Program Overview

Our Purpose:
The Advancing Adolescent Reading Initiative (AARI) is a comprehensive professional development program being developed by the J.P. Das Centre for Albertan educators teaching in grades 7-12. This four-year research and capacity building initiative is funded by Alberta Education to support the goals of the Ministry’s High School Completion Strategic Framework.

The AARI program provides teachers across subject areas with advanced knowledge on how to:

- teach reading skills as part of content area instruction,
- teach content area specific reading skills and strategies,
- identify students who need additional reading support, and
- implement evidence-based reading instruction and interventions in a variety of secondary school contexts.

Our Program:
AARI draws upon local, national and international adolescent literacy specialists to provide instructional leadership to the program. This comprehensive professional development program is spread across two years of study and includes:

- **Eight Online Learning Modules.**
  AARI is a series of sequenced, online, interactive learning modules aimed at developing the deep foundational knowledge necessary to understand how students learn to read—and why some of them struggle. The first four focus on language, reading, data-informed assessment and instruction. The second four modules focus on content area reading skills, differentiated reading instruction across content areas and instructional coaching.

- **Weekends With the Experts**
  AARI contracts and hosts internationally recognized experts to share their insights and expertise with the AARI cohorts and invited guests. Each weekend will allow feature the latest in research and practice.

- **Summer Institutes**
  These 3 to 5 day institutes at the University of Alberta for the AARI pilot cohorts will include modeling, teacher practice, and group work.

Building Expertise
With training and support, secondary teachers can be better prepared to meet the needs of adolescent readers in every classroom.
AARI FAQ’S

When did this program start?

The AARI program officially began in August of 2011 with a three-day Summer Institute held at the University of Alberta. At this time our first pilot cohort of 24 teachers are working through the first four modules. A second pilot cohort is scheduled to begin in July of 2012; this second cohort has already been selected and notified of their inclusion in the AARI program.

Who is involved?

AARI program participants have been selected through a careful screening process. The first two cohorts are composed of junior or senior high school teachers with at least a half-time teaching assignment. These teacher participants represent a variety of content specializations and have made a 2-year commitment to the AARI professional development program.

Jurisdictions were given the opportunity to recommend their candidates for the AARI program and were asked to provide supports for these teachers in terms of time, travel and workload.

The program is administered by the AARI team and is supervised by the JP Das Centre at the University of Alberta under the directorship of Dr. Lynn McQuarrie and Dr. Rauno Parilla. Individual modules are being developed specifically for the Alberta context by reading experts from across North America. Each module is expected to take 8 to 12 weeks to complete and will be facilitated by qualified instructors.

Alberta Education is an important partner in the Advancing Adolescent Reading Initiative and appreciates the AARI program as an important part of the High School Completion Initiative. The AARI program will serve as an important template for continuing and future professional learning and represents a new and innovative approach for supporting practicing teachers.

What kind of training is AARI providing?

AARI participants are studying scientifically based reading instruction for adolescents. These teachers are being offered the latest in research, assessment and learning strategies from the very best in the field of adolescent reading. Online training involves readings, assignments and classroom research activities. Participants are learning about the reading process, reflecting on their practices and implementing and evaluating various instructional strategies and approaches. They are collaborating in online forums and are providing valuable feedback to the AARI team on the content, activities and facilitation of our program.

Do teachers get University credit for their training?

The AARI program is free of charge and is a pilot initiative that is not part of a specific degree program for secondary education teachers so, at this time, we cannot award academic credit for the modules. However, teachers who are enrolled in a Master’s program may be able to take some of the modules as an "independent study". Department approval and University fees would then apply.

Gaining Insight

If we are going to help our students achieve success in their content reading, we must first unpack and demystify the knowledge, skills and processes that we take for granted in our own reading and writing.
Why is this program necessary?

“It is estimated that 70 per cent of youth who drop out of school have poor literacy skills”.

(Kamil, 2003; Kleinbard, 2009).

Recent research indicates that many secondary students fail to comprehend text at an acceptable level and that even students with proficient reading abilities are increasingly unprepared for the literacy demands of the workplace and post-secondary education. Yet, the kind of language, reading, assessment, and intervention knowledge needed to teach reading is typically not part of the secondary teacher education programs and, as a consequence, is often not present in junior and senior high schools. Long-term, cumulative and systematic professional learning programs are needed to build teacher capacity in addressing adolescent learners literacy needs.

The AARI program represents a much different approach to professional learning in adolescent reading than has been traditionally offered through district training programs or publisher-sponsored workshops. Our program is intensive and comprehensive and requires a structured and supported approach that allows teachers to integrate theory and practice with effective and proven classroom applications.

By the end of their program, AARI participants are expected to recognize a wide variety of reading challenges and to support their readers at every stage of their literacy development. With AARI support, these teachers will be provided with the tools and training to become instructional leaders in their respective schools, supporting colleagues in implementing effective practices across all subject areas. Jurisdictions with teachers participating in the pilot of AARI will receive this comprehensive and research supported professional learning program at no charge.

Is it too late to get involved?

School boards and jurisdictions looking to become involved in the AARI program are asked to contact the AARI team for more details. Piloting will be completed as of 2014 and we hope to make the AARI program more widely available after that time.

Where can I find more information?

Website: http://aari.educ.ualberta.ca/
Contact: 780 492 3075
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Long-term, cumulative and systematic professional development programs are needed to build teacher capacity in addressing adolescent learners literacy needs. The goal of Advancing Adolescent Reading Initiative (AARI) is to develop such a program for Alberta high school teachers.