

Literary Learning

The Newsletter for Vermont's English Language Arts Educators and Supporters

May 2023

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Visits Vermont for
Evidence-Based
Instructional Diets

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Networked
Improvement
Community for Literacy

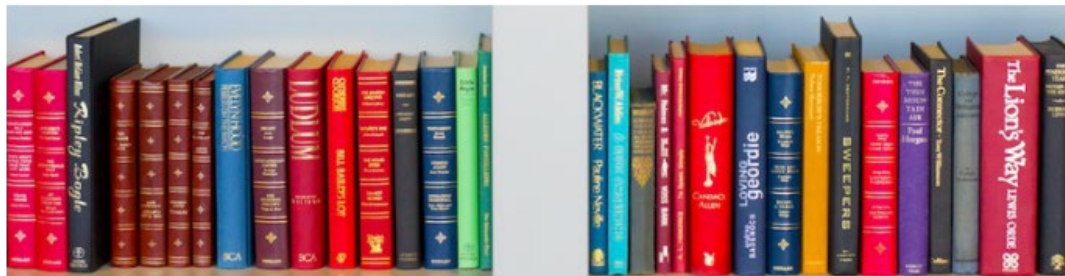
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Dr. Sharon Walpole Visits Vermont for Evidence-Based Instructional Diets

I had the pleasure of spending a day of in-person professional learning with [Dr. Sharon Walpole](#) this February as part of my work with the Early Networked Improvement Community (ELNIC) for literacy. The session began with an overview of the current research, which includes the importance of foundational skills, comprehension, and writing. Dr. Walpole overlaid three word clouds to illustrate the connections between these three crucial components of literacy instruction. She went on to discuss each of these components in more detail, including the enabling conditions for successful instruction.



Foundational Skills: In learning foundational skills, it is imperative that students learn and have consistent access to academic language. Teacher modeling is also important. Additionally, students need to practice words in isolation as well as in context. “Phonics isn’t enough,” said Dr. Walpole. Educators must be “intentional in a way that matters to [them].”

Reading Comprehension: Students need reading strategies as well as background knowledge and vocabulary. Educators should use high quality, challenging texts of diverse types to teach reading comprehension. They should also teach multiple reading strategies, including how and when to use each one. Read alouds are an essential component of comprehension instruction, especially for younger students. Educators can use read alouds to help facilitate conversations about reading strategies as well as provide access to challenging texts not yet accessible to emergent readers. This builds background knowledge and vocabulary as well as knowledge about the structure of texts. As Natalie Wexler explains, what you know about the world is more powerful than comprehension strategies. For young children, this knowledge is built through oral language. Because of this, Dr. Walpole said that “language development *is* literacy development.”

Cooperative learning opportunities and attention to motivation are also important for reading comprehension. To support both of these conditions, educators should put students in groups purposefully diverse by achievement (which is different from phonics instruction, where it is recommended to group students homogeneously). Hearing each other discuss a text and show understanding is motivating for students who may not yet have the same level of comprehension.

Writing: The enabling conditions for successful writing instruction include teacher modeling, peer feedback, collaboration, choice, and practice time. Dr. Walpole stressed the importance of students having more opportunities to plan and draft writing. She also explained that giving feedback to peers can be even more beneficial than receiving the feedback; this is because when a student gives feedback to a peer, they will automatically be paying attention to the same thing in their own writing in the future.



Dr. Walpole also discussed the importance of having a suite of assessments that work together (as opposed to just one benchmark assessment that claims to do it all). She spent some time talking about [Lexile measures](#) and how they can inform instruction. She also stressed the importance of standards-based assessments for valid, reliable results. Local, teacher-developed assessments are an essential component of a comprehensive assessment system, but they need to be standards-based in order to get a complete picture of a student's proficiency level (in other words, teachers should not just assess what they know their students will know and be able to do).

In the part of the session focused on prekindergarten, Dr. Walpole explained how language development is more important for this age group than literacy development. Read alouds are essential in attending to oral language, which then aids in literacy development. She pointed educators to three of seven practices described in the What Works Clearinghouse practice guide [Preparing Young Children for School](#): build vocabulary knowledge and language knowledge intentionally; build knowledge of letters and sounds; and use shared book reading to develop oral language, print features, and world knowledge. Walpole explained that curriculum planning means deciding how much of each of these practices to incorporate, in what order, and for how long each day.

The next part of the session focused on scheduling to set up the instructional context. The amount of time spent on foundational skills, reading comprehension, and writing (or the “diet”) is different based on grade level, but those three components should always be present. She presented two different models for chunking instructional time. The first starts with a block of whole-group reading instruction followed by small-group skills instruction and ending with whole-group writing instruction. The second model starts with small-group reading instruction followed by whole-group writing instruction and ending with whole-group skills instruction. Her message was that educators need to decide where they are going to differentiate. It’s not realistic to differentiate it all, so the small group instruction should be purposefully identified based on student need.



