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professional development for
raising reading achievement

Middle School Literacy: Improving Text Comprehension, Grades 6-8

Course Description

Middle School Literacy: Improving Text Comprehension, is an interactive, online and in-person professional development course designed for all middle school teachers, especially teachers of English Language Arts. The 10 online sessions are structured around strategies readers use before, during, and after reading to get meaning from text, and are designed to support students reading on, or slightly below, grade level. A special section appearing in most topics shows teachers how to customize instruction and reading strategies for the struggling reader, those students reading at least two years below grade level.

- **Session 1**, the Course Introduction, includes a video of students discussing their experiences as readers. A Self-Assessment follows the video.
- **Session 2** discusses the importance of understanding students' individual needs by differentiating between four types of middle school students—advanced, proficient, basic, and struggling. Session 2 includes research on the Cycle of Failure and discusses how to use various assessments and conduct reading histories.
- **Session 3** looks at how to build and encourage reading fluency by conducting Oral Fluency Assessments and successfully interpreting oral fluency benchmarks.
- **Session 4** focuses on understanding the complex nature of reading comprehension and helping middle school students develop strategies to use before, during, and after reading.
- **Sessions 5 and 6**, the before-reading sessions, explain how and why to build background knowledge and pre-teach new vocabulary and concepts. Specific techniques such as using a Smart Chart, previewing a book, mediating a textbook, using a Concept Definition Map, and teaching vocabulary context and root words to develop vocabulary are emphasized.
- **Sessions 7 and 8**, the during-reading sessions, explain how to explicitly model and teach key reading strategies, such as making inferences, asking questions, drawing conclusions, and using self-monitoring strategies, for both the fiction and non-fiction genres.
- **Session 9**, the after-reading session, focuses on deepening students' comprehension by talking and writing in response to text. Guidance is given on note-taking—including double-entry journals—getting the most from group discussion; leading students through Thinking, Pairing and Sharing; and writing summaries.
- **Session 10** concludes the course, focusing on classroom management and presenting ways to manage classrooms for effective whole class, small group, and individual instruction that meets the needs of all students.

All online sessions are supported by lesson plans and classroom resources to ensure that the course content can be seamlessly integrated into classroom reading programs or subject-specific curriculum.

Course Objectives

On completing this course, you will be able to:

- Assess middle school students for the purpose of matching them to texts and making strategic decisions about instruction.
- Guide students at all reading levels to get meaning from text through building background knowledge, using targeted reading strategies, and applying content-related writing techniques.
- Provide explicit strategy instruction to increase students' comprehension during the reading of fiction and nonfiction, including textbooks.
- Enable students at all reading levels to understand content-related vocabulary.
- Establish schedules and routines for working with students in small groups or individually, including solutions for struggling readers.
- Implement lesson plans and resources that target the needs of middle school readers.

Course Outline

1. Course Introduction
1.1 Introduction to the Middle School Reader
Self-Assessment

2 Content Literacy in Middle School
2.1 Overview: Meet the Middle School Reader
2.2 Four Middle School Readers
2.3 The Cycle of Failure
2.4 Conducting a Reading History

3 Assessing Your Middle School Students
3.1 Overview: The Goal of Assessment
3.2 Warm-up: Who's Who?
3.3 Using Data to Drive Instruction
3.4 Oral Fluency Assessment
3.5 Scoring an Oral Fluency Assessment
3.6 Strategies for Building Fluency

4 Getting Meaning From Text
4.1 Overview: What Do Strategic Readers Do?
4.2 Warm-up: Getting the Most From Text
4.3 Matching Readers to Text
4.4 Before, During, and After Reading
4.5 The Unique Needs of Middle School Readers
4.6 Creating a Literacy Environment

Middle School Literacy: Improving Text Comprehension, Grades 6-8
Scientifically Based Reading Research

All content in *Middle School Literacy: Improving Text Comprehension, Grades 6*-8, is grounded in scientifically based research. Intended for all teachers of middle school, including reading specialists and content-area teachers, this course is structured around strategies readers use before, during, and after reading to get meaning from text. It targets several research-based comprehension strategies that teachers can easily implement in their classroom. The course includes differentiated skill instruction for English language learners and students with special learning needs.

