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Optional Flexible Year Program and Middle School Student Achievement in Reading

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Abstract

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MA, Walden University, 2006

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Local student reading results on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness have decreased. It is of great concern that many students had less than full mastery of the prerequisite, fundamental skills in reading. The study site used the Optional Flexible Year Program for remediation of students at risk of not passing the state assessment. The purpose of this concurrent explanatory study was to explore the relationship between participation and nonparticipation in the remediation program and student reading achievement and to better understand staff perceptions regarding the remediation program. Guided by Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation, quantitative research questions asked whether at risk students who participated in the remediation program showed greater increases on reading state assessments than comparable students who did not participate in the remediation program. Qualitative questions examined staff perceptions of the remediation program on the impact of student achievement. Findings showed no statistically significant difference in reading achievement between the experimental and control groups. Perceptions collected through questionnaires and interviews revealed staff negativity towards the remediation program and its ability to positively affect student achievement. This study has the potential for positive social change by contributing to the literature on the Optional Flexible Year Program remediation plan. Study findings will also benefit policy makers, school leaders, and students as they consider strategies presented to improve reading performance.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to several people without whom I never would have pursued and accomplished this milestone in my life. I want to thank my parents, Ralland and Lois Harrison. From as early as I can remember, you always planted the seed that I was capable of doing anything. Thank you for your unfailing love and support. Although no one will understand our game from my childhood, I'll say it anyway—I love you more than you love me.

Secondly, I also wish to dedicate this achievement to my husband, my rock, Mark Fender. I cannot put into words how much I love you and how much your support and encouragement through this process contributed to its completion. You are the best part of me, and I am so honored to be your wife.

A final dedication is to Evelyn Grace Hajek. Our darling little one, you bring joy to all around you. You inspire me to be a better person. As you grow, I hope this accomplishment inspires you to make your dreams a reality.

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Introduction

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed by President Obama in December of 2015, states are held accountable for development and implementation of high quality state assessments, and local schools are held accountable for elevated levels of student achievement (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], n.d.). Recent changes in Texas state assessments increased rigor and implemented measures of postsecondary readiness standards. After these changes, there was a decline in student reading performance across all assessed grade levels (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2007-2016b). Fewer students meeting acceptable levels of student achievement in reading gave rise to the need for new solutions. The TEA offered schools the opportunity to apply for a waiver and utilize the Optional Flexible Year Program (OFYP) as part of an intervention and remediation plan for struggling students. The OFYP allows districts to reduce the number of instructional days for select students while remaining in session for students who may not pass the state assessment or be promoted to the next grade (Texas Administrative Code, 2008). The purpose of this doctoral project study was to explore the relationship between the OFYP remediation program and reading student achievement, as measured by the Texas state assessment instrument. I also explored the perceptions of administrators, counselors, and teachers regarding the use of OFYP for improving student performance.

The Local Problem

The local district was in a small rural community in South Central Texas with a population of just over 1,750 students. According to a recent Texas Academic Performance Report published by the TEA, the student ethnic distribution was 80% Hispanic and 18% White, with all other reported ethnicities less than 1%. Economically disadvantaged students made up 72% of the population; 55% of students were designated at-risk. Percentages of students categorized as economically disadvantaged and at-risk in the local district were both higher than the state average (TEA, 2012-2015). Two of the district's campuses had been rated Improvement Required for two of the three years since the new state accountability system had been in place (TEA, 2015b).

On the new State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading exam, local passing percentages were lower than the state average. From 2012-2015, the percentage of students passing the reading exam in Grades 3-8 was also consistently lower than on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the previous state assessment instrument (TEA, 2007-2012; TEA, 2012-2015). The problem that prompted this study was the decline in reading scores with the inception of STAAR. There was a gap in practice resulting in this low student achievement in reading. Under current daily instructional practices, at-risk students were not adequately prepared for the increased rigor of the new state assessment instrument. One means of addressing this gap in practice was the OFYP.

The Problem in the Larger Educational Setting

The multiple iterations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) provided large amounts of federal funding for education (Federal Education Budget Project, 2014). The 2002 reauthorization of ESEA, known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, might be best known for its mandates related to testing and accountability, holding schools accountable for high standards. The 2015 passage of the ESSA became the most recent reauthorization of ESEA, mandating a continued focus on accountability for student performance (USDE, n.d.).

The TEA first implemented state assessments in 1979, with continuous increases in rigor over subsequent assessment instruments (TEA, 2010b). In 2012, Texas instituted a new state assessment program, the STAAR. This most recent change was in response to the passage of Senate Bill 1031 in 2007 and House Bill 3 in 2009 by the Texas Legislature, which required increasing the rigor of state assessments once again, as well as addressing college and career readiness standards (TEA, 2010b). Under the new STAAR, passing rates on the reading assessments had dropped dramatically statewide as compared to the previous TAKS assessment program (TEA, 2007-2016b). In the first four years the STAAR was administered, statewide passing rates for Grades 3-8 reading ranged from 62%-80% (TEA, 2011-2015), compared to 84%-89% in 2011, the final year of the TAKS (TEA, 2010-2011).

Rationale

In June 2003 the 78th Texas Legislature adopted Texas Education Code Section 29.0821, OFYP. This provided school districts a flexibility in their instructional calendar

to designate up to 10 days of instruction for students not likely to pass state assessments or be promoted to the next grade. The Commissioner's Rules regarding the OFYP, adopted in November of 2008, are outlined in Texas Administrative Code §129.1029 (Texas Administrative Code, 2008). These rules further clarified that students in participating schools who were not eligible for the OFYP remediation may have their required instructional days reduced, effectively decreasing the number of students on these instructional days and providing the opportunity for campuses to use scheduling and staff in unique ways to meet the remedial needs of attending students. Schools wishing to participate in the OFYP must submit an application to the TEA (TEA, 2007-2015a). The local school district had submitted the required waiver applications and participated in the OFYP remediation model since its inception.

The Director of Dropout Prevention and At-Risk Programs for the TEA reported that the state had not conducted any studies to determine if any relationship exists between participation in the OFYP and increased student achievement (Julie Wayman, personal communication, June 16, 2015). As state assessment scores for reading had dropped in recent years, there was a need to reconsider whether or not there was a relationship between students attending the increased instructional days as part of the OFYP and improvement on the reading exam.

Student achievement in reading is of concern at the national level. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest national data collection initiative designed to monitor what students in the United States know and are able to do. Oversight of this long-term project for collecting longitudinal data is assigned, by law, to

the USDE (Institute of Educational Sciences [IES], 2015). Achievement levels on the NAEP assessments are categorized as Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. Results from the 2013 NAEP reading exam indicated only 35% of fourth graders, 36% of eighth graders, and 38% of twelfth graders scored at the Proficient achievement level, leaving an average of 64% of students at or below Basic in reading achievement (Kena et al., 2015). Achievement at the Basic level on this assessment represents only partial mastery of basic skills (IES, 2012). It is of great concern that over half of America's students had less than full mastery of the prerequisite, fundamental skills in reading. Even with the increased focused on accountability and rigorous assessment under NCLB, there was little change in NAEP average scale scores from 1992 through 2013. Although from 1992 through 2013 Grades 4 and 8 reading scale score averages evidenced increases of 5 and 8 scale score points out of a possible 500 points, respectively, the average scale score in Grade 12 decreased over this same time frame (Kena et al., 2015).

Purpose

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the relationship between participation in the OFYP remediation program and student reading achievement. This relationship was explored by collecting student state assessment data before and after participation in the OFYP remediation and comparing those results to data from similar students who did not participate in the OFYP. Administrator, teacher, and counselor perceptions regarding the use of the OFYP as a remediation model were collected and analyzed to provide further insight into the benefits for students participating in the program.

Definitions

At-risk student: This study used the term "at-risk" to describe students not meeting basic proficiency levels in reading. This definition was in alignment with the USDE study on characteristics of at-risk students, which described students as at risk of dropping out of school if they had not evidenced proficiency in math and reading (Kaufmann, Bradbury, & Owings, 1992).

Improvement Required: One of five possible state accountability labels that may be applied to campuses and districts, Improvement Required is the designation received by institutions with unacceptable performance levels (TEA, 2007-2016a).

Motivation: Motivation is the internal force that determines an individual's decision to put forth effort. This decision is based on their perceived value of the reward, or avoidance of negative consequences, relative to the exertion required (Vroom, 1964).

Optional Flexible Year Program: The OFYP is a legislature-approved waiver allowing Texas schools flexibility in their instructional calendar to provide intensive instruction on specified days for struggling students while releasing other students from attendance requirements (TEA, 2007-2015a).

Remediation: Techniques used to improve student achievement (Ortlieb, 2012), such as the time students spend in tutoring and supplemental instruction (Bachman, 2013) during OFYP described the term remediation for this study.

Scale score: Scale scores are measures of student performance relative to the proficiency levels and passing standards of an assessment. This score takes into account

the difficulty of assessment items and allows for comparison of student performance across different test administrations (TEA, 2007-2016c).

STAAR: The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) is the statewide assessment program for Texas. The STAAR was first administered in 2012 (Texas Education Agency, 2007-2015b).

Student achievement: For this study, student achievement was defined as the level of student mastery of state standards as measured by the STAAR.

Significance

This study added to the body of research on innovative ways designed to increase instructional time for students at risk of failing state assessments. As the TEA continues to accept applications for the OFYP, it is in the best interest of schools and policy makers to have access to research on these programs. Minimal research had been conducted across implementation sites (Longbotham, 2012), and no studies had been done in the local context, to determine how participation in the OFYP impacted student academic achievement. In the local setting, the study findings informed the district of any relationship between the use of the OFYP and increased student achievement in reading, as measured by the STAAR, and also provided staff perceptions on the effectiveness of the OFYP for impacting student performance. The study provided valuable insight into how the district might improve their efforts to support struggling students.

This study will bring about positive social change. It was apparent from the assessment data that an effort needed to be made to address the local and state decline in reading assessment scores. Local school leaders in a position to determine remediation

strategies can use the results of this study to better inform their decisions on how to best support improved academic achievement for reading students. Policy makers can use the results of this study to inform decisions regarding the OFYP. In the local setting, these decisions would impact over 1,600 students. At the state level, policies have the potential to impact over 5 million students in more than 1,200 public schools.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The decline in students meeting passing standards on state reading assessments was concerning. School districts in Texas have the opportunity to address the needs of struggling students through the OFYP remediation. This study focused on the correlation, if any, between the OFYP and improved student performance in reading achievement. A collection of qualitative data provided understanding of staff perceptions regarding OFYP and its impact on improving student performance.

The research study was guided by the following questions:

RQ1: Do at-risk students who participate in the OFYP remediation model evidence greater increases in reading student achievement, as measured by STAAR, than at-risk students who do not participate in the OFYP remediation model?

$H_0$1: The mean increase in STAAR reading scores for students participating in the OFYP remediation model will have no statistically significant difference than the mean increase of similar students who do not participate in the OFYP remediation model.

$H_1$1: The mean increase in STAAR reading scores for students participating in the OFYP remediation model will be greater than the mean increase of similar students who do not participate in the OFYP remediation model.

RQ2: What are the faculty perceptions of the OFYP remediation model for impacting students to improve academic performance?

RQ3: What are the faculty perceptions of the curriculum and resources utilized in the OFYP for students to improve achievement in reading?

Review of the Literature

Theoretical Foundation: Expectancy Theory of Motivation

This study was grounded in the expectancy theory of motivation. Expectancy theory, proposed by Vroom (1964), is a process theory, attempting to explain the process by which individuals make conscious choices based on the effort required and the potential positive or negative outcomes that will result based on their decisions. A person's actions and efforts can be attributed to their perceived value of the rewards contingent upon meeting certain expectations or, conversely, the avoidance of negative consequences (Vroom, 1964). This theory describes three interconnected facets of motivation: valence, expectancy, and instrumentality (Vroom, 1964). An essential question for each of these facets, respectively, might be: (a) how important is the potential reward to the individual, (b) does the individual feel effort will lead to improved performance, and (c) will improved performance result in gaining the reward? Vatsa (2013) described Vroom's theory as a process by which "behavior is energized, directed, sustained, or stopped" (p. 98). In other words, an individual will be motivated to engage

in activities they feel will result in outcomes that fulfill intrinsic needs or shield them from undesirable outcomes.

Initially, Vroom's expectancy theory was discussed in connection with job satisfaction. Multiple applications of expectancy theory in post-secondary education have been made, asserting that students are motivated to apply themselves in academic settings when they sense, or expect, a positive outcome as a result of their effort (Edgar, Johnson, Graham, & Dixon, 2014; Ernst, 2014; Geiger & Cooper, 1995; Hodge, 2014; Robles & Roberson, 2014).

Škoda, Doulík, Bílek, and Šimonová (2015) applied Vroom's expectancy theory in a study comparing motivation styles of 15-year olds in inquiry-based science education. However, little additional research was found connecting Vroom's original expectancy theory to K-12 students. The motivation theory more frequently applied to this learner range is Eccles' expectancy-value model of achievement-related choices, or EVMARC (Eccles et al., 1983). Similar to Vroom's (1964) theory, the EVMARC considers the value a student places on the outcome in relation to the effort required to obtain the outcome. Applications of EVMARC to K-12 education and student achievement, across multiple content areas, have been made in many studies (Andersen & Ward, 2014; Burak, 2014; Gråstén, Watt, Hagger, & Liukkonen, 2015; Lawanto & Stewardson, 2013; Lykkegaard & Ulriksen, 2016).

The intent of student participation in the OFYP remediation was to improve academic achievement on state assessments. The expectancy theory supported the idea that students see a perceived value in putting forth initial effort to do well on state

assessments based on earning rewards and avoiding negative consequences, specifically avoiding assignment to additional instructional days during the OFYP remediation. For those students designated as needing assistance and assigned to the OFYP remediation days, motivation to take advantage of the remediation in order to achieve a passing score on subsequent state assessments, effectively earning the future reward of additional "vacation" days during next year's OFYP remediation, may be a factor in student willingness to fully commit their efforts during the OFYP instructional days.

