



VERMONT READS INSTITUTE  
- AT UVM -

## *What is VRI?*

The Vermont Reads Institute at the University of Vermont conducts high-quality research and professional development in the area of reading and literacy. An umbrella organization, VRI administers five programs designed to help students achieve the highest possible levels of competence in critical thinking and comprehension by enhancing teacher quality and supporting school change. Our funding comes from individuals, foundations, and the Vermont Department of Education.

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Mary Grace, Director  
Cynthia Snyder, Business Manager

### *Literacy Leadership Initiative*

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# newsletter

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## *QUESTIONS FOR THE REFLECTIVE READER:*

### **HELPING CHILDREN TO SELF MONITOR**

I did it! It was early November- about eight weeks into readers' workshop - and they were actually all reading! All the early behavioral or routine-related pitfalls had been remedied and as I looked around I felt a tremendous sense of pride. I was the best reading teacher in the world. TA DA!

And now I could roll up my sleeves and get to real reading instruction. I think I'll have a few one on one conferences. And what the heck - I'm having a good day - I think I'll start with one of my stronger readers.

I sat down next to Amy, who I felt is one of the best readers in the class and I noticed she was about two chapters into Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie*. I knew from early assessments that her reading fluency and comprehension were excellent.

"So tell me a little about what's happened so far."

"Um, well, there is this girl Opal, and a dog, Winn-Dixie."

"Okay, anything else?"

What followed was the most painful twenty-second silence of my career.

She seemed clueless, in large part because she needed to be supported to remember that reading is about building meaning and making sense of the words on the page. Here was a student who could decode with ease and read as fluently as a newscaster, but when reading on her own she couldn't self-monitor. And she felt she'd been doing an excellent job because she was sitting and reading each and every word. She just wasn't considering what she'd read.

Yes, this was an extreme case, but it brought me to a powerful realization. Children need constant, consistent reminders to think while they read. Many students who seem to be reading independently are not getting the full benefit of their efforts because they are simply working at reading, and not at thinking.

So what could I do? One solution I came up with was the "Questions for the Reflective Reader" page. Basically, at the start of each readers' workshop, I'd give one student the page. Once students began working and reading, I'd ring a chime and signal that student to read aloud one question from the page for all to hear. Once she read the question, the student would pass the page on to another student. After ten minutes, I'd ring the chime again and the next student would read another question.

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*QUESTIONS FOR THE REFLECTIVE READER (cont.)*

This became a routine activity and many students looked forward to reading the questions aloud. The questions also have been handy in other contexts within my workshop. I've used them as a teacher's tool in conferences and in small groups in order to remind kids to self monitor. I've cut the questions apart and put them in a basket for students to draw during independent reading (sometimes the announcements were too disruptive) and also during share time at the end of the workshop, to help students launch a reflective discussion of a book they'd been reading. Certainly, I still had kids who needed even more frequent reminders, but the page undoubtedly helped a few readers a day refocus their thinking and reminded them that reading IS thinking, and not just decoding.

Questions for a Reflective Reader

Do I understand the story? If someone asked what the story was about, could I explain the story to him or her?

Do I know the main characters in this book by name? Can I describe each of these characters? Could I draw a picture of these characters if I was asked to?

Do I know the setting of this book? Do I know the time period and place where the events in the story take place?

Are there things about the story that I really like? Are there things about the story that I dislike? Could I explain these things and give reasons for my answers?

Do I understand the major problem in this story? Do I have a reason for continuing to read?

Have I been keeping track of my ideas using sticky notes? Have I been using comprehension strategies (making connections, predicting, inferring, asking questions, solving tough words) when I'm reading?

Have there been difficult spots in the story to understand? Have I done everything I know to do to help me understand these spots?

Does the story remind me of anything? Is the book like another story I've read? Do characters remind me of people I know? Could I give reasons for why I am reminded of these things?

Is reading this book important to me? Do I really care about finishing this book? Is it worth all my time and effort to read it?

Written by Chris Lane, Monument Elementary School

*Current Projects***READING FIRST**

As we begin our fifth year of implementation of the Reading First Grant here in Vermont, we continue to focus on providing excellent literacy instruction to students in grades K-3. To that end, we have revised the content of our Reading Academies in order to engage the participants more actively in the process of learning about effective instruction in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. At this point, all K-3 teachers, principals, and special educators from Reading First schools have participated in a Reading Academy so we now offer this four-day professional development experience to educators in non-Reading First schools. The response has been most positive and we will continue to offer our Reading Academies throughout this year and next.



