

# Winter Newsletter

## FOX VALLEY READING COUNCIL

January/2012 Vol. #4 Issue #6

### Greetings from Your President

Dear FVRC Members,

I would like to welcome all of our members into the New Year. Hopefully, everyone has dug themselves out of the last few snows we've had. On the bright side, Chicago winters lend themselves to reading all those books you have had stock piled on your nightstand. For me, one such book is *Diane Ravitch's The Death and Life of the Great American School System*. Although not a "vacation read," I think it is an important read for all educators. The ideas presented are similar to what I learned from Linda Darling-Hammond's book, *The Flat World of Education*. As teachers in the classroom, we are so busy with daily classroom life that it is difficult for us to find the time to learn about past and present policies that impact the work we do. Ravitch's book is particularly a timely read with ISATs looming around the bend. I don't know about your school, but the climate of my school changes every year at this time. Once we come back from winter break, teachers begin the *ISAT panic*.

I am just beginning to scratch the surface of my understanding of Common Core. I am both hopeful and skeptical. My greatest hopes are that teachers are able to slow down our pace and rate of instruction, focus on depth and complexity rather than quantity, focus on teaching students how to think and be resourceful rather than to memorize and finally to be able to be more responsive to our students' needs.

We look forward to seeing you at our next event held at the Kane County ROE- details enclosed within the newsletter. We need volunteers who are passionate about education and literacy to help with our council. Empower yourself by getting involved.

Best regards,  
*Andrea Schaal*

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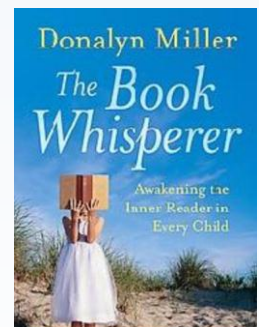
### THE READING CORNER

FVRC's Professional Pick  
*The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child*

By: Donalyn Miller  
Reviewed by: Jaclyn Giordano

As an educator and a lifelong reader, author Donalyn Miller emphasizes that "Building lifelong readers has to start here. Anyone who calls himself or herself a reader can tell you that it starts with encountering great books, heartfelt recommendations, and a community of readers who share this passion." Donalyn Miller's passionate and honest book reawakens the inner reader in us all. She skillfully and emotionally discusses teaching readers through independent reading during the school day and free choice reading (readers get to choose the books they read) – both of which increase student motivation and stimulate critical thinking skills. Her artfully written and honest book offers practical strategies to incorporate into the classroom, including book reviews, reading response letters, and reader's notebooks. All of these strategies incorporate differentiated reading instruction while promoting honest discussions and conferences around authentic reading experiences.

She gives fruitful alternatives to instructional practices such as whole-class novel units and round robin reading — practical alternatives that a teacher can use to reach every reader and capture both their attention and eagerness for reading. Interspersed throughout Miller's book are quotes from actual students who are becoming readers as well as what Miller calls "whispers" — descriptions of activities she has used to promote reading dialogue in her classroom. An honest and real look at the advantages of independent, free choice reading amidst a high stakes and assessment driven educational atmosphere, Miller's book gets to the heart of all teachers: creating students that love reading and will do so long outside the walls of our classrooms.



Donalyn Miller writes a blog sponsored by Education Week. You can find her posts at [http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/book\\_whisperer/](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/book_whisperer/)

**For more information visit us:**

Website: [www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org/localcouncils/foxvalley.html](http://www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org/localcouncils/foxvalley.html)

Email: [foxvalley@illinoisreadingcouncil.org](mailto:foxvalley@illinoisreadingcouncil.org)



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## FVRC Professional Book Recommendation

If you are anything like me and you have been trying to make sense of how the Response to Intervention model supports our struggling readers then Richard Allington's, *What Really Matters in Response to Intervention* is the book for you.