Review of the Broader Problem

The OFYP is an option unique to Texas schools. As such, there was a dearth of professional literature on the practice. For this study, the characteristics of the intent and structure of OFYP were considered to identify topics available within the literature that would inform development of the conceptual framework for the study. The OFYP requires struggling students to attend more schools days than students identified as on pace for passing courses and the state assessment. With reduced numbers of students in attendance on the OFYP days, while maintaining full staffing, student groups and schedules can be reconfigured to accommodate smaller class sizes and targeted instruction to meet the needs of students. The overarching purpose of the OFYP is to provide intervention time for struggling students. With these characteristics in mind, three relevant topics were identified: increased learning time, class size, and Response to Intervention. Each of these topics will be discussed here.

Multiple literature databases were accessed through the Walden University Library to locate research relevant to the study topic. The key search terms utilized were:

increased learning time, extended learning time, class size, class size and student achievement, Response to Intervention, and *secondary reading remediation*. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed sources published within the last five years.

Literature on Increased Learning Time

The OFYP approach to remediation provides an opportunity for increased learning time for struggling students. The students assigned to attend school on the designated OFYP days have up to ten additional instructional days as compared to students not required to attend the OFYP days.

Efforts to positively increase student achievement, especially in struggling schools, has been a long-term focus for the USDE, as the legislature has continued to reauthorize ESEA for over 50 years (USDE, n.d.). Increased learning time is one of the supported strategies under multiple reform efforts, such as Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation, and Title I School Improvement Grants (Kolbe, Partridge, & O'Reilly, 2012; Owen, 2012). The ESEA Flexibility Waiver document (USDE, 2012) outlines seven school turnaround principles, including redesign of the school calendar and/or schedule to allocate additional student learning time for students and teacher collaboration. Statistics show that 90% of Title I School Improvement grantees utilize extended learning time as part of their turnaround strategy (Silva, 2012). Despite frequent cuts to education funding, financial support for increased learning time continues to grow (Owen, 2012; Silva, 2012). Recently, the USDE provided the option for state flexibility in the use of 21st Century Community Learning Center funding to support expanded learning time

within the school day, as opposed to the original intent of the funding to support after-school or summer programs (Owen, 2012).

Increasing learning time has been approached in a variety of ways. School redesign to expand learning time may include increased minutes in the school day, re-allocated minutes to core subject areas as opposed to other nonpriority content or activities, an extended school week to include instructional time on nontraditional school days, such as Saturdays, or extended length of the school year (Kidron & Lindsay, 2014; Kolbe et al., 2012; McMurrer, 2012). However, the current approach to the school calendar and school day, originally designed to meet the needs of a primarily agrarian society, has changed little over time (Kolbe et al., 2012). Even within the last decade under NCLB, little change has been made in the average number of days in the school year, and schools only slightly lengthened the school day. Kolbe et al. (2012) found that, on average, public schools have added an additional 4 minutes, and private and charter schools have increased the school day by an average of 6 minutes. The most common approach to increasing learning time has been summer school or before- and after-school academic programs during the school year (Kidron & Lindsay, 2014).

One example of extended learning time most closely aligned to the Texas OFYP option was utilized by Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (Midkiff & Cohen-Vogel, 2015). The Nashville schools used a school calendar that was a cross between the traditional school calendar and a year-round calendar, creating intercessions—periods of time between regularly scheduled school days—in which students retake courses or prepare for state assessments.

Other sources differentiate between extended learning time and expanded learning time. The premise for expanded learning time is that learning can, and does, occur outside of the formal school setting. Avenues of expanded learning time include after-hours school programs, summer learning programs, and community-centered programs to provide extended learning opportunities and resources (Deschenes & Malone, 2011; Little, 2010; McMurrer, 2012). These partnerships between community organizations and schools can provide continuity of student learning and access to resources. Deschenes and Malone (2011) conducted interviews of key informants from 14 year-round learning organization and examined program evaluations and other documents from these programs. Recommendations for successful expanded learning initiatives derived from this study emphasized the need to remain focused on the specific needs of students and the necessity of sharing data across entities, such as schools and community organizations, for the benefit of student learning (Deschenes & Malone, 2011).

Targeted audiences for increased learning time also differs. The USDE recommended extended learning time for all students, not just a targeted group (Silva, 2012). A Michigan approach aligned with the USDE recommendation primarily increased time dedicated to core content learning time for all students (McMurrer, 2012). Others, such as the Louisiana Recovery School District and schools in Idaho, have utilized increased learning time to target low-achieving students (McMurrer, 2012; Owen, 2012). A pattern emerged in the review of learning time in schools conducted by Kolbe et al. (2012). Common characteristics of schools more likely to increase learning time were urban settings, larger enrollments, and larger percentages of minority students.

Additionally, they found that middle schools and high schools were more likely to increase learning time than elementary schools (Kolbe et al., 2012).

Studies on increased learning time and academic achievement have shown mixed results. Kidron and Lindsay (2014) and Patall, Cooper, and Allen (2010) conducted meta-analyses of multiple studies on increased learning time and academic achievement and arrived at similar conclusions. Results showed mixed effects and sizes related to a variety of factors. Patall et al. (2010) identified a neutral to small effect on student achievement, stating increased learning time may be especially important for students at risk of failing. However, no causation could be concluded. Kidron and Lindsay (2014) agreed that students struggling to meet grade level academic standards in English language arts benefitted from increased learning time. This was further demonstrated in high achieving charter schools in New York. These schools have over 25% more instructional time than typical New York City schools and have shown greater gains in both English language arts and mathematics (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Owen, 2012). Kidron and Lindsay (2014) found positive effects for elementary mathematics and negative effects on middle school mathematics. However, there was a statistically significant effect on both math and literacy when extended learning opportunities were led by certified teachers. In a quantitative study on data from California elementary schools, Jez and Wassmer (2015) found a statistically significant positive relationship between the amount of allocated instructional time and state assessment scores. With an increase of 15 minutes per day, overall student achievement increased 1%. The socioeconomically disadvantaged students had a much larger gain. This subpopulation evidenced a 37% average increase in

academic achievement over the previous year (Jez & Wassmer, 2015). Harris, Deschenes, and Wallace (2011) identified expanded learning opportunities coordinated with communities influenced increased attendance rates and motivation, student connectedness to school, and improved student health.

The literature does consistently suggest that increasing learning time should be one part of a more comprehensive approach to improving academic performance. Schools need to consider how the time is used, increasing the quality of instruction during new and existing time to promote student gains (Del Razo, Saunders, Renee, Lopez, & Ullucci, 2014; Silva, 2012; Owen, 2012; Kolbe et al., 2012; Patall et al., 2010; McMurrer, 2012). In a case study of Colorado's learning time, researchers found well-intentioned reforms were viewed as ineffective by some parents, creating merely opportunities for "more of the same" (p. 5) rather than instruction with an intensified level of quality (DiGiacomo, Prudhomme, Jones, Welner, & Kishner, 2016). The emphasis should be on the importance of academic learning time, the period of time a student is highly engaged in learning, as opposed to merely allocated time for learning (Farbman, 2012; Fisher et al., 2015; Jez & Wassmer, 2015). This may be better accomplished through strategically planned lessons designed to address specific identified gaps in student learning, coupled with continuous monitoring and adjustments as students make progress (Fisher et al., 2015; Kidron & Lindsay, 2014; McMurrer, 2012; Owen, 2012).

Resistance does exist for increasing learning time. Patall et al. (2010) states that the strongest opposition, especially for extended school years, comes from middle- to

upper-class families who value summer vacation time (p. 405). Researchers also found resistance from teachers asked to take on additional learning time, such as an extended year or school day, without increased compensation or planning time (DiGiacomo et al, 2016). The financial challenges for supporting expenses related to increasing learning time has also been a deterrent for schools (Gabrieli, 2011; Jez & Wassmer, 2015). Gabrieli (2011) estimated expanding learning time would require as much as $1,300 per student per year to cover building expenses, teacher compensation, and other resources. An administrator in Michigan expressed concern that once School Improvement Grant funding was gone, they would not be able to continue with an extended school day (McMurrer, 2012). If increased learning time is correlated to improved student achievement, schools need to determine how to make such efforts sustainable for the long term.

Literature on Class Size

The reduction in the number of students present during the OFYP instructional days is a core component of OFYP. As such, student-to-teacher ratios are reduced. The resulting reduction in class sizes provides increased opportunities for individualized attention to each student.

Reductions in class size became especially popular in the late 20th century. Indeed, Snyder and Dillow (2015) identified a continual decrease in the student-to-teacher ratio from 1960-2011 in the United States. In 2010, 36 states had at least one policy in place limiting the number of students in classes, with the majority of these policies regarding primary classrooms (Zinth, 2010). Smaller classes are a preference for

most stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, and parents (Chingos, 2013; Cho, Glewwe, & Whitler, 2012). McDonald (2013) pointed out that low student-staff ratios are often used as a point of pride for educational institutions.

Discussions on the effects of class size on student achievement have the potential to be quite contentious. There is a wide spectrum of research, with conflicting results. Those stakeholders supporting smaller classes claim such practices are correlated to improved student achievement and individualized attention for students. Those opposed indicate the minimal academic gains in small classes may not justify the economic impact (Cho et al., 2012; Harfitt & Tsui, 2015; McDonald, 2013). One point in the research remained consistent—results are mixed.

Glass and Smith (1978) conducted a systematic review of the literature on class size, identifying 80 studies comparing class size and student achievement. Later researchers agreed the results indicating higher achievement in smaller classes, however, may be interpreted differently by others, as many of the studies did not control for other factors (Chingos, 2013; Nye, Hedges, and Konstantopoulos, 2000). A landmark study was conducted by Nye et al. (2000) using four years of data from the Tennessee STAR (Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio) project. This was the first large-scale randomized study in the United States on class size effects on student achievement. The experiment compared the progress of randomly-assigned kindergarten students in classes ranging from 13-17 students, as opposed to classes with 22-26 students. Based on an analysis of four years of data, researchers concluded that smaller class sizes in the early grades led to higher academic achievement. They also indicated the number of years students spent in

smaller classes further impacted the effects (Nye et al., 2000). Chingos (2013) points out that, although well designed, the Tennessee STAR experiment is not without flaws. Schools opting to participate in the class-size reduction experiment received additional financial resources from the state government (Chingos, 2013: Nye et al., 2000), which may have impacted results. Konstantopoulos (2011) re-evaluated the Tennessee STAR data using alternate formulas and concluded the impact of small class sizes were inconsistent, beneficial in some, yet not beneficial, or a disadvantage, in others. Sohn (2016) also stated that the magnitude of the impact of smaller class sizes indicated in the Tennessee STAR study was overestimated, as protocols for the study were not followed with fidelity by the schools and randomization of students to class-size groups was suspect (Sohn, 2015; Sohn, 2016).

More recent studies continued to indicate mixed results. Breton (2014) found large class sizes had substantial negative effects on fourth grade math student achievement in Colombia. Konstantopoulos and Shen (2016) and Nandrup (2016) also identified negative effects for larger class sizes at elementary grade levels, but insignificant effects for the middle grades. Other studies indicated smaller class sizes had minimal to no effect on student achievement (Coupé, Olefir, & Alonso, 2016; Konstantopoulos & Traynor, 2014; Krassel & Heinesen, 2014; Watson, Handal, & Maher, 2016).

Altinok and Kingdon (2012) compared class size and student achievement across subject areas for students in 47 different countries using data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). They found a small, yet

statistically significant, negative effect of larger class sizes in 14 of the 47 countries, concluding that class size does not have a consistent, substantial effect on student performance. The authors did point out that positive effects of smaller classes are larger in developing countries than in resource-rich countries. This finding is consistent with findings in other studies that stated smaller classes do show some positive effects for students from low socioeconomic, disadvantaged backgrounds (Bosworth, 2014; Fan, 2012; McDonald, 2013; Shin, 2012), as well as having a positive effect for black students (Dee & West, 2011; Shin, 2012).

Two studies continued to explore class size effects in state-specific contexts. Cho et al. (2012) compiled 17 years of data on enrollment in Minnesota schools and achievement results from the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment. Findings indicated positive effects of smaller classes on student achievement, but not to the extent purported by the Tennessee STAR study. Conversely, a study was conducted in Florida following the 2002 voter-approved Florida state amendment requiring schools to reduce student-to-teacher ratios at all grade levels. Chingos (2013) stated the effects of the class size reductions on student achievement were "small at best, and most likely close to zero," (p. 556).

The reason behind the impact of class sizes on increased student achievement has also been the subject of multiple studies. Harfitt (2012) conducted three case studies with secondary school students to better understand how class size impacted teaching and learning. Classroom observations were utilized to collect data on teacher and student behaviors; student interviews were conducted to gain the student perspective. Results

from the observations indicated a greater level of voluntary participation in class discussions in small classes, with higher student-initiated responses and challenges to the teacher, which was consistent with the student interview data in which students in the smaller classes stated they felt more able to ask questions. Students in the smaller classes also indicated teachers had better classroom management and there was more time on task (Harfitt, 2012). In contrast, a study of students in introductory college mathematics courses reported students in larger classes expressed a higher degree of satisfaction in the course (Gleason, 2012).

One concern is the impact increased class sizes will have on the ability of the instructor to provide quality feedback to students. Sorensen (2015) studied instructor performance with online courses, a context in which class sizes might be limitless due to the lack of physical space constraints. Data for this nonexperimental study were collected from peer reviews and classroom walk-throughs. Although not statistically significant, the data indicated that as class sizes increased, instructor feedback and ratings of instructional expertise decreased (Sorensen, 2015).

In the midst of conflicting study results, several researchers advised approaching changes with caution. Problems occurred in many of the studies, considering the multiple factors that might influence achievement results or cause bias in results (Bosworth, 2014; De Paola, Ponzo, & Scoppa, 2013). One anomaly that exists in the class size argument is the consistent high performance of students in China and other Asian countries where large class sizes are the norm. In these countries the focus is on teacher quality

(McDonald, 2013). In a qualitative study on teacher behaviors, Englehart (2011) similarly concluded teacher quality can offset class size effects.