COURSE RESEARCH FOUNDATION	COURSE CLASSROOM APPLICATION
Fluency	
• Fluent readers read as smoothly as they speak—with inflection, pace, and tone. In order to be truly fluent, a reader must comprehend and interpret text (Thurlow & van den Broek, 1997).	✓ Teachers use fluency norms as a basis of comparison when assessing students; classroom-ready booklists support fluency building activities, and sample activities like modeled fluent reading and repeated readings provide further instruction and practice
Vocabulary	
• Struggling readers…often have limited vocabularies because they have little exposure to books.2.2	✓ Master teacher modeling and classroom guidelines are available for previewing books to help plan instruction that fills in gaps in students' vocabulary
• Teach vocabulary that is related to what students are reading (Beck et al., 1982)	✓ Teachers explore concept definition maps and coordinating lesson plans and prepare to use with them with students
• Give them many encounters with every new word (LaBarge & Samuels, 1974).	✓ Small-group activities and oral exercises that expose students to new words, linked to other familiar words, are outlined
• Students who are poor readers often have "heard of" a word, but they lack depth, breadth, or specificity in word knowledge (Beck & McKeown, 1991).	✓ Experts demonstrate how two readers construct mental models from a text selection

• Effective vocabulary study occurs daily and involves more than memorizing definitions. Teachers deliberately use new words as often as possible in classroom conversation. (When Older Students Can't Read)	✓ Master teachers reveal appropriate words for instruction, and share a word knowledge chart as an in-class resource
• Research shows that students encounter about 20,000 to 40,000 new words a year as they read (Anderson, 1996). 6.6	✓ Teachers experience an interactive demonstration and activities on word building to teach students how to approach new words independently
Comprehension	
• "Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension; one cannot understand text without knowing what most of the words mean" (Nagy, 1988).	✓ Prompts for figuring out unfamiliar words give students an interactive way to see examples of semantic clues that rely on context to decode word meanings
• All students need a variety of skills and strategies to comprehend and construct meaning from their history, science, mathematics, technical, and literary texts.2.1	✓ Motivating reading passages have students examine different strategies for comprehension and constructing meaning from text
• You can help students explore genre and the literary elements mood and theme. When they understand these, they'll read with greater comprehension and pleasure.7.4	✓ Teachers receive direct online instruction about the literary elements mood and theme, are provided with lessons plans on each, as well as extended genre definitions for both fiction and nonfiction
• Teaching the literary elements of character, plot, and setting will help students untangle the who, what, where, and why of fiction. 7.3	✓ Teachers receive direct online instruction about the literary elements mood and theme, are provided with lessons plans on each, and find out how to use graphic organizers to enhance teaching of these literary elements
Group Discussions	
• Note that all small groups should be flexible; that is, groups should change as needed to reflect student performance. 3.3	✓ Teachers use oral fluency assessments and view students with diverse needs to learn how to establish meaningful routines and groupings for students requiring extra support.

• When students share their responses to literature in small groups, they build their desire to become active, attentive readers. Social interactions are key to creating a community of learners who support, monitor, and enlighten each other (Vygotsky, 1978). 9.1	✓ Practical small-group ideas for modeled fluent reading, post-reading strategies and paired reading methods are suggested, along with booklists and activities to build student fluency
• Children's learning is boosted by active participation.	✓ Master teachers model how to motivate students and set guidelines for encouraging and promoting independent practice
• In all partner strategies the teacher matches each student to an appropriate partner (generally matching high-performing students with middle-performing, middle-performing with lower-performing students) and provides the student with a specific role for the activity. (Engaged Literacy Learning)	✓ Classroom activities for building fluency through strategic pairing of students are highlighted, and complete booklists and activities are included
• Social interactions are key to creating a community of learners who support, monitor, and enlighten each other (Vygotsky, 1978).	✓ Classroom routines that support small-group student instruction are modeled and discussed
Writing and Grammar	
• Writing improves when students practice answering specific question types, elaborating subjects and predicates, combining simple sentences, constructing clauses, and linking sentences into organized paragraphs. (When Older Students Can't Read)	✓ Think, pair, share and specific note-taking tools that help students respond appropriately to text are illustrated; teachers learn about common grammar pitfalls and how to help students avoid them
• Writing provides an overt indicator of what students are thinking as well as helps students to focus their attentions on specific issues of importance. (Engaged Literacy Learning)	✓ Best practices for student note-taking and repeated journal language arts practices are fully investigated
Age-Appropriate Materials	
• Before discussing any literary elements, it's best to establish the genre of a given fiction selection. 7.2	✓ Interactive opportunities for effective teaching of literary genre include lesson plans, description charts, and prompts for making inferences; teacher resource defining grade-appropriate literary genres is provided