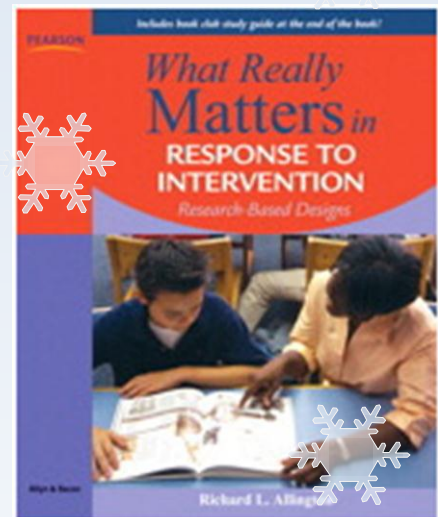
This book was recommended to me after I voiced much frustration with what I see happening to our struggling readers in our elementary buildings. Though I fully understand the premise behind RtI I find myself wondering if the creators of this initiative really meant for it to be enacted this way. Students are being colored coded based on one measure and then placed into intervention programs that do not align with their classroom instruction. All the while teachers and administrators are left wondering why these students are not making the marked gains promised by these programs. I felt the need to go to the source. Allington is one of the creators of the RtI model; I was hoping his book could explain to me how we got to where we currently are as well as give suggestions on how to get us back on track.

In *What Really Matters in Response to Intervention*, Allington asks the really tough questions: Are we providing our students with enough reading instruction? What is the volume of reading our students are doing? Are the pull-out interventions being taught by highly qualified staff? Is there a clear alignment between the pull-out interventions and the students' classroom instruction? Is your building really adding instructional time for these interventions or are students missing core instruction in an effort to remediate lacking skills? He asks us to seriously examine the instructional practices happening within our classrooms.

After reading this book I felt both affirmed and charged. Affirmation came with the fact that I wasn't completely crazy in thinking that something has gone awry with supporting our struggling readers. I now feel charged to begin seriously looking into our current teaching practices & structures, and to start asking the "hard" questions to our administration.

*What Really Matters in Response to Intervention* comes as part of a series of What Really Matters books written by Richard Allington. This series asks the tough questions and forces us to go back to our roots on best teaching practices for all students.

Happy Reading,  
Amy Stuckey



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### Policy Watch

by Sunday Cummins,  
FVRC Legislative Liaison

- If you want to “be informed” in a critical way about **what to consider when looking at the Standards**, take some time to revisit an issue of the *American Educator* – Winter 2010-2011 at <http://www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/winter1011/index.cfm>. This issue is devoted to commentary by leading educators on the potentials and pitfalls of implementing the CCSS.
- If you want info on how **ISBE is working to implement the CCSS** including their collaboration with the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) to **develop statewide summative and interim assessments**, visit: [http://www.isbe.net/common\\_core/default.htm](http://www.isbe.net/common_core/default.htm).
- If you are seeking ways to **embed literacy instruction into authentic learning** projects for your students, check out the U.S. Department of Education report released earlier this month - "Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy: A Road Map and Call to Action." The Road Map “highlights nine steps the Department will take to advance civic learning and engagement” including pushing for more community service projects by k-12 students.

For more information:  
<http://www.ed.gov/civic-learning>.

### Books for Babies

#### Update

FVRC is *ecstatic* about the \$500 Walmart Community Foundation grant we received in December for our Books for Babies initiative. We have collected many books at our two fall events this school year- thank you! We have recently partnered with the VNA (Visiting Nurses Association) in Aurora. The VNA is a non-for-profit organization that provides many health related services to the Fox Valley community.

We will continue to collect new and gently used books appropriate for babies and toddlers at all our events this year. We especially need books in Spanish. In the spring we will donate book bags for new moms with the help of the VNA.

We are also looking into partnering with the Aurora Public Library to help us with our project. If you are unable to attend our upcoming events but have books to donate, please contact Andrea Schaal at [andrea.schaal@att.net](mailto:andrea.schaal@att.net). Please watch for future updates on our community literacy project.



# Join Fox Valley Reading Council



FOX VALLEY  
Reading Council

*for dinner and an interactive presentation  
on the English Language Arts  
Common Core Standards.*

***Presenter: Roberta Sejnost***

This 1 ½ hour presentation will include general information about the standards as well as activities that are linked to specific standards and will span all grade levels.

*When:* Thursday, Feb. 23  
Dinner starts at 5:30 pm

*Where:* Kane County Regional Office of Education  
210 South 6th Street  
Geneva, IL

*Cost:* FREE (CPDUs will be available)  
FVRC is collecting donations of  
new/gently used Spanish or English  
books for the Books for Babies program.

*RSVP:* Gina Lofgren  
[grlofgren@comcast.net](mailto:grlofgren@comcast.net)

*Katina Kastrantas*  
[kkastran@gmail.com](mailto:kkastran@gmail.com)