Literature on Response to Intervention at the Secondary Level

The OFYP, at its core, is an intervention strategy intended to increase academic achievement of underperforming students. On secondary campuses, which are typically characterized by educators with subject-specific training, teachers may be asked to tutor students during the OFYP in subjects outside of their primary area of expertise. Examining the components of Response to Intervention (RtI), and specifically the challenges of RtI at the secondary level, further informed this study.

RtI is a multi-tiered approach to meeting the needs of struggling general education students, with the first tier as regular classroom instruction and tiers two and three providing varying levels of interventions based on student needs. The goal of the RtI process is to accurately identify and address student needs and increase academic achievement, as well as serve as a precursor to identifying students with disabilities (Bradley et al., 2011). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 2004 and the focus on closing achievement gaps in the NCLB Act of 2001 prompted school implementation of RtI. Common components of RtI frameworks include the use of universal screeners to identify students requiring interventions, utilization of research-based instructional strategies as part of a multi-tiered prevention system, progress monitoring, and data-driven decision making (McInerney & Elledge, 2013). With its foundation grounded in research on early literacy and in elementary school settings

(Faggella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011), RtI implementation has proven challenging within traditional secondary school structures.

Several studies have been conducted to ascertain the attitudes of various stakeholders, such as school psychologists, special education directors, campus administrators, and teachers, regarding secondary school implementation of RtI (Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Fisher & Frey, 2013; Regan, Berkeley, Hughes, & Brady, 2015; Sansosti, Goss, & Noltemeyer, 2011; Sansosti, Noltemeyer, & Goss, 2010; Sansosti, Telzrow, & Noltemeyer, 2010). Common themes emerged across these studies as people in various school roles identified barriers to RtI implementation in secondary settings. The importance of understanding the purpose and structure of RtI was identified as a critical component to the success of RtI programs, especially at the secondary level (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Regan et al., 2015), considering that much of the research on RtI has been done at lower levels. Regarding one school's tier two focus on small group instruction, a secondary teacher stated, "I never thought I'd be working with small groups like our kids get in elementary school," (Fisher & Frey, 2013). See, Gorard, and Siddiqui (2015) conducted a randomized control trial of RtI programs in the United Kingdom for students in their final year prior to transitioning to secondary school. Although their results suggested RtI had a positive effect on student performance in reading and literacy, misunderstandings on the criteria for students to receive the prescribed interventions complicated outcomes (See, Gorard, and Siddiqui, 2015). Professional development aimed to provide clarity on the *"who"* and the "what" for RtI, and ongoing support, was cited as a key necessity for successful implementation (Regan et al., 2015).

A lack of time intersects several reasons for these challenges. Secondary school schedules often prove inflexible, creating a lack of available time to commit to interventions. Secondary school courses cover a large amount of content, moving beyond the acquisition of basic skills prevalent in the lower grade levels (Prewett et al., 2012). This precipitates the feeling that any time dedicated to RtI will be at the expense of time necessary to cover required content (Sansosti et al., 2011), and potentially compromise credit acquisition and graduation (Sansosti, Telzrow, et al., 2010). School psychologists also perceived teachers were reluctant to commit time to RtI because secondary students are viewed as adults, therefore held highly accountable for being personally responsible for their learning (Sansosti, Telzrow, et al., 2010).

Another time issue identified in the studies was the lack of time for teachers to collaborate, problem-solve, and plan for RtI, especially in the highly departmentalized, and potentially isolating, structure of secondary schools (Sansosti et al., 2011; Sansosti, Telzrow, et al., 2010). The amount of time needed to engage in these professional communities of learning is exacerbated by the lack of clarity on appropriate secondary RtI approaches and teacher feelings of inefficacy about RtI. Planning and preparation for RtI may prove challenging, even for the highly experienced teacher (Wilson, Fagella-Luby, & Yan, 2013). School psychologists surmised that most secondary educators are unfamiliar with RtI and its core features (Sansosti, Telzrow, et al. 2010). Teachers felt unsure about their role and the processes in RtI, citing reasons such as inconsistent meetings and trainings and the lack of support from RtI specialists and administrators (Isbell & Szabo, 2014). A lack of support gives rise to inconsistencies in RtI

implementation and failure to appropriately document progress (Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Regan, et al. 2015; Sansosti et al., 2011; Sansosti, Telzrow, et al., 2010).

Sansosti et al. (2011) identified the importance of collaboration across campus and district leadership for a successful RtI effort, yet such collaboration is frequently lacking. As a systemic approach, RtI requires cooperation from campus leaders, special education departments, and curriculum departments in schools. However, conflicting priorities and demands hamper opportunities for key leaders to work together in supporting RtI implementation on a consistent basis (Sansosti et al., 2011; Sansosti, Telzrow, et al. 2010).

Despite these difficulties, principals and teachers still expressed the importance of RtI as a means to better meet the individual needs of students. They were not ready to abandon efforts to support expanding capacity of staff to successfully utilize intervention strategies (Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Sansosti, Noltemeyer, et al., 2010; See et al. 2015). Teachers expressed frustration in their inability to provide the sufficient time and attention to students that could lead to positive results (Isbell & Szabo, 2014). While Sansosti, Telzrow, et al. (2010) identified some negativity from school psychologists regarding RtI in secondary schools, it was inferred this negativity came from frustration with the challenges of secondary implementation, not negativity towards the prevention framework. Effective implementation of RtI requires a cultural shift on secondary campuses with strong instructional leaders committed to integration of RtI practices (Johnson & Smith, 2011; Sansosti et al., 2011).

Summary

Section 1 identified the persistent local problem of low student achievement scores in reading, as measured by the Texas state assessments. The OFYP option available to Texas schools to mediate low student performance is utilized by the local district. A review of the literature revealed minimal research conducted on the correlation between participation in the Texas-specific OFYP initiative and increased student achievement, with no peer-reviewed sources available. Topics relevant to the characteristics of the OFYP, however, were found in the literature and contributed to the conceptual framework for this study. Those topics included increased learning time, class size, and Response to Intervention at the secondary level.

Section 2 discusses the study methodology, including the study design, data collection strategies, and analysis processes through which a better understanding of the connection between student participation in the OFYP and student achievement was derived.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The declining student performance in reading at a small rural school district in Texas was alarming. As the STAAR testing program began to raise passing standards in 2016, the local school remained challenged to meet accountability measures with the current level of student performance. The local problem that prompted this study was the decline in student performance on the reading state assessment under the new state assessment program. A current method to remediate and support struggling students, the OFYP, needed to be evaluated to determine if there was a relationship between the OFYP remediation efforts and increased student achievement.

This project study used a mixed-methods approach with a concurrent explanatory design to explore the extent to which a relationship existed between student participation in the OFYP remediation programs and improved student performance on the state reading exam. Additionally, faculty perceptions were collected regarding the OFYP and its motivational impetus on students to improve their performance.

Study Design and Approach

This study used a mixed-methods approach with a concurrent explanatory design. The quantitative portion of the study was quasi-experimental research that included the collection and statistical analysis of archival student assessment data from a campus utilizing the OFYP as well as a control group consisting of campuses not utilizing the OFYP. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted with administrators, teachers, and counselors from the local campus using the OFYP to better understand staff perceptions

regarding the OFYP and its potential impact on student achievement. This mixed-methods approach may help the local district, as well as the larger educational community, better understand the OFYP and its correlation, if any, to student motivation and achievement.

Justification for Study Design and Approach

A mixed-methods approach is identified by Creswell (2012) as a means to provide a deeper understanding of the research problem than if a qualitative or quantitative methodology was used in isolation. Furthermore, utilizing either a qualitative or quantitative method in isolation would not have fully informed the identified research questions in this study. Mixed methods is an appropriate choice when outcomes and processes are under investigation (Creswell, 2012). This study used state assessment results as quantitative measures to indicate if growth in student achievement existed after participation in the OFYP. The use of archival assessment data in this study allowed for the concurrency of data collection. The qualitative portion of the study provided an improved understanding of the remediation processes within the OFYP and the staff perceptions of the program.

Qualitative Data Set and Collection Plan

The qualitative portion of this study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ2: What are the faculty perceptions of the OFYP remediation model for impacting students to improve academic performance?

RQ3: What are the faculty perceptions of the curriculum and resources utilized in the OFYP for students to improve student achievement in reading?

Merriam (2009) described the importance of obtaining an "insider's perspective" on investigated topics (p. 14). To gain this insider's viewpoint, administrator, counselor, and teacher perceptual data were collected through questionnaires and interviews of staff on the local campus that used the OFYP remediation model. The focus of the qualitative data collection was on the faculty perceptions of the OFYP remediation and suggestions based on their experiences with the program. This information provided insight into the study results from the quantitative portion of the study.

Quantitative Data Set and Collection Plan

The quantitative portion of the study used a pre- and posttest quasi-experimental design. The pre- and posttest design aligned with the research question indicating analysis of the STAAR reading results to determine a relationship, if any, between participation in OFYP and improved student performance as compared to the prior year's state assessment.

The independent variable in the quantitative portion of the study was participation in the OFYP, a remediation model providing specialized instructional days for at-risk students. The dependent variable was reading academic achievement as measured by STAAR, the state assessment instrument. Two consecutive years of STAAR scale scores were collected for each student. The STAAR assessment was an appropriate assessment to use as the measure of the dependent variable due to the consistency of testing dates and conditions across sites and the numerous reliability and validity studies on the STAAR

exams, including Kudor-Richardson 20, stratified coefficient alpha, and studies linking STAAR performance to ACT and SAT results (TEA, 2007-2015b). Also, the scale score results on STAAR can be used to compare student performance from one year to the next as a vertical scale score had been developed for Grades 3-8 assessments (TEA, 2013). Gain scores were calculated for each student and entered into IBM SPSS Statistics (IBM Corp., 2012). An independent samples *t* test was conducted to determine any statistical difference between the gain scores of students participating in OFYP as compared to students not participating in OFYP.

With the research question for the quantitative portion of this mixed-methods study, I sought to determine whether at-risk students who participated in the OFYP remediation model evidenced greater increases in student achievement than at-risk students who did not participate in the OFYP remediation model, in terms of STAAR reading assessments. The null hypothesis was that the change in STAAR reading scores for students participating in the OFYP remediation would have no statistically significant difference than those who did not participate in the OFYP. The directional alternative hypothesis for this portion of the study was the students participating in the OFYP would have greater increases in student achievement on STAAR reading than similar students who attended a school with a traditional school year, therefore not participating in the OFYP remediation calendar option.

Integration of the Approaches

Integration of the qualitative and quantitative approaches occurred after data had been collected and analyzed independently. As a mixed-methods concurrent explanatory

design, the qualitative data provided insight into the results evident in the quantitative data. The relationship between the two methods is summarized in Figure 1, which served as the conceptual framework for this study based on Vroom's theory of expectancy.

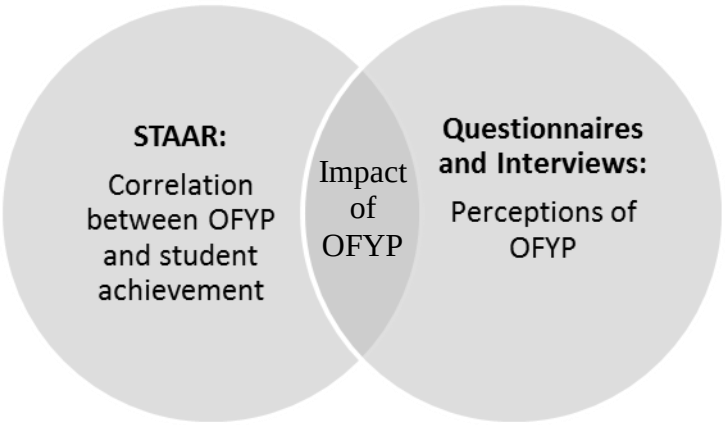

Figure 1. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data.

Setting and Sample

Population

The local setting for this study was a small, rural school district located on the outskirts of a metropolitan area. The student population of the district was just over 1,750 students. Each year the TEA publishes open-access data, available on their website, on school districts and campuses in the state. The published data for this district indicated the ethnic distribution in the district was 80% Hispanic and 18% White. All other represented ethnicities were less than 1% of the total student population. The district percentages of economically disadvantaged students (72%) and at-risk students (55%) exceeded the state average (TEA, 2012-2015).

Qualitative Sampling

Questionnaires were administered to all teachers with OFYP experience and interviews were conducted with the campus administrator, counselor, and reading teachers to obtain information on the practices during and perceptions of the OFYP as a means of motivating students and improving student performance on state assessments. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) identified homogenous sampling as appropriate to attain an "insider's perspective" on experiences under study (p. 134). Purposeful sampling was used in this study to identify participants, as the specific experience in the local school was under study. A purposeful sampling method is also supported by Chein (1981) and Patton (2002) as the most appropriate sampling method for gaining information from persons who hold the most information about the experience under investigation.

Qualitative eligibility criteria. Questionnaire participants included all current teaching staff who had experience with the OFYP. Interviewees included the campus administrator, counselor, and reading teachers from the middle school campus in the OFYP-implementing school district. Different types of staff members were included in an effort to gain varying viewpoints on the OFYP experience, as their different roles had the potential to yield different perspectives. Staff members from the control group schools were eliminated as they lacked experience with the OFYP and the ability to provide information regarding its motivating effect on students.

Participant number. The number of participants asked to complete the questionnaire was determined by the number of teachers on the campus having

experience with the OFYP. Based on current campus personnel, this number would not have exceeded 34. The target sample size for teacher interviews was 6-8 teachers. This number was selected to include all the teachers on the campus who might have had knowledge of the OFYP remediation practices relevant to reading at the middle school level. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that sampling continues until data saturation is reached. This guideline was considered while teacher interviews were conducted.