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• Literary elements such as character, plot, and setting are the ABC's of fiction. Students need to understand these elements to comprehend and appreciate fiction. 7.2 • Simply appreciating literature is a goal in itself. To do that, students need to understand basic elements of fiction. 7.2	✓ Students will better understand fiction through valuable lesson plan tools like character, plot and setting maps and open-ended questions for lively class discussions ✓ Students complete a reading-interest survey; teachers are provided with a high-interest booklist
• When students apply the metacognitive process—awareness of what they're thinking—to their reading, they can quickly use appropriate strategies to understand text. 7.6	✓ Master teachers model a think-aloud on fix-up strategies that will help students clarify their understanding of a topic
• Middle school students read a good deal of nonfiction in their content-area textbooks.8.1	✓ Effective student methods to navigate a textbook incorporate activities like textbook scavenger hunt, steps to reading a graphic, and other key textbook features
• Students will need many more practice opportunities using easier texts, including previously read texts. 8.4	✓ Meaningful techniques that match students with appropriate texts on their reading level create a high-motivation learning environment
• Provide a wide range of reading. Mark the books or establish a coding system so students can find the appropriate level book.10.1	✓ Well-rounded classroom libraries are constructed by using informal student assessments such as the interest survey and questions about reading and reading histories
Motivation and Self-Esteem	
• Stay positive and focus on what students can do. Set achievable goals and foster independence by giving students books they can read on their own. 2.3	✓ Guidelines for assessing fluency are provided so that teachers can obtain a baseline reading level for students to match them with appropriate texts
• Struggling readers are rarely given speaking parts, a situation that reinforces their already low self-confidence. (Fluency Beyond the Primary Grades)	✓ Experts demonstrate a variety of ways to motivate and excite a diverse-needs class with essential reading and language arts activities

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• Students who believe in their own ability to comprehend and construct meaning from a text are far more likely to complete their assignments successfully (Schunk and Zimmerman, 1997). 10.5	✓ Teachers are provided with classroom management scheduling tools that maximize instructional time with students who require extra student support

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Middle School Literacy: Improving Text Comprehension, Grades 6-8
Professional Development Course Hours

Description	Estimated Time	Participation Hours
Self-paced instruction includes the relevant reading research base. Participation in interactive simulations for practice of research-based strategies. Video modeling by teachers.	1 hour per session plus additional time to revisit concepts and key activities for ongoing practice.	10
Reflection on learned and applied skills; sharing of ideas and student work; lesson planning; facilitator modeling, in-person instruction and in-class coaching.	2 hours x 4 workshops; 3 hours in-class coaching	11
Personal journal writing in response to session-specific topics and prompts.	10 minutes per session	2
Collaborative discussions with colleagues and advice/feedback from reading specialist.	20 minutes per session	3
Relevant articles to read study and connect to learning and classroom application.	20 minutes per session	3
Print and review online resources (lesson plans, management tools, graphic organizers, etc.) – for planning and application in classroom.	20 minutes per session	3
Preparation for application of learned skills and strategies utilizing tested lesson plans and student resources	60 minutes per strategy; 1 strategy per week	10
Preparation and presentation of course learning.	1 hour	1
Setting goals and incorporating into Professional Improvement Plan.	1 hour	1
Review online correlations to standards and reading programs. Use online correlations in preparing lesson plans for classroom application.	1 hour	1
Total Hours		**45**