. Subject-area reading instruction (approximately 70%)
3. Understanding reading difficulties and disabilities (between 60-65%)
4. Reading assessment and evaluation methods (approximately 60%)
5. Understanding reading acquisition and development (approximately 60%)

Finally, respondents overwhelmingly indicated (76%) that they would prefer a summer institute to run no longer than one week.