The campus principal and the campus's single counselor were also interviewed. These interviews represented 100% of the available faculty subsets in these role categories.

Quantitative Sampling

Nonprobability convenience sampling was used to identify students for whom assessment data were compiled. Creswell (2012) explained nonprobability sampling as a viable option when participants represent a specific characteristic the researcher desires to study. In this case, the treatment group was comprised of at-risk seventh grade students who participated in the OFYP. The control group included at-risk seventh grade students from demographically similar schools as identified on Texas state accountability reports that do not offer the OFYP. Students identified as part of the control group were academically and demographically as similar as possible to the students in the study group.

Quantitative eligibility criteria. The sampling frame for the treatment group was all at-risk seventh graders who attend the local school utilizing the OFYP as a remediation plan for reading. This grade level was selected because state assessment

results are available for the prior year and STAAR is administered only once each assessment cycle for these grade levels, as opposed to other grade levels that have multiple administrations. Eligibility requirements for selecting participants in the treatment group were:

- The student must have taken the STAAR reading assessment in both sixth and seventh grade.
- The student must have participated in the OFYP remediation days in the school year of their seventh grade assessment used in this study.

A similar frame applied to the control group, with the exception of participation in the OFYP. As a part of the state accountability system, Texas identifies comparison groups for schools of similar type, size, and demographics. The TEA suggested these comparison groupings can be used by schools to gauge their performance relative to those peer campuses (TEA, 2015a). Schools listed on the comparison group for the local site were contacted for permission to access student assessment results for inclusion as part of the control group in this study.

Participant number. The number of participants in the study were defined by the number of students in the local district that met the study criteria. With an average of 35 local sixth grade students not meeting standard on the STAAR reading exam in recent years (TEA, 2012-2015), the potential number of students participating in OFYP for reading was a manageable sample size, which was anticipated to be 20-30 students.

Role of the Researcher

Identified faculty participants were provided an explanation of the study, how the information they provided would be used, and assurances of confidentiality. They were asked to complete and sign an informed consent document prior to participation, and were informed that they could choose to opt out at any time. These processes of informed consent were identified as research best practices (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009).

No direct contact was necessary with students for whom state assessment results were collected, as archival data were used for this study. The researcher made contact with the local district for access to data on the treatment group. Identified demographically similar districts were contacted for access to data on students for the control group.

Protection of Participants

In considerations of the confidential nature of student assessment results, all collected quantitative data were de-identified. Student names, nor the names of any of the participating schools, are used in the study report.

Steps were also taken to protect the interviewees and those that completed the questionnaire. Data were only collected upon the consent of the prospective participants. The online questionnaire responses were password protected. Data from the interviews were kept secure through the use of codes in place of names, by storing names and matching codes separately from the data, and discarding of names once the study was completed. In alignment with the assurances of confidentiality communicated to faculty

participants (Creswell, 2012), the final research study report does not include information that would identify the individual participants. Findings are communicated in a general way, utilizing wording that will not indicate the individual, or role, from whom information was garnered.

Data Collection Strategies

Qualitative Sequence

Data collection instrumentation and process. Two forms of qualitative data collection were used in this study: questionnaires and interviews. Both forms were collected following protocols suggested by Creswell (2012). Due to the uniqueness of the OFYP, implemented in only a small subset of Texas school districts, I developed questions to best fit the program under investigation. Prior to administering the instruments, drafts of the questions were piloted with educational professionals to garner feedback and refine the questions, as suggested by Merriam (2009).

Questionnaires were administered to all teaching staff on the campus to gain a wide perspective on staff perceptions regarding the OFYP without influence from the researcher's presence. The questionnaire prompts were developed into a digital survey using Google Forms. A link to access this digital survey was sent to all campus staff members using e-mail addresses provided by the principal. By using open-ended questions on this instrument, staff had the opportunity to provide any information they felt was relevant.

Questionnaire prompts included:

1. Describe your experiences with the Optional Flexible Year Program (OFYP).

2. What are the benefits, or problems, of using OFYP for student remediation?
3. In your opinion, how do the curriculum and resources used during OFYP help to improve student achievement?
4. What suggestions would you give for improving the use of OFYP as a remediation strategy?
5. In what ways has OFYP positively or negatively influenced *student motivation* to improve their academic performance?
6. To what extent do you feel OFYP has influenced *student performance*?

More in-depth interviews were conducted with the campus administrator, counselor, and campus reading teachers. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to obtain the desired information, while still allowing for flexibility to respond to interesting, relevant ideas that emerged during the interviews, as suggested by Merriam (2009).

The interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format. This arrangement was utilized for the interviews so respondents felt confident in the confidentiality of their answers and encouraged fully transparency (Creswell, 2012), as opposed to a focus group interview that might have inhibited full disclosure in front of peers (Lodico et al., 2010). The interviews were scheduled to accommodate up to an hour per interviewee, as recommended by Weiss (1994). The length of each interview was adjusted based on the willingness and capacity of the participant to continue providing information relevant to the study topic.

Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewee. At the conclusion of each interview, I manually transcribed responses, which were then analyzed in the context of all interviews to identify trends and consider if the data indicated saturation (Lodico, et al., 2010).

Interview questions, which were piloted with educational professionals ahead of time to garner feedback, included:

1. Tell me about your experience with the Optional Flexible Year Program (OFYP) on your campus.
2. Describe your perceptions of the student experience with the OFYP.
3. In what ways, if any, does OFYP motivate students to improve their reading performance?
4. Describe any instances in which the OFYP does not motivate students to improve their performance in reading.
5. How has the OFYP been structured, specifically in the area of reading (e.g. schedules, student groupings, etc.)?
6. Tell me how the curriculum and resources used during the OFYP for reading remediation improves student achievement.
7. In what ways, if any, has the OFYP allowed your school to better meet the needs of students struggling in reading?
8. If the OFYP was no longer utilized in your school, how might students struggling in reading be affected?
9. What other information, if any, would you like to provide regarding OFYP?

Triangulation of data. Triangulation is a primary means to ensure credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Collecting data from both questionnaires and interviews provided the opportunity for triangulation in this study. This use of multiple instruments and information from a wide variety of individuals with varying perspectives allowed for cross-checking of information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and provided the sought after "corroborating evidence" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259).

Procedure for gaining access. Once permission was granted from the district's central office to conduct the study at the local site, contact was made with the campus principal to introduce myself and the study. The desired questionnaire and interview processes were discussed.

Role of the researcher. The researcher role in this specific study was an important consideration. The researcher is a member of the community and former employee of the district in the study, separating from the district on good terms in 2012. As such, a positive relationship existed between the researcher and many of the intended participants. This position had the potential to benefit the ease of access to the site and each participant's sense of comfort during the interview process. On the other hand, the researcher needed to take measures to guard against any personal bias or unintended inferences from the collected data. As suggested by Merriam (2009), the researcher encouraged respondents by remaining interested, yet maintaining neutrality. Member checking, a common means of avoiding misinterpretation (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al.,

2010; Merriam, 2009), was used as an additional measure of the accuracy of recorded responses and interpretation.

Quantitative Sequence

Data collection instrument. Texas has a long history of state testing, implementing its first state-wide assessment program in 1980 in response to requirements passed by the 66th Texas Legislature. The most recent iteration of the state's assessment program instrument is the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness, or STAAR, which was first administered in 2012 (TEA, 2014-2015). Data from the STAAR Reading assessment in Grade 6 and Grade 7 were used in this study.

According to the TEA (2014-2015), Pearson was the primary contractor responsible for developing the STAAR from 2012-2015. In addition to a quality review performed by the contractor, additional reviews of test items were conducted by the TEA and Pearson-trained committees comprised of teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators, regional Education Service Center employees, and TEA staff members. The STAAR exams have been piloted and field tested to establish validity. All test administrators receive training and are held to strict security standards to further ensure test validity. The STAAR has also undergone measurements of reliability, including the Kudor-Richardson 20 (KR_{20}) and stratified coefficient alpha, tests of internal consistency (TEA, 2014-2015).

Each STAAR reading assessment measures student mastery on the state standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), specific to the grade level of students to whom each test is administered. While all TEKS are assessed periodically,

the majority of each assessment focuses on readiness standards, those TEKS determined to be essential in the current grade level, important for subsequent courses, support college and career readiness, and require in-depth instruction of broad ideas (TEA, 2010a). Content on both the sixth and seventh grade reading tests, utilized as the pre- and posttest in this study, is divided into three reporting categories: 1) Understanding and Analysis Across Genres, 2) Understanding and Analysis of Literary Texts, and 3) Understanding and Analysis of Informational Texts (TEA, 2011).

The STAAR test is administered to Texas students each spring. Individual students receive a report that includes three scores: raw score (the number of test items answered correctly), percentage score (the percentage of correct test items), and scale score. This scale score allows for comparison across test versions and takes into account the test difficulty (TEA, 2007-2016c).

Procedure for gaining access. The study used archival data that did not require direct contact with students to administer the data collection instrument. Access to campus-level passing percentages was readily available online to the public. However, in this study permission to access student-level data was needed from districts identified as meeting the criteria for the study.

The local district and other non-OFYP participating districts with similar demographics were contacted with a request to access student-level state assessment data to inform this study. Once granted access, a key contact was identified to compile the previously identified student-level data sets. Such gate-keepers are valuable resources to facilitating access on the local site (Lodico, et al., 2010).

Student scale scores were collected, de-identified, and compiled into a spreadsheet by the data gatekeeper identified by the district. The data sets were then entered into SPSS for later analysis. Data were summarized and reported in tables for this study. Comprehensive raw data information, without identifying details, will be made available upon request.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data for this study was collected by compiling archival data from state assessments. Qualitative data were generated through questionnaires and interviews of the administrator, counselor, and teachers on the local campus that utilized the OFYP remediation model. The data were analyzed in an attempt to answer the research questions:

RQ1: Do at-risk students who participated in the OFYP remediation model evidence greater increases in reading student achievement, as measured by STAAR, than at-risk students who did not participate in the OFYP remediation model?

RQ2: What are the faculty perceptions of the OFYP remediation model for motivating students to improve their academic performance?

RQ3: What are the faculty perceptions of the curriculum and resources utilized in the OFYP for students to improve achievement in reading?

Qualitative Data Analysis

Data from questionnaires were downloaded from the online survey program and the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed. Interviewees were provided the

opportunity to review the transcriptions of their individual interviews for accuracy before analysis by the researcher, as suggested by Creswell (2012).

The questionnaire and interview documents were then hand-analyzed, which Creswell (2012) suggested as possible with the limited volume and personal interest in using a hands-on approach. Following a preliminary exploration to gain a sense of the data, the notes were reviewed again and open coding methods were applied, followed by axial coding to categorize findings in the data and identify themes. Creswell (2012) and Merriam (2009) both suggested this two-phase coding approach for analyzing qualitative data.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Permission to access the archival state assessment data was sought by contacting the local school and demographically similar schools, as identified by the Texas Accountability System, which did not utilize OFYP.

Collected student assessment data, both pre- and posttests scores, were used to calculate gain scores for each student. These gain scores were compiled in SPSS for analysis. Creswell (2012) indicated an independent samples *t* test as an appropriate statistical approach when a study includes one independent and one dependent variable. In this study, an independent samples *t* test was conducted to compare the mean gain scores of the two groups and identify any statistically significant difference.

Validity and Trustworthiness of Findings

The validity and trustworthiness of the study findings relied on the researcher's conscientious use of valid and reliable quantitative instruments. The qualitative data were

carefully monitored for accuracy through member checking. These measures ensured the credibility of the qualitative data. Clear descriptions of the research process in this study are provided so the study might be replicated.

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

The mixed-methods concurrent explanatory approach allowed for collecting the archival quantitative data and the administration of questionnaires and interviews to generate qualitative data within the same time frame. Creswell (2012) suggested the use of a mixed methodology provides a better understanding of a research problem than either a qualitative or quantitative method used in isolation.

The statistical analysis of the collected assessment data was used to determine any relationship between participation in the OFYP and an increase in reading student achievement, as measured by STAAR. The quantitative findings were further explained by the exploration of the qualitative data. This qualitative data were generated through questionnaires and interviews designed to explore the faculty perceptions of the OFYP remediation model for motivating students to improve academic performance. By considering the data collected and analyzed using both the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, the richest description of the OFYP and its relationship to increased student achievement was derived.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this project study was to explore the relationship between the OFYP remediation program and middle school reading student achievement as measured by the Texas state assessment instrument. I also explored the perceptions of the campus

administrator, counselor, and teachers regarding the use of the OFYP for improving student performance.

As a mixed-methods study using a concurrent explanatory design, collection of qualitative and quantitative data was commenced simultaneously. I met face-to-face with the superintendent of the local school and obtained a letter of consent for the district to participate in the study. I then met with the assistant superintendents at the comparison schools to request completion of a data use agreement and subsequent collection of the requested data. All district administrators had staff compile the quantitative data and deliver it either via e-mail or in person.

The collection of qualitative data on the campus under study was facilitated by the campus principal. I met face-to-face with the principal to explain the study and the components of the data collection for which I would need access to campus staff. The principal facilitated contact with teachers who fit the participant criteria for the questionnaire and the interviews.

Teachers on the campus who had experience with the OFYP were e-mailed a request to participate in the online questionnaire. The e-mail included a brief description of the study and all other components of the IRB-approved consent form. It also included a link to an online survey created using Google Forms. The e-mail explained that by clicking on the link the staff member was signifying consent to participate in the study. Two reminders were sent to potential participants to encourage them to complete the questionnaire if they had not already done so. By the end of a 15-day window, 11 of the

24 teachers who met the participant criteria had responded to the survey. A sampling of the online questionnaire responses is included in Appendix D.

Interviewees were e-mailed about the study and times to meet were confirmed. I was able to meet with each interviewee at the school in their individual classrooms or offices. Prior to the start of each interview, I went over each component of the consent form, explaining the study, the voluntariness of participation, and their right to opt out of participation at any time. Each participant consented for the interview to be audio-recorded. After interviews were concluded the recordings were transcribed into Word documents. A representative sample of the transcriptions can be found in Appendix B.