In order to provide support to the Reading Coaches who work in each Reading First school, we invited Cathy Toll to Vermont to share her expertise in the area of literacy coaching. Cathy has written three books on this topic and we have provided the coaches with these texts. Cathy has worked with the coaches in the past, so it was particularly nice to have her continue her work with our coaches. Her focus is on communication with classroom teachers and administrators as well as supporting classroom teachers in their work with children. Cathy shared the outline of her forthcoming book and we are looking forward to receiving it just as soon as it is published.

In January, Stan Paine, Director of the Western Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center at the University of Oregon will be spending a day with the leadership teams from all Vermont Reading First schools. His presentation will focus on sustainability and leadership. These are topics that are of great interest and of particular significance to our group.

# Professional Development Calendar

February 11, 2008 9:00am-3:00pm

## What to Look for in the Results-Oriented Reading Classroom – A Principal's Workshop

Co-sponsored with LAPDA  
Presented by Jane Mekkelsen  
VRI Training Room,  
250 Main St, Montpelier, VT

Jane Mekkelsen is currently the Co-Coordinator of the Literacy Leadership Initiative (LLI), a project of VRI at UVM. She is also the Reading First Coordinator at JFK Elementary School in Winooski. Jane recently retired from UVM, where her teaching focused on all areas of literacy learning and assessment with special interests in teaching struggling readers and multicultural literature for children and youth. Her research focused on attributes of successful schools, impact of statewide assessment, literacy program evaluation, and school improvement. She has worked as a classroom teacher, special educator, multi-age grant director, elementary school principal, and middle school assistant principal.

This workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on and inform their role as a literacy leader in their schools and districts. Participants will have an opportunity to try-out protocols and guides for planning and implementing a comprehensive reading program, as well as the opportunity to practice some coaching strategies.

The following topics will be addressed:

- The role of the Principal as a Literacy Leader
- Strategies for literacy coaching: what works?
- Contemporary research-based practices in reading assessment and instruction - what matters?
- Looking beneath the surface of reading: what's the instructional focus?
- Small group reading instruction: what does it look like?
- Using your data to improve instruction: formative assessment and teacher data-teams
- Resources for ongoing support and information

February 15, 2008

LLI Presents:

## Camille Blachowicz on Content Vocabulary

Double Tree Hotel, South Burlington, VT

April 10, 2008 9:00am-3:00pm

LLI Presents:

## Reading Specialists and Literacy Coaches in the Real World

with MaryEllen Vogt, Ed.D.,  
Sheraton Conference Center

MaryEllen is Professor Emerita, California State University, Long Beach. A public school reading specialist for 15 years, she has co-authored 7 books, including *Reading Specialists and Literacy Coaches in the Real World* (2nd Ed.; Allyn & Bacon, 2007) and *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model* (3rd Ed; Allyn & Bacon, 2008). Her research interests include improving comprehension in the content areas, teacher change, and content literacy for English learners. Dr. Vogt served as President of the International Reading Association in 2004-2005.

MaryEllen Vogt will present information and techniques to support reading specialists and literacy coaches as they implement reading programs at the school and district level. She will address the varied roles of reading specialist and literacy coaches, including: teacher and diagnostician, intervention provider, curriculum designer, professional developer, coach/ mentor/supervisor, literacy program evaluator, action researcher, and literacy leader. In her afternoon session, participants who work with English Language Learners will have an opportunity to work more closely with MaryEllen to consider the special roles of reading specialists and coaches working with ELL students.

**Is your school interested in being part of a VRI project?**

LLI, VALLI, and Bridging Project Applications are now available online at [www.vriuvrm.org](http://www.vriuvrm.org).

**Four days of free  
professional  
development!**

# Reading Academy

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March 12, 13 & April 2, 3, 2008

8:30am-3:30pm

Hilton Hotel, Burlington, VT

June 23, 24, 25, 26, 2008,

8:30am-3:30pm

Equinox Resort, Manchester VT

## *Who can attend?*

- Classroom teachers of grades K-3
- Specialists (special education, title 1, reading specialists, other resource staff)
- Administrators, supervisors

## *What will this training do?*

- Deepen your understanding of the 5 essential components of reading in grades K-3: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Comprehension, Fluency, and Vocabulary.
- Expand your repertoire of research-based instructional approaches to help students achieve Grade Level Expectations.
- Provide opportunities to practice several approaches with colleagues.
- Provide time to plan ahead for classroom application.

## *Presenters/Facilitators:*

Cathy White, Nancy Woods, Pam Chomsky-Higgins, VRI at UVM, Janet Harwood, VT Dept of Education

*To register, go to: [www.vriuvvm.org](http://www.vriuvvm.org)*

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