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Early Learning Networked Improvement Community for Literacy

The Early Learning Networked Improvement Community (ELNIC) is a unique, job-embedded professional learning opportunity where participants engage in collective problem-solving—using formative data and evidence-based practices—to support equitable, high-quality instruction. Using an improvement science approach and a continuous improvement model, NICs support supervisory unions, districts, and schools in building, strengthening, and sustaining equitable, effective, evidence-based programs and practices to ensure all students have high-quality educational experiences. Through shared learning, subject matter experts, researchers, and SU/SD practitioners work with each other and the VT AOE staff to rapidly test and implement changes that lead to scalable, sustainable, and lasting improvement.

Over the past couple of years, educators have been participating in an ELNIC with researchers/subject matter experts Dr. Nell Duke and Dr. Sharon Walpole to improve literacy instruction in foundational skills and formative assessment practices, in PreK-3rd grade, through embedded professional learning, coaching, and examination of student work/learning. The Broad Aim of this work is to improve literacy instruction in foundational skills so that all PreK-3rd grade learners will demonstrate growth in phonological awareness, word recognition, fluency, comprehension, and writing, and the gaps between historically marginalized and privileged students will be reduced in these areas. This is achieved through such evidence-based change ideas as implementing print-referencing read alouds; teaching high frequency words (instead of memorizing them); interactive writing for authentic purposes; explicit strategy instruction (including comprehension strategies); and flexible, needs-based differentiated instruction.

Testimonials from current participants highlight the success of this work:

- “The...phonics lessons have integrated seamlessly into my daily routines...not daunting or time consuming and have had the biggest impact in...performance compared to other changes I have made in the past.”
- “My students’ writing and reading have significantly improved. I truly enjoy watching them use their strategies to solve how to write words; I could not be more proud of their growth.”
- “Providing research based, differentiated reading instruction has helped all of my students make substantial and rapid progress in their reading development.”
- “I facilitated a school-wide PLC yesterday...When I gave educators an opportunity to share how change ideas were going in their rooms with their learners, their faces lit up ...Knowing that change is so difficult for so many, the excitement that was felt and the buy-in that was shared among colleagues was overwhelming!”

[Contact the AOE’s ELNIC Hub](#) for additional information or to join the community!

Vermont Agency of Education and Vermont Public Ambassadors Project

In 2020, the [Vermont Agency of Education](#) (AOE) and [Vermont Public](#) (Vermont PBS at the time) formed a partnership to provide educational resources to Vermont students during school closures; make remote learning easier for Vermont teachers and caregivers; and ensure equitable access to educational opportunities for all Vermont learners, regardless of connectivity. The Education Ambassadors project is a result of this partnership.



Education Ambassadors support an integrated approach to cross-curricular instructional design, through the lens of multimedia. They serve as a sounding board for Vermont Public and the AOE, providing professional expertise and insight to inform the development of new resources and ways in which to use existing materials. Visit the [Education Ambassadors](#) webpage to learn more about the Ambassadors themselves.

Project Focus 1: PreK - Grade 3

Inspired by Ready to Learn research, and local collaboration, our Ambassadors are working with Vermont Public, the Vermont Agency of Education, and the ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain to create STEM kits and activities that support ECHO's Science and Stories video series. Ambassadors are planning a project that is informed by STEMIE's Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education program to ensure that kits will be inclusive and accessible to all.

Project Focus 2: Grades 3-5

But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids is led by kids! Kids from around the world send producers Jane Lindholm and Melody Bodette questions, and it's the job of Vermont Public to track down interesting people who can give the answers. This show is made for kids ages 5 to 11 to listen to at home, in the car, and in the classroom. Media today must be accessible and interactive. *But Why* has created content across platforms and print for the classroom too. This project is focusing on the state-adopted International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards and ways to make these educational resources more accessible and available to teachers. This may happen through teacher conference workshops, by creating teacher toolkits, or courses that support savvy media integration.

Project Focus 3: Grades 6-12

Inspired by Vermont Public's podcast, *Brave Little State*, the Vermont Public Podcast Project is an evolving idea that will enhance access to podcast kits and storytelling resources in the classroom. This idea will bring local classroom teachers together with Vermont Public production staff to explore podcasting as a valid form youth driven storytelling that additionally meets the ISTE standards.

Resources

If you have resources you use in your own classroom that you would like to share, please [send them to me](#).