Quantitative Findings

Quantitative data were collected to address the first research question:

RQ1: Do at-risk students who participate in the OFYP remediation model evidence greater increases in reading student achievement, as measured by STAAR, than at-risk students who do not participate in the OFYP remediation model?

The null hypothesis was that the change in STAAR reading scores for students participating in the OFYP remediation would have no statistically significant difference than those who did not participate in the OFYP. The directional alternative hypothesis for this portion of the study was that students who participated in the OFYP would have evidenced greater increases in student achievement on the STAAR reading assessment than similar students who attended a school that did not utilize the OFYP.

Texas state assessment scores for reading were collected from the campus utilizing the OFYP method for remediation as well as from two comparison schools that did not employ the OFYP strategy. The treatment group was comprised of students in seventh grade who had not met the state standard on their sixth grade reading assessment and participated in the OFYP remediation during their seventh grade year. Gain scores for these students were derived by comparing their seventh grade reading state assessment score to their sixth grade reading state assessment score. The control group data were collected and calculated in the same manner from demographically similar schools that did not employ OFYP as a remediation strategy. Data from multiple years (2012-2016) were collected and compared to help identify any potential patterns of impact of the OFYP remediation strategy on reading student achievement.

Table 1 provides an overview of the descriptive statistics for the collected student data. The number of students each year identified as in the treatment group ranged from 27-45 students. The number of students in the control group ranged from 69-88 students. While the sample size of the control group is larger than the treatment group, including all the collected data was consistent with the proposed methodology of including all students who fit the identified criteria in the schools selected.

Table 1

S*tudent Sample Sizes in the Data Collection Sets*

Student groups	2013	2014	2015	2016
Treatment	31	45	27	40
Control	88	82	69	74

Individual student gain scores for the two groups of students, treatment and control, were entered into SPSS and an independent samples *t* test was conducted to determine any statistically significant difference between the mean gain scores of the two groups. Each of the years of data were analyzed independently to align with the proposed data analysis processes and to see if results were consistent across multiple years of the OFYP implementation. Findings were consistent across all years. The students remediated using the OFYP showed no statistically significant difference as compared to the control group, thus accepting the null hypothesis and rejecting the alternative hypothesis. Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the group statistics for each of the years analyzed.

Table 2

Group Statistics for Multiple Years of Student Data Sets

Student groups	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Treat.	Control	Treat.	Control	Treat.	Control	Treat.	Control
N	31	88	45	82	27	69	40	74
Mean	64.00	86.51	69.76	90.85	86.26	98.36	68.10	79.82
Std. deviation	92.831	68.066	60.039	60.454	83.497	66.192	62.871	74.548
Std. error mean	16.673	7.256	8.950	6.676	16.069	7.969	9.941	8.666

The mean gain score for the treatment groups ranged from 64.00-86.26, while the control groups' mean gain score across the represented years ranged from 79.82-98.36. The mean gain score for the control group each year was consistently higher than the mean score of the treatment for the same year. However, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances showed homogeneity of variances in each data set, indicating reliability of the independent samples *t* test results.

Table 3 displays results of the independent samples *t* test on the 2013 data. With a *p* value of .154, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean gain score for students who received the OFYP remediation and students in demographically similar schools who did not receive the OFYP remediation.

Table 3

Independent Samples t test Comparing 2013 Student Data

		Independent samples test								
		Levene's test for equality of variances		*t* test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
VAR00001	Equal variances assumed	1.860	.175	1.433	117	.154	22.511	15.706	-8.593	53.615
	Equal variances not assumed			1.238	41.921	.223	22.511	18.183	-14.186	59.209

Table 4 shows the test results on the 2014 data, which also indicated no statistically significant difference between the two student groups. However, the *p* value for the 2014 data was much closer to being below .05, which would have indicated a statistically significant difference.

Table 4

Independent Samples t test Comparing 2014 Student Data

		Independent samples test								
		Levene's test for equality of variances		*t* test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
VAR00001	Equal variances assumed	.046	.831	1.886	125	.062	21.098	11.188	-1.045	43.241
	Equal variances not assumed			1.890	91.241	.062	21.098	11.166	-1.081	43.277

Tables 5 and 6, representing the analysis of the 2015 and 2016 student data, likewise show a *p* value of greater than .05, indicating no statistically significant difference between the two groups. The 2015 and 2016 results evidence the highest *p* values of all four years of data analyzed, p = .457 and p = .400, respectively.

Table 5

Independent Samples t test Comparing 2015 Student Data

		Independent samples test								
		Levene's test for equality of variances		*t* test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
VAR00001	Equal variances assumed	4.299	.041	.747	94	.457	12.103	16.208	-20.078	44.284
	Equal variances not assumed			.675	39.448	.504	12.103	17.936	-24.163	48.370

Table 6

Independent Samples t test Comparing 2016 Student Data

		Independent samples test								
		Levene's test for equality of variances		*t* test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
VAR00001	Equal variances assumed	2.011	.159	.845	112	.400	11.724	13.875	-15.767	39.216
	Equal variances not assumed			.889	92.318	.376	11.724	13.188	-14.467	37.915

In summary, data analyzed across four consecutive years of results consistently showed no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups for each of those years, thus supporting the null hypothesis, that stated the change in STAAR reading scores for students participating in the OFYP remediation would have no statistically significant difference than those who did not participate in the OFYP. The directional alternative hypothesis, that stated students that participated in the OFYP would have greater increases in student achievement on STAAR reading than similar students who attended a school without the OFYP, was rejected.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data were generated through two means. First, online questionnaires were sent to all campus teachers who had experience with the OFYP. Further insights

were collected through face-to-face interviews with the campus principal, counselor, and reading teachers. The qualitative portion of this project study focused on the latter two research questions:

RQ2: What are the faculty perceptions of the OFYP remediation model for impacting students to improve academic performance?

RQ3: What are the faculty perceptions of the curriculum and resources utilized in the OFYP for students to improve achievement in reading?

Twenty-four teachers were e-mailed to solicit their participation in the online questionnaire. The e-mail included the IRB-approved description of the study and purpose of the questionnaire. It also explained the participant rights. By clicking on the provided survey link, teachers indicated their consent to participate. Eleven of the 24 qualifying staff members (45.8%) completed the online questionnaire.

Five face-to-face interviews were conducted: the campus principal, the campus counselor, and three reading teachers. The number of reading teacher interviews conducted was lower than anticipated due to high levels of teacher attrition on the campus in recent years. All reading teachers with OFYP experience who were still on the campus were interviewed. The campus principal served as the gatekeeper for accessing potential interview candidates. All interviews were held individually and recorded, then subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Analysis commenced with the reading of all collected qualitative data and application of the open coding process, which Merriam (2009) described as the process in which the researcher notates initial reactions to participant responses. The next step in the

analysis involved physically cutting out and sorting the coded portions of data into themes, or categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I then combined these categories to represent consistent patterns of thought across the responses, as suggested by Merriam (2009). Initially, 24 categories were identified, which were then combined into four recurring themes: teacher beliefs, teacher experience, student challenges, and refinements to remediation. These themes informed the conclusions drawn relative to each of the research questions.

Teacher beliefs. Participants in both the online questionnaire and interviews were consistent in the belief that the OFYP remediation did not, to their knowledge, achieve its intended outcome. Participants stated, "In all honesty, I don't think it helped improve student achievement," and, "If the goal was to support students who need to have that extra support in reading skills/reading comprehension, then I don't think that that was achieved." Those that did feel the OFYP had a positive impact communicated that is was only effective for a few students or they witnessed only minimal improvement. Questionnaire respondents commented, "Some students who were here to see improvement in their scores made the week worth it," and, "I believe there was minimal improvement in performance." Both of these sentiments indicated the OFYP had a limited impact.

Teacher experience. Statements about the teacher experience during the OFYP were primarily negative. Several comments indicated the OFYP was viewed as more work at a time teachers lacked energy. One interviewee stated:

> So, I felt sometimes the teachers were stressed, especially at the end of the year because they are tired. And the kids are tired. Everybody's tired. And so sometimes they're like, "Oh my, goodness. I just want this school year to be over with."

This end-of-the-school-year fatigue may have contributed to additional stress for teachers. One interviewee comment was, "As with anything, it required a lot of work and a lot of planning…something else we've got to plan for…it took on a negative perception by a number of teachers." This negativity surrounding planning was communicated by both core and elective teachers. Since the OFYP instruction was primarily focused on the state-assessed core areas, core teachers felt inequitably burdened to continue planning for the OFYP week while elective teachers did not have the same responsibilities:

> The biggest challenge was elective teachers being assigned a core subject to remediate. The core teacher did all the planning, work and more to have multiple elective teachers call in sick or mid-week take students to the gym or outside.

Conversely, elective teachers felt inadequately prepared to effectively support student achievement. One stated, "As an elective teacher, I was asked to create content and lessons for topics I knew little about." Another shared:

> For many [OFYP] sessions, I was asked to work with the core teachers on what the students needed. Many times, the core teachers did not wish to share (or maybe did not have time to share). I ended up doing the best I can [sic] coming up with what students needed and wanted to do.

The statements from both core and elective teachers showed a common feeling of frustration regarding the OFYP remediation.

The responses received about the curriculum and resources used to remediate students struggling in reading did not indicate a specific, or consistent, set of materials. The majority of the responses communicated that teachers were instructed to create interdisciplinary units focused on real-world learning that would be fun for students and might increase buy-in. One participant described how their grade level group utilized blended learning for a science-based learning experience with reading practice incorporated in the research phase of the project. Another grade level used a more traditional approach, citing textbooks, STAAR preparation materials, and the standard curriculum as resources. A participant at this grade level stated, "I think it wasn't necessarily different. I think we just went at a slower pace." Another said, "As far as resources, I mean, all I used in the second time was butcher paper and a marker." These statements are in alignment with the comment, "Sixth grade had different priorities, seventh grade had different priorities, and eighth grade [sic]." There were inconsistent priorities across grade levels and differences in the curriculum and resources used by teachers.

The differing approaches, curriculum resources, and materials may be due, in part, to the inconsistency of the OFYP implementation, both in timing and focus. One interviewee shared that in the early years of local implementation the OFYP days were scheduled in November and February, then shifted to days in February and June. In contrast, another respondent communicated that initially the OFYP was held the last two

weeks of school. These varying time frames, and potentially differentiated foci due to timing, may have influenced the clarity of purpose for teachers and students.

Student challenges. A major reason the faculty members cited to explain their perceived ineffectiveness of this remediation strategy was student buy-in. One questionnaire response stated, "Only a few students were here to improve their scores and get something out of the week." While Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation purports that students are likely to put forth effort to earn positive reinforcements or avoid negative consequences (Vroom, 1964), staff felt the students did not perceive the OFYP as an opportunity to improve their academic standings or to earn days off from school on future OFYP-designated days. "In reality, some students felt punished and didn't have their heart in it," stated one staff member. Another communicated they had heard students mention the futility of attempting to do well, sharing, "I have heard the comment, 'So, I'm not going to pass anyway, so there's no point in even trying.'"

A lack of student buy-in created attendance issues during the OFYP days, exacerbating the challenge of the remediation strategy positively impacting student achievement. One comment was, "It's hard to work with kids who didn't want to be here and only see school as a social time." Another person stated,

> Personally, I feel it was a waste of time because there wasn't a whole lot of buy-in with the kids. The attendance requirements, I think, weren't as strict as they should have been because we had kids only show up for the two days they were required to.

The attendance problems were consistently perceived to be elevated in the OFYP period during the last week of school; students were upset because friends were already on summer break and they felt the school year was over. A common comment associated with the diminished attendance was the inability to hold students accountable: “The last week of school OFYP was much more difficult. Simply because you have NOTHING to hold them accountable [sic].”

Refinements to remediation. A consistent positive remark was that teachers felt the opportunity for small group instruction during the OFYP due to a diminished student population was a benefit. Two of the interviewees specifically mentioned small groups during the OFYP helped them better meet the needs of students, stating, “[The students] felt like they got some more attention. They felt that their needs were met,” and, “[They were] less afraid to ask questions. They also felt that they were all in the same boat, like they were all on equal ground. It really let them take that wall down and just feel a little safer.” The perceived benefit of small groups was evident in both the online questionnaire and the interviews, and across all roles that participated in those interviews.

When asked to make suggestions on how to improve the OFYP remediation model, a pattern emerged: the need to provide frequent opportunities for all students to improve. Staff members highlighted their new remediation strategy of daily dividing students by ability for remediation or enrichment, based on needs, for a 30-minute time period was more profitable than the intermittent OFYP remediation days. They feel this new strategy is beneficial for all students, not solely meeting the needs of struggling students. Statements regarding nonstruggling students being released from school during

the OFYP included, “I personally worry about the [gifted and talented] kids,” “Passing students lost a week of instructional time,” and, “I would also argue that those students grading out of OFYP and able to stay home don’t benefit.” Teachers wanted to continue to provide educational opportunities for students regardless of academic level.

Reading teachers and campus leadership confirmed that they felt consistent, ongoing intervention is more productive than an isolated week, and that capitalizing on the benefits of small group instruction was important. One interviewee stated:

> We have to be creative in coming up with other ways to work with [students] in small groups. So if we are not aware of that, then it’s negatively going to affect us. So, we have to build systems in place within our schedule to try to accommodate that, and, if we’re not, then there could be some potential ill effects.

The campus is working to provide this small group instruction during their newly structured daily remediation and/or enrichment—providing opportunities for all students to continue improving academically.

Evidence of data quality. Member checking was utilized to ensure the collected interview responses accurately reflected what the participants hoped to convey. Participants were e-mailed their transcript and asked to verify the accuracy of the information. They were also invited to expand further on their responses, if they desired. A sample of the e-mails regarding member checking opportunities can be found in Appendix C.

Conclusion

A comprehensive review and analysis of the qualitative data indicated that staff perceptions about the efficacy of the OFYP for improving student achievement were in alignment with the quantitative data indicating the OFYP produced no statistically significant difference in the academic achievement gains of middle school students struggling in reading compared to similar students not experiencing the OFYP remediation model.

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation. This theory suggests that the effort individuals put forth is connected to their desire for, and perceived attainability, of a positive reward or avoidance of a negative consequence (Vroom, 1964). Staff communicated their perceptions that students were not sufficiently motivated by the potential reward of school days off during the OFYP days or by the threat of having to attend school during OFYP days for remediation.

The OFYP time provided struggling students an opportunity for remediation with smaller class sizes. Although some studies highlighted the positive impact of smaller class sizes on academic achievement (Cho et al., 2012; Nye, et al., 2000), results of this study were in alignment with studies indicating smaller class sizes had minimal to no impact on academic improvement (Chingo, 2013; Coupé et al., 2015; Konstantopoulos & Traynor, 2014; Krassel & Heinesen, 2014; Patall et al., 2010; Watson, Handal, & Maher, 2016), especially in the middle grades (Konstantopoulos & Shen, 2016; Nandrup, 2016).

Another key component of the OFYP was to provide increased learning time for students identified as needing remediation. The quantitative results of this study did not indicate a statistically significant difference in reading academic achievement gains after students attended the OFYP as compared to similar students who did not have the OFYP opportunity. This result was in contrast to other studies that associated increased learning time with gains in English Language Arts achievement (Dobbie & Fryar, 2011; Kidron & Lindsay, 2014; Owen, 2012). One key difference between the OFYP program and the strategy for increased learning time in the New York charter schools that had increases in academic achievement was the amount of increased learning time. The OFYP days increased learning time for struggling students by less than 6%, while the New York charter schools increased instructional time by 25% (Dobbie & Fryar, 2011; Owen, 2012). This difference in the amount of increased learning time may have contributed to the contrast in findings.

Staff cited challenges with buy-in and collective accountability as primary limitations of any potential success accomplished by the OFYP. The teacher frustration with the extra effort required to plan for the OFYP and the elective teachers feeling ill-prepared to provide remediation in core content areas were in alignment with research on the challenges of RTI at the secondary level (Isbell & Szabo, 2014; Wilson et al., 2013). However, the local staff made positive comments about working in small groups, which is not a trait common to secondary teachers, who often associate such practice with elementary school instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

Overall, teachers in the local setting under study preferred frequent, ongoing intervention and/or enrichment opportunities for all students, especially in small group settings, over the OFYP model.

Project Deliverable

Based on the study findings, the current OFYP model for remediation did not produce statistically significant gains and was not supported as a productive practice by stakeholders. Staff perceptions did, however, show a great deal of buy-in for opportunities to work with students in small group settings on a more frequent basis. A potential project deliverable could be a training for middle grades reading teachers on incorporating small group instruction in their daily pedagogical practice. Small group instruction has historically been more favored at the primary grade levels. The project described in the next section will describe one way small group instructional practices might be adapted for middle-grades application.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The proposed project is a three-day training series to support literacy development in middle school classrooms. The target audience for the three professional development days is middle school reading teachers. The overall goal of the project is to positively impact student performance in reading by supporting middle school reading teachers in their acquisition of strategies for small-group instruction in the regular reading classroom.

Rationale

The professional development project genre was selected based on the study findings. The previously reviewed study outcomes indicted the OFYP remediation strategy in the local school did not produce results with any statistically significant difference than non-OFYP schools. Teacher perceptions also reflected low confidence in the program for making a difference in student achievement. However, staff members communicated a desire to continue having opportunities to work with small groups of students throughout the school year. This training series will be one step in addressing the staff-identified alternative to the OFYP, since the OFYP did not produce the desired quantifiable results and qualitative data further indicated a lack of staff confidence in the OFYP for positively impacting student performance.

Review of the Literature

A second review of the literature was conducted taking the study findings, which indicated a staff preference for ongoing, continuous use of small-group instruction as a remediation strategy, into consideration. The Walden University Library was used to

search for articles, and only peer-reviewed articles published within the last five years were considered. Key search terms included: *middle school reading instruction, small group instruction, differentiated instruction, reading groups,* and *literature circles.*

Literature on Differentiated Instruction

A wealth of literature on differentiated instruction (DIF) exists. Birnie (2015) explained that although the term "differentiated instruction" became popular in the early 2000s, largely in part to the work of C. A. Tomlinson (2010), DIF actually dates back to the one-room schoolhouse days when effective teachers addressed the varied needs of students. DIF can be described as meeting the needs of all students by providing flexibility in the content, processes, and products associated with the learning experience for each student (De Jesus, 2012; Maple, 2016; Puzio, Newcomer, & Goff, 2015; Smit & Humpert, 2012; Taylor, 2015; Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). Kaplan (2016) associated DIF as part of the approach to meeting the needs of gifted learners, promoting "the match between the learner and the learning experience" (p. 114). Matching the learning experience to the learner can be accomplished by modifying the instructional pace, depth and complexity of the content and product, and making learning personally relevant to the student (De Jesus, 2012). The practice of DIF is supported by Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Based on this theory, students develop most when their learning is structured in a way that is challenging yet attainable. If the task is too easy or too hard, the capacity of the student to grow is diminished (Vygotsky, 1978).

Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) said DIF, although not new, is increasingly important. This need for DIF in today's classrooms was emphasized throughout the literature. Findings in the research by Firmender, Reis, and Sweeny (2013) evidenced an increase in the range of student reading levels in classrooms as grade levels increased, with a comprehension grade level equivalent range as much as 11.1 at Grade 5 (Firmender, et al., 2013, p. 9). Morgan (2014) explained the greater level of diversity in 21st century classrooms and the demand to achieve at higher levels also supports the need for DIF. Federal legislation, such as NCLB and the ESSA (USDE, n.d.), further implied teachers and learning organizations should implement instructional practices such as DIF that create opportunities for every student to be successful.

According to Goddard, Goddard, and Minjung (2015), there has been minimal research conducted on the impact of DIF on student achievement, and results are mixed in studies that do exist. Valiandes (2015) reported results of a quasi-experimental study evaluating the effects of DIF that showed the group of students receiving DIF had significantly higher growth than those taught in a traditional "teach to the middle" model. In an experimental study on DIF in middle school reading, Little, McCoach, and Reis (2014) stated their results showed students receiving DIF outperformed students at some of the sites, and converse results at other sites. Both Little et al. (2014) and Smit and Humpert (2012) ultimately concluded that DIF is at least as effective as traditional instruction.

Despite the plethora of writings about DIF, authors communicated that misunderstandings still exist and implementation of DIF is challenging (Birnie, 2015; De

Jesus, 2012; Maple, 2016; Mills et al., 2014; Morgan, 2014; Weber, Johnson, & Tripp, 2013). Mills et al. (2014) explained that confusion about DIF may be based on a person's view. From a systems view, DIF appears to be a structural approach—magnet schools for high-performing students, special education programs, honors courses, and so on. However, DIF can also occur at the classroom level when a teacher creates opportunities for individualized and small group learning based on student needs (Mills et al., 2014).

Addressing the confusion surrounding DIF, research by Goddard et al. (2015) indicated the level of teacher-reported norms across the campus regarding DIF were correlated to the level of student achievement. Achieving this common understanding and implementation of DIF could be accomplished through the suggested in-school time for collaboration and planning for DIF (Puzio et al., 2015; Weber et al., 2013). Weber et al. (2013) stated that without in-school time for collaboration, DIF may be viewed by teachers as unessential. This time for collaboration should include both structured and unstructured time (Puzio et al., 2015) and provide opportunities for teachers to see DIF strategies modeled (Taylor, 2015), as well as ongoing support from someone with DIF expertise (Mills et al., 2014; Puzio et al., 2015; Weber et al., 2013).

A key to DIF implementation is for teachers to know their students, both their academic skill levels and personal interests (De Jesus, 2012; Taylor, 2015). Ascertaining an accurate understanding of students' academic abilities requires valid, reliable, and ongoing assessments (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). Once comprehensive data have been collected and analyzed, Taylor (2015) suggested that teachers start with just a few DIF

strategies rather than set themselves up for becoming overwhelmed with the many DIF options available.

Literature on Small-Group Instruction

Whole-group instruction still dominates middle school classrooms (Lapp, Fisher, & Frey, 2012; Hollo & Hirn, 2015). In a study conducted by Hollo and Hirn (2015), they found that more time in middle school classrooms is spent in whole-group settings than either elementary or high school levels. Assisting middle school classroom teachers in transitioning to more small-group instruction is, therefore, a worthy endeavor.

Data support the use of small-group instruction, especially with adolescent students struggling in reading. In a meta-analysis of experimental literature on remediation practices for upper-elementary and middle school students, Flynn, Zheng, and Swanson (2012) found a positive correlation between small-group instruction and improvement in reading. Qualitative data also support a student preference for small-group instruction. After conducting student interviews, Groff (2014) concluded that students preferred the supportive environment in small-group settings, which encouraged them to take risks, ultimately boosting their self-efficacy as it pertained to reading. Students also reported they enjoyed the opportunity to read selections connected to their personal interests (Groff, 2014). This personalization of reading material is made more possible through small-group instructional settings. Vygotsky's (1978) research suggested that learning is a social endeavor, and that students create deeper meaning of content through interaction. Middle school students, according to Batchelor (2012), are especially social beings and benefit from the collaborative environment indicative of

small-group instruction. Hollo and Hirn (2015) reported more on-task, engaged student behaviors when working in small groups.

Proponents of small-group instruction further explained the rationale for incorporating such a practice in classrooms. Wilson, Nabors, Berg, Simpson, and Timme (2012) and Hollo and Hirn (2015) explained that small-group instruction engages all students for greater amounts of time than whole-group instruction. Small-group instruction also allows teachers to more readily employ differentiated instructional strategies. Small-group instruction provides opportunities for teachers to target specific student needs and more readily modify content, process, or products based on formative assessment (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012: Wilson et al., 2012). Although an individual might perceive that small-group instruction may decrease teacher-student interaction, Wilson et al. (2012) asserted that such classroom practices increase personalized student interaction with teachers. Using small-group instructional practices with time divided between teacher-led and independent activities has also had positive student behavioral results. Students taught in small-groups developed autonomy (Bates, 2013), followed directions independently, and persisted through challenging tasks (Weiss, 2013), all positive qualities in and beyond educational settings.

Several articles outlined teacher actions that would promote successful implementation of small-group instruction. One important component identified was to develop systems and routines in the classroom for transitions between collaborative grouping activities, independent assignments, and small-group instruction with the teacher (Watts-Taffe, et al., 2012). This included clearly defining and communicating

expectations and outcomes to students (Bates, 2013; Watts-Taffe, et al., 2012; Weiss, 2013). Suggestions also included the importance of scaffolding potential nonteacher facilitated small-group collaboration in a gradual release model (Watts-Taffe, et al., 2012; Weiss, 2013) and explicitly teaching collaboration to students through modeling and structured practice (Lapp et al., 2012; Weiss, 2013). Coles et al. (2013) advised designating student leaders to answer questions while the teacher is engaged with a small-group, finding this strategy decreased student frustration with tasks, ultimately decreasing incidences of disruptive behavior.

Determining how to assign students to groups is a key, yet complex, endeavor (Lapp, et al., 2012; Watts-Taffe, et al., 2012). Grouping by ability was suggested as a best method for primary grade levels (Wilson, et al., 2012). However, other sources recommended other grouping strategies: homogenously, heterogeneously, or based on relationships (Bates, 2013; Lapp et al., 2012; Mills et al., 2014). In a study conducted by Mills et al. (2014) teachers reported that structuring groups based on friendships was most successful, stating, "The students had close relationships with each other and strong commitments to making sure that the group dynamics worked," (p. 340). Dedication to the group membership may contribute to successful task outcomes.

The importance of ongoing assessment was also communicated in the literature. Formative assessments inform grouping strategies and differentiation based on student needs (Bates, 2013). Formative assessment can also inform content of literacy center tasks, those independent and collaborative activities engaged in by students outside of the teacher-led small-group instruction (Wilson et al., 2012).

Literature on Literature Circles

A predominant means described in the literature for incorporating small-group reading instruction in the middle grades is through a strategy called literature circles. This approach groups students around common self-selected texts and incorporates independent reading and collaborative, peer-led discussions about the reading (Avci, Baysal, Gül, & Yüksel, 2013; Batchelor, 2012). Whittingham (2013) stated, "At the core of successful literature circles is collaboration," (p. 54). The literature circle strategy has also been called book clubs or literacy circles (Bromley et al., 2014; Woodford, 2016).

Several studies have been conducted on the impact of literature circles. A quantitative study showed students in the experimental group had statistically significant gains in reading level after experiencing literature circles, while the control group did not (Avci et al., 2013). Qualitative data also evidenced literature circles promoted positive results. Teachers reported student choice in reading material, indicative of literature circles, resulted in increased amounts of independent reading, student engagement, and completion of books (Helgeson, 2017; Thomas, 2015; Woodford, 2016). Students spoke favorably about their experience in literature circles, self-reporting increased engagement and a more positive attitude about reading (Woodford, 2016). Literature circles have been successfully implemented in both middle grades and postsecondary settings, including online formats (Avci et al., 2013; Bromley et al., 2014; Thomas, 2015, Whittingham, 2013; Woodford, 2016).

Implementation of literature circles begins with the teacher introducing multiple books to the class through what Batchelor (2012) called "book talks." The purpose of

book talks is to generate student interest in the available selections so they might choose which book they would like to read. While some concerns may be raised regarding the potential mismatch between student reading ability and the books students select, authors still advocated student choice, explaining that text difficulty does not equate to frustration; students are more motivated to read the books because they have chosen them (Halladay, 2012; Harmon, Wood, and Stover, 2012). As previously mentioned, the books students have chosen determines literature circle group membership. Each group then determines their own norms, such as reading assignments, rules for reading ahead, and how the group will handle sharing of information in sections not yet up for discussion (Batchelor, 2012).

Students are assigned various roles prior to independently reading each assigned section of their selected text. Whittingham (2013) stated literature circle roles provide students a focus and purpose for their reading, which "challenges students to go more in-depth with their preparation for class" (p. 55). The number of roles ranges from four to eight, depending on the number of group members and their level of experience with literature circles. Role responsibilities include tasks such as directing the group conversation, summarizing the text, expanding vocabulary, and researching real-world connections (Bromley et al., 2014; Helgeson, 2014; Whittingham, 2013). Hodges and McTigue (2014) suggested this combination of independent reading and collaborative discussion meets the "adolescents' dual need for autonomy and connectedness" (p. 159). However, Woodford (2016) emphasized the importance of modeling and whole-group practice of literature circle discussion processes prior to releasing students to conduct

their groups without teacher facilitation. Lenters (2014) also communicated another concern regarding literature circle roles, warning that using the roles beyond a transitional stage to build rich discussion skills contributed to an environment of tension and a power struggle. In contrast, Barone and Barone (2012) stated the accountability created by role assignments was one of the strengths of the literature circle strategy.

Summary

Literature on differentiated instruction, small-group instruction, and literature circles was conducted. The positive effect of small groups of students working together, either independently or with teacher facilitation, was discussed across all three topics. These strategies provide opportunities for teachers to identify and respond to individual student needs.

Information gathered from this literature review informed the project development for this study and supported the professional development genre. Both Woodford (2016) and Thomas (2015) related the importance of modeling strategy processes for teachers prior to implementation in the classroom. Thomas (2015) also suggested ongoing professional development over several months, as opposed to a single session approach, would yield a change in practice.

Project Description

Detailed Overview of the Project

The project I developed is a three-day professional development series training middle school reading teachers in the practice of literature circles, which are student-led discussion groups about text. This professional development series combines all three

components of the literature review previously discussed: literature circles, small-group instruction, and differentiation. The desired outcomes for the training series are to promote successful implementation of small-group instructional strategies within a literature circle framework in middle school reading classrooms and to positively impact student achievement.

In consideration of the recommendations by Thomas (2015) regarding the efficacy of ongoing professional development, the first two days of the training series are designed to occur on consecutive, or nearly consecutive, days. The third day is recommended to occur approximately three months after the initial training, allowing time for teachers to implement the strategy shared and practiced in the initial training and then receive follow-up support on the third day of professional development. Participants will receive two texts as a part of their training: *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (2002) and *Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles* book by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke (2004). These books will be an integral part of the training series and will also serve as helpful references for participants as they implement literature circles in their middle school reading classrooms.

All training presentations are in Microsoft PowerPoint, which include detailed trainer notes with timing, materials, and scripted comments for each slide. An abbreviated overview document for each training day is also included as a resource for trainers. All participant handouts are also compiled and included as part of the

professional development series resources. The compiled training resources are found in Appendix A.

Training day one. On the first day of the training, data on the wide range of reading levels represented in middle school classrooms will be shared with participants. Participants will then be introduced to research on the success of small-group instructional strategies in middle school classrooms. Participants will also learn about the dual need of middle school students for autonomy and interconnectedness (Hodges & McTigue, 2014). Literature circles will be identified as one small-group instructional strategy that addresses the gap in reading levels and meets the identified needs of adolescents.

As a Texas-based researcher and professional developer, I included a section in the training to review the state standards in reading for Grades 6-8. These standards, which mention students working together in teams, student-led discussions, and continuous application of all standards (TEA, 2010), further justify the use of literature circles.

After building the case for using literature circles, the processes and procedures for implementing the strategy will be covered. Participants will be guided through the initial considerations prior to introducing literature circles to students: student grouping, text selection, and response formats. They will then be guided through the steps of a literature circle and practice those steps as a group. Modeling, which both Thomas (2015) and Woodford (2016) suggested an important part of professional development, will be accomplished through the use of several short videos throughout the training day.

Day One of the training will conclude with participants generating questions they still have about literature circles and their implementation. These questions will be documented on chart paper and revisited on Day Two of the training.

Training day two. Day Two of the training will begin with a review of the learning from the prior session. Participants will then begin learning about more of the details in planning for and implementing literature circles. These details include selecting books, grouping students, designing assessment strategies, and scheduling initial implementation of literature circles. To continue building their understanding of the literature circle processes and procedures, participants will independently read portions of the book *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (2002) and apply literature circle practices as they discuss the reading in small groups.

At this point in the training series, the goal is for participants to have a basic understanding of what literature circles are and what needs to be considered in planning for them. Differentiated instruction, as described by C. A. Tomlinson (2010), will then be introduced and participants will consider how the literature circle strategy aligns to differentiated instruction, deepening the rationale for using literature circles with their students.

The final portion of Day Two of the training series consists of revisiting the questions generated on Day One, ensuring each curiosity has been covered by the day's training content, and if not, the trainer will provide answers or direct participants to alternate resources where they might find the answers. Lastly, the participants will

engage in a facilitated planning time with the trainer available to guide and assist, as needed.

Training day three. The third day of the training will not occur immediately after Day One and Day Two. Instead, it will be scheduled about three months after the first two days, giving participants time to initiate literature circles in their classrooms. This structure will allow them to bring real-world experiences and questions to Day Three of the training series. With that in mind, the focus of Day Three is to allow participants to share their successes and problem-solve challenges they have experienced as they have implemented literature circles. Participants will celebrate the successes of their colleagues and gain ideas to enhance their own practice after engaging in timed conversations with multiple individuals. The Consultancy Protocol (National School Reform Faculty, n.d.) will be used as a framework for participants to share their challenges and colleagues collaboratively generate solutions. Further assistance for addressing challenges will come from exploring sections of *Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles* by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke (2004), again in a literature circle format with participants independently reading portions and then discussing in small groups.

Ongoing collaboration. Continued opportunities to collaborate beyond time spent in professional development sessions is critical to implementation of instructional strategies (Puzio et al., 2015; Sansosti et al., 2011; Weber et al., 2013). This ongoing collaboration will be accomplished with the support of the campus instructional coaches. Reading teachers and the instructional coaches will be able to utilize their designated professional learning community and collaborative planning times to continue learning

about and refining implementation of literature circles, sharing their classroom experiences, and collaboratively problem-solving challenges as they arise. The texts provided as part of the training materials will prove a useful resource for this continued collaboration around the use of literature circles.

Needed Resources and Existing Supports

Primary resources for this professional development series include consumable supplies, such as chart paper, participant handouts, and copies of the two texts selected as part of the training materials. Technology needs include a computer, projector, and an internet connection. As a seasoned trainer, my experience has been that most schools have existing resources to provide the majority of these needs, with the exception of the two texts identified as part of the training materials.

An additional existing resource available in the school participating in this study is the teacher support system provided by the instructional coaches. The individuals in this role will also attend the three-day training series and support the implementation process with the reading teachers.

Lastly, time is another necessary resource for the project. Three days must be allocated for reading teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, and district curriculum specialists to attend the training.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

An initial barrier to project deployment could be the necessary time commitment for staff members to attend the training series. Providing specialized training content for such a small target audience during district-mandated professional development days may

conflict with other required sessions. A solution could be providing a stipend for the intended participants to attend the training on alternate days, such as additional days in the summer or on Saturdays.

As mentioned, the cost of supplying the two texts for each of the training participants could prove cost prohibitive for the trainer. A potential solution would be to ask the school to purchase these texts for the attendees.

The availability of the large quantity and variety of books necessary for implementing literature circles may be challenging in some schools. This barrier could be addressed by utilizing current curricular resources, such as state-adopted anthology textbooks and other existing class sets of books, as reading material for the initial implementation. Over time, teachers and schools could use funds for instructional resources to expand the number of available titles that might be used as literature circle selections.

Lastly, a barrier could exist if there is a lack of flexibility within the current curriculum requirements. Such stringency could hamper the teachers' implementation of student-selected texts over mandated reading selections in the curriculum. If this situation exists, I would work with the teachers to communicate with campus and district leadership about the benefits of literature circles and how the curriculum concepts and desired outcomes could still be accomplished by students working within the literature circle framework.

Implementation Timeline

As an external researcher and not a part of the faculty in the school under study, I can only provide a suggested timeline, which will be shared with the school along with the training resources. There is some flexibility within the timeline, as implementation of literature circles is not time-bound and could be done at any time in the school year. However, starting early in the year would provide the opportunity for teachers and students to experience several cycles of implementation, building an internalization of the processes and procedures for the strategy (Daniels, 2002).

The suggested timeline would be as follows:

- June-July: Approach the campus and share the professional development series, offering to train reading teachers as a part of back-to-school professional development, or provide materials for the campus to present the training themselves,
- August: Provide Day One and Day Two of the training series to the reading teachers, and
- November: Provide Day Three of the training series to reading teachers.

Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others

The roles of the teachers for this project will be one of participation in the training series, with subsequent implementation of literature circles in their classrooms. Campus administrators, district curriculum specialists, and campus instructional coaches will also attend the professional development series, and will commit to being a support system as teachers work to integrate literature circles into their instructional practices. Classroom

instruction on the literature circle protocol and implementation of the strategy with students would make them the beneficiaries of the training, not directly connected to the developed project itself.

Project Evaluation Plan

The ultimate goal of this project is to promote successful implementation of small-group instructional strategies within a literature circle framework in middle school reading classrooms. The evaluation described here is intended to measure the professional development series participant acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary for achieving this goal.

Evaluation of the project will occur throughout the professional development series presentation. Multiple formative assessment strategies will be employed throughout the training days. The goals of these assessment tools are to evaluate participant acquisition of the presented content and determine continuing needs, allowing the trainer to modify the training content or approach to best support the participants' learning. An informal summative assessment will occur at the conclusion of the training series to evaluate the training.

Formative assessments occur throughout the training. Frequent opportunities will be provided to reflect on the learning—both as debrief conversations and written reflections. Many session activities require a product to be produced, such as charted responses or development of a graphic organizer to represent their learning. Multiple instances to practice the literature circle protocols as adult learning are included in the session, giving the trainer the opportunity to observe, provide feedback to participants,

and adjust the session to address any identified gaps. These processes align with the formative assessment cycle of eliciting, noticing, interpreting, and acting suggested by Levin, Hammer, Elby, and Coffey (2012).

Possibly the most important evaluation piece for this professional development series will occur as part of Day Three. Participants sharing their experiences implementing literature circles in their classroom will provide a wealth of anecdotal data on the strength of the provided training to support implementation of literature circles. Teachers will share their reflections on implementation and their perceptions on how it has impacted student achievement in their classrooms. A final summative assessment, "Three Stars and a Wish," is the concluding activity on Day Three. Participants will reflect and provide written comments about three things they learned through this professional development experience and one thing they wish would have been covered or something they still wanted to know more about.

The key stakeholders in this project are the teachers and their students. By positively impacting the level of teacher understanding about the benefits and processes for literature circles and supporting them in implementation of the strategy, students may be more motivated to read, thereby impacting their academic achievement (Halladay, 2012; Harmon et al., 2012). This growth in academic achievement will be measured and monitored through a review of student summative assessment scores, including interim school-based assessments and the STAAR results.

Project Implications and Social Change

Importance of the Project to Local Stakeholders

This project has implications for social change in the local community. The data on student achievement in the school in the study showed a trend of consistently low student achievement in reading. The currently employed remediation strategy, the OFYP, did not result in statistically significant improvement in academic achievement as compared to students in schools not utilizing the OFYP. This project has the potential for impacting social change at the local level by providing the training necessary for teachers to alter their current instructional practices and implement literature circles. The characteristics of the literature circle protocol align to research-based best practices of small-group instruction (Hollo & Hirn, 2015; Watts-Taffe et al., 2012: Wilson et al., 2012) and differentiated instruction (Little et al., 2014; Smit & Humpert, 2012; Valiandes, 2015).

Importance in the Larger Context

This project has implications for social change in the larger context. Much like the local site, there is a student achievement gap in reading across the state and the nation (Kena et al., 2015; TEA, 2007-2016a). Studies also showed that middle schools are implementing beneficial small-group instructional strategies less frequently than either elementary schools or high schools, still using whole-group as the predominant instructional grouping (Lapp et al., 2012; Hollo & Hirn, 2015). While the professional development training series produced in this project was designed with the specific local site in mind, the training is readily applicable to any school beyond the local site.

Conclusion

In this section the project developed as an outcome of the study was described. A review of the literature on differentiated instruction, small-group instruction, and literature circles was presented. This second literature review informed the development of a three-day professional development training series on literature circles for middle school reading teachers. A detailed description of the training series was provided, including an implementation and evaluation plan. The impact of the project for social change was also described. The next section will include reflections on the project and my experience as a scholar in the development of the project.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the OFYP on student achievement in reading. A mixed-methods approach was used to ascertain whether or not seventh grade students receiving the OFYP remediation evidenced a statistically significant difference in reading student achievement growth compared to seventh grade students in like schools not receiving the OFYP remediation. Qualitative interviews and questionnaires were also conducted at the local site to better understand staff perceptions of the OFYP for motivating students and improving student achievement. Results of the quantitative measures indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups. In general, staff perceptions regarding the benefits of the OFYP were negative. They did, however, express support for working with students in small groups.

Based on the study findings, I conducted an additional literature review on differentiated instruction, small-group instructional practices, and literature circles. The literature review revealed whole-group instruction remains the predominant means of instruction in middle schools (Lapp et al., 2012; Hollo & Hirn, 2015) despite student needs for autonomy (Hodges & McTigue, 2014) and social interaction (Batchelor, 2012). A three-day professional development training series on incorporating literature circles in middle school reading classrooms was created as an outcome.

Project Strengths and Limitations

This project has several strengths. First, the importance of improving teacher practice through professional development is well-documented in the literature (Falter

Thomas, 2016; Giraldo, 2014). As such, the professional development genre was selected as the best method for communicating the need for and potential of literature circles for changing middle school reading instructional practices. Furthermore, dividing the training into two initial days and one follow-up day approximately three months later, along with ongoing collaboration supported by internal staff, aligns with the suggestion by Thomas (2015) regarding the importance of ongoing professional development rather than a single-session approach.

A second strength of the project is the structure of the training days themselves. Modeling for teachers was cited as an important step for acquisition of new strategies (Thomas, 2015; Woodford, 2016). This is accomplished through facilitation and videos during the sessions. The learning is carefully scaffolded over the three sessions with many places for teachers to reflect on and process their learning. Throughout the training participants are also provided opportunities to collaborate and practice the literature circle strategy as a learner. These activities are structured in a way that allows the training facilitator to engage in continuous formative assessment on the progress of participants in learning the content presented.

Lastly, providing time for the teachers to plan during the session and implement literature circles prior to the last professional development day has the potential for increasing transfer of the learning to real-world implementation with students. This also provides an opportunity for the training facilitator and fellow participants to become a collegial network of ongoing support for improving that implementation.

A limitation of the project may be the age of the texts selected for use in the professional development series. However, Daniels' (2002) work could be considered a seminal text on literature circles. Integrating and emphasizing more recent research on literature circles, especially in middle school classrooms, could alleviate the concern over the publication date of the selected texts. I could also focus on the data that current practices are yielding as a catalyst to consider change.

Another limitation on the success of the project may be my limited opportunity to personally deliver the training to the reading teachers on the campus included in this study. I am not a faculty member in the school district and have little influence on the professional development offerings they deploy. To alleviate this limitation I have crafted detailed training facilitator notes and created all handouts necessary for the training. At minimum, I will compile and print all the materials and provide them, along with a copy of the presentation slide decks on a compact disc, to the district at no charge so they might add this training series to their repository of potential offerings.

Recommendations for Alternate Approaches

Alternate approaches to the problem were considered. The professional development series, while scheduled to take place over time to allow for implementation and subsequent collaborative problem-solving, is training that occurs outside of the context of the classroom. One alternative could be the inclusion of dedicated time for the trainer to observe classrooms and provide feedback for teachers while they integrate literature circles. This follow-up support and coaching is important for increased transfer of learning into practice (Lia, 2016). This alternative approach was abandoned because it

would be cost prohibitive. However, with the inclusion of the existing campus instructional coaches in the training, virtual technical assistance could be provided to the coaches, who, in turn, could support the teachers.

Another alternative approach could be the development of an online training versus the face-to-face professional development. However, the social nature of literature circles (Avci et al., 2013; Batchelor, 2012; Whittingham, 2013) make the in-person training scenario most appropriate.

Lastly, literature circles is merely one means of integrating small-group and differentiated instruction in classrooms. The professional development could have focused on multiple ways small-group instruction and differentiation could look in classrooms. However, when researching means of incorporating small groups, specifically for adolescents, literature circles was found to be the predominant strategy for middle grade reading.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

As an educator with over 25 years of experience, I started this doctoral journey with a wealth of experiences. However, I soon discovered that teachers, myself included, rely on many resources that are not peer-reviewed or grounded in data. A major shift in my scholarship throughout this journey has been my increased focus on evidence and the utilization of quality sources of information.

With my specific study topic, it was difficult to find any prior research connected to the primary focus of the study. This impacted not only the literature review of the

study itself, it also complicated the process of determining the project topic. Through the doctoral process I have become more adept in thinking analytically and conceptually about topics. I had to think beyond the OFYP itself and consider the characteristics of the OFYP strategy. When the data showed the OFYP was not successful in influencing student achievement, I had to consider solutions other than the OFYP that incorporated insights from the qualitative data. This experience has taught me to better integrate seemingly disconnected concepts into positive solutions.

This personal growth is an outcome of my commitment to pursue research and development in a scholarly manner. This required a relentless persistence, continuous self-motivation, and a willingness to accept feedback.

Project Development

The successful production of the professional development project was an important component of the solution to the identified problem behind the study. The topic of the professional development series was integration of literature circles into middle school reading classrooms. To produce a quality project, I had to think beyond the literature circle content and also consider adult learning theory. In his book, Knowles (1973) provides several characteristics about adult learners, such as creating a collaborative environment for learners, focusing on relevant issues, ensuring learners have the opportunity to practice and self-assess their learning, and building in time for considering immediate utility of the training topics. These were considered as I developed the training. A great deal of time is spent upfront in the training to build relationships amongst the participants. Data relevant to the specific audience and

integration of state standards to justify the suggested strategy are presented in the sessions. Sections of the training content are chunked and strategically sequenced to allow participants to understand and practice one piece of the strategy at a time, building their confidence in teaching the same steps to their students. Lastly, support is provided through facilitated planning for integrating the strategy in the classroom and follow-up support is delivered during the final professional development session. The characteristics of adult learners and how to structure the training to meet those needs were important considerations during the project development.

Leadership and Change

As a leader, I have grown in my understanding of the importance of listening to the perspectives of all stakeholders. During the qualitative study data collections regarding the OFYP remediation strategy I heard many frustrations expressed. Some of those frustrations were beyond the strategy itself, speaking to other systems and procedures impacting the participants' daily work. It is important for leaders to encourage open dialogue and give all stakeholders the opportunity to voice their concerns without censure.

Another area of leadership I understand better as a result of this study is to differentiate between change and statistically significant change. As an educational leader, there are many opportunities to share growth data. As an outcome of this study experience I have become more conscientious about the quality of data on student achievement growth I personally share, and I view data presented by others with a more critical eye.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Through this study and project development process I have been able to refine my research skills and learn the importance of peer-reviewed sources as credible references in scholarly research. I have also improved in my ability to produce scholarly writing supported by those peer-reviewed resources. These skills will continue to serve me well as I pursue additional opportunities to investigate issues in schools and seek to find research-based solutions to problems in schools.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As a practitioner in the field of education outside of the school system, this project study has allowed me to gain insight into the day-to-day experiences of educators. I more fully recognize the importance of the stakeholder voice from all levels in addressing challenges in schools. I also discovered in this study how unique characteristics of students and scheduling on varied campus levels has a great deal of influence on the campus practices and needs to be considered when providing suggestions or support for improvement.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

My current role as a project manager in an educational support organization includes creation and delivery of professional development materials as part of my daily work. This is an area in which I am very comfortable, making construction of the professional development series for this project quite enjoyable. The training materials I produce as a part of my work must meet high quality standards and are regularly vetted prior to release. This prepared me to apply similar attention to detail and quality as I

prepared the training series on literature circles. I look forward to the potential utilization of the developed training materials and additional opportunities to create such products.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Under state accountability and federal accountability requirements inherent in ESSA (USDE, n.d.), schools continue to be held to a high standard for student growth and achievement. More importantly, schools have a moral obligation to students to create educational environments in which they can excel. This study on the OFYP revealed the remediation practice did not produce the desired student growth results in reading. I considered what type of project would best meet the needs identified in the data on student achievement as well as the teacher appreciation of small-group instructional opportunities. The resulting professional development product on literature circles was created to meet these needs, sharing research-based practices designed to improve student achievement in reading through a small-group instructional approach. It is my hope that the professional development series on literature circles is structured in a way that will build teachers' confidence and skills leading to successful implementation of literature circles for students. Ultimately, the goal is to positively impact student performance.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This project has the potential for social change. Utilization of the professional development series is an important step in the efforts to transform middle school reading classrooms from one of teacher-led instruction to student-led dialogue and rich learning, creating organizational change within schools. Secondarily, this study has the potential to impact change at the policy level. Communications with members of the TEA indicated

that even though the OFYP waiver is still an option for Texas schools, little research had been done on the efficacy of the OFYP for improving student achievement (Julie Wayman, personal communication, June 16, 2015). This study will add to the extremely limited body of research on the OFYP practice, which may impact future decisions regarding the OFYP waiver.

Beyond application in the local school represented in the study, this professional development series is applicable to any middle grade school in Texas. The same training outline could be used beyond Texas with minimal shifts in content, specifically the training portion, which includes an analysis of Texas state standards for reading.

A natural next step for future research would be a case study at the local site to document and analyze changes in reading classroom practices following attendance in the training series. Another potential area of study would be on effective ways teachers can provide supports for struggling reading students within the structure and schedule of literature circles.

Conclusion

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the relationship between participation in the OFYP remediation program and reading student achievement. The local middle school campus had seen a decline in the percentage of students meeting standards on the state reading assessment. The OFYP is one option schools in Texas have available for addressing the needs of students who are not meeting standards on state assessments. Determining if the local use of the OFYP remediation strategy was

producing positive results was an important consideration as the school sought ways to best address the declining reading achievement levels.

Reading student achievement data were collected from the local site and compared to student achievement data for demographically similar schools. Analysis of this data showed no statistically significant difference in the reading achievement growth of the treatment group as compared to the control group. As part of an explanatory design, the quantitative data collection was accompanied by the collection of qualitative data through surveys and interviews of staff members at the school implementing the OFYP remediation. Staff perceptions also indicated a lack of confidence in the ability of the OFYP to impact student motivation and achievement. However, staff members cited working with small groups of students was a beneficial characteristic of the OFYP and expressed a desire for opportunities to work with small groups of students on a more continuous basis.

The staff's commitment to explore alternative ways to meet students' needs through small group instruction was the driving force behind the project development. The outcome was a three-day professional development series to train middle school reading teachers in the processes and procedures for incorporating literature circles in their classrooms. A complete set of the resulting product is included in Appendix A. This training series has the potential to transform reading classroom practices in the local school and beyond.

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Appendix A: The Project

The following documents represent the complete set of training materials for a three-day professional development series for middle school reading teachers to learn about and implement literature circles. The materials include an overview sheet for a trainer, the slides and accompanying trainer notes, and copies of all handouts needed during the professional development sessions. Materials for each day of training are presented on the following pages in sequence by day.

Literature Circles in Middle School Reading Classrooms

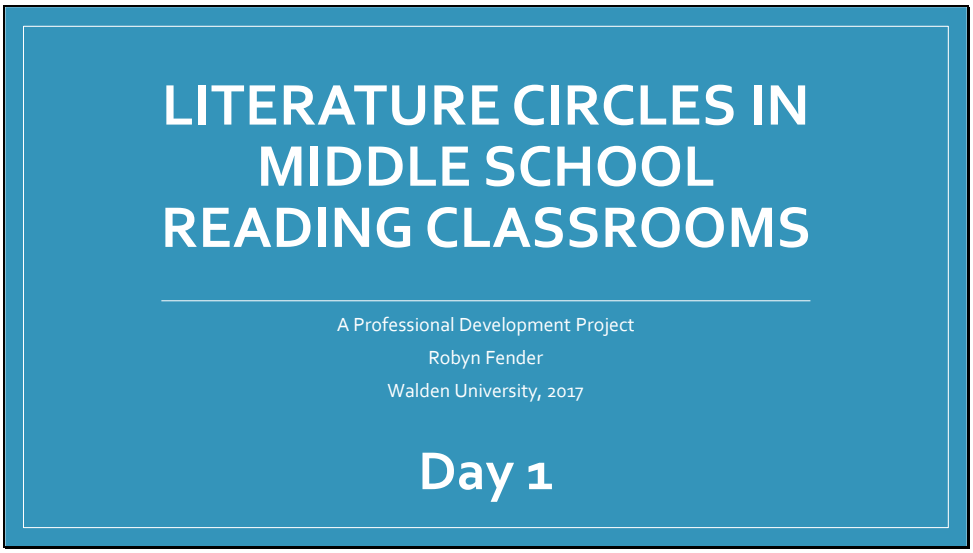
Training Outline- Day 1

Section	Slide	Timing	Overview	Materials
Introduction	1	2 min.	Welcome Background on the training	None
	2-3	20 min.	Ice Breaker Activity	Envelopes Self-adhesive nametags
	4-5	3 min.	Outcome and Objectives	None
Rationale for Small-Group Instruction	6-7	13 min.	Introduce discussion of the "Why" Data on reading student achievement	None
	8	8 min.	Common middle school classroom practice	Internet connection
	9	4 min.	Benefits of small-group instruction	None
	10	10 min.	Reflection	Participant notepad Chart paper
Brain Break	11	10 min.	Bless the Book brain break	4-5 books for a middle school audience
Defining Literature Circles	12-14	7 min.	Describing Middle School Students Transitioning to Objective 2	None
	15	45 min.	Defining Literature Circles (Jigsaw activity)	Copies of books *Literature Circles:*

				Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups by Harvey Daniels (1 per participant)
Break	16	15 min.	Provide time for participants to take care of personal needs.	
Justifying Literature Circles	17	5 min.	Listing student and teacher activities in Literature Circle experiences	Chart paper
	18-24	20 min.	Identifying connections between the TEKS and Literature Circles	copies of middle school English Language Arts/Reading TEKS (including Figure 19); highlighters
Brain Break	25	10 min.	Bless the Book brain break	4-5 books for a middle school audience
Lunch	26	Break for Lunch		
Getting Started	27	15 min.	Initial considerations	none
	28-34	60 min.	Role Sheets • Rationale overview • Experiencing a literature circle with role sheets • Debrief and Refine • Observing literature circles • Importance of temporary nature of role sheets	participant copies of *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels; copies of a short fiction text selection; internet connection
	35-38	10 min.	Other methods of student response to text • Response logs • Sticky note Samples of open-ended response strategies	none

Break	39	15 min.	Provide time for participants to take care of personal needs.	
Key Steps	40	5 min.	Keys Steps	none
	41	10 min.	The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly video	Internet connection
	42-44	15 min.	Scheduling	none
Wrap Up and Closing	45-46	40 min.	Graphic Representations of Learning • Development • Sharing	Chart paper
	47	8 min.	Questions and Curiosities	Chart paper Sticky notes
	48	2 min.	Homework: Bless the Book	Participant-provided books at next session

Slide 1