- Agency of Education's [Annotated Guide for Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#)
 - The [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#) practice guide is designed to assist classroom teachers and specialists in improving the foundational literacy skills of students in grades kindergarten through 3rd grade.
- Agency of Education's [Annotated Guide for Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#)
 - The [Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#) practice guide is designed to assist classroom teachers and specialists in improving the reading comprehension skills of students in grades kindergarten through 3rd grade and contains recommendations to help students engage with and comprehend texts.
- [Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten](#) and [Grades K to 3](#) – These resources include research- and evidence-based [Essential Practices](#) to improve literacy outcomes, many of which include writing.
- [Lexile® Find a Decodable Book](#) and [Lexile® Decodable Passages](#) – Looking for tools to support phonics instruction? Find a Decodable Book is a free resource that helps readers crack the alphabetic code by finding books that match instruction. Decodable Passages provides access to online passages students can read to practice specific phonics skills. Free with Vermont's contract with MetaMetrics. Interested in the science behind decodables? Check out this [recent blog post](#).
- [Self-Regulated Strategies Development](#) (for reading and writing) – SRSD is an evidence-based pedagogy. It teaches students how to use the writing process and equips them with the necessary skills and strategies to become self-regulated, successful writers. Through carefully analyzing peer-written exemplars and published mentor texts, SRSD exposes learners to the features of effective writing at the outset and all through the year. Explicit instruction prepares students to incorporate these features into their own pieces. They learn key strategies and solidify their skills through collaborative writes, self/peer feedback and embedded deliberate practice. To facilitate a gradual release, teachers model writing, offer scaffolds and support ongoing goal setting.
- [Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers](#) – This [IES/WWC Practice Guide](#) provides four recommendations for improving elementary students' writing. Each recommendation includes implementation steps and solutions for common roadblocks. The recommendations also summarize and rate supporting evidence.

Professional Offerings and Opportunities

Family Engagement in Literacy Announcement – We are pleased to announce that the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) will launch a program focused on family literacy engagement in 2023. The family literacy engagement program will provide districts that opt-in with curriculum, professional learning, and coaching around implementing:

- **Literacy family engagement workshops** that empower families and schools to partner in support of students' literacy achievement; and
- **Small group supplemental literacy sessions** following an evidence-based curriculum and explicit instruction of phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension.

The program would work well with after-school programs, summer programs, or during the school day. The family literacy engagement program is just one component of the State of Vermont's efforts to improve literacy outcomes for Vermont's students. Additional details about the family engagement in literacy program should be available in early May. If your school or district is interested in learning more, please [contact Emily Lesh](#).

Teacher Teams Collaborate with Teaching Artists at the Project Design Lab – The [Project Design Lab](#) takes place July 10-14 at UVM, and is open for registration. This year's project themes will explore belonging and identity, climate action, and relationship building. Educator teams from a school or district will collaborate with a teaching artist to design a project that uses creative engagement – *making things we care about* – to activate students' creativity and strengthen their engagement in curriculum or a school initiative. Participation includes a seven-day teaching artist residency in your school next year to help implement your project. Educators earn three graduate credits of 40 hours of recertification credit. [Contact Paul Gambill](#) for more information.

The Resilient Adolescent Reader – Join Partnerships for Literacy and Learning (PLL) for the three-credit graduate summer course, [The Resilient Adolescent Reader](#), with Lisa Driver, Ed.D., addressing the needs of the adolescent reader who needs literacy support. By the time they are in middle or high school, they may appear unmotivated, but in reality, they crave and deserve success in reading. Strengthen the resiliency of your struggling readers by learning to revise, adjust, and grow our approach to help all learners. This asynchronous course runs from July 5 - Aug. 19, 2023. Find details on the [PLL's course webpage](#). [Contact Mary Grace](#) for more information.

Vermont Council on Literacy Conference – Join the Vermont Council on Literacy (VCL) for this in-person event with Ralph Fletcher, Friday, May 5, 2023! Ralph is an author of many children's books and a teacher of writing. Ralph is a warm and personable presenter, sure to spark your interest and enthusiasm for the teaching of writing. Registration is open on the [Vermont Council on Literacy website](#). This conference is at the Sugarbush Resort and Conference Center in Warren. Registration: \$225 with lunch. Don't miss this literacy event! [Contact Ellen A. Thompson](#) for more information.

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Middle Grades Literature: Bringing Relevant Texts into Our Classrooms – Reading is a social act, and in this graduate course, Partnerships for Literacy and Learning (PLL) will engage with middle grade text in a social and analytical manner. We will read and analyze current, relevant texts for middle grade readers, along with *The Joy of Reading* from Miller and Lesene. There will be an emphasis on practical applications of book clubs, discussion protocols and familiarity with current literature. This hybrid course runs from June 28 - August 16, 2023, with six one-hour meetings. Find details on the [PLL's course webpage](#). [Contact Mary Grace](#) for more information.

Vermont Literacy Conference (Partnerships for Literacy and Learning) – [Register today](#) for the upcoming Vermont Literacy Conference for Teachers on July 31, August 1, and 2 at the Hilton Burlington Lake Champlain. This conference is designed to bring together educators from all backgrounds to learn and share best practices for literacy instruction with students of all ages. With keynote speakers Dr. Timothy Rasinski and Dr. Penny Kittle, you'll have the opportunity to learn from experts in the field and gain insights into the latest research and techniques. In addition to the keynote speeches, the conference will also offer a wide range of breakout sessions on topics such as word work, comprehension, writing, and equitable instruction. You'll have the chance to collaborate with fellow educators and share your own successes and challenges in the classroom. Don't miss out on this incredible opportunity to improve your teaching skills and enhance your students' literacy skills.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

<https://education.vermont.gov/student-learning/content-areas/language-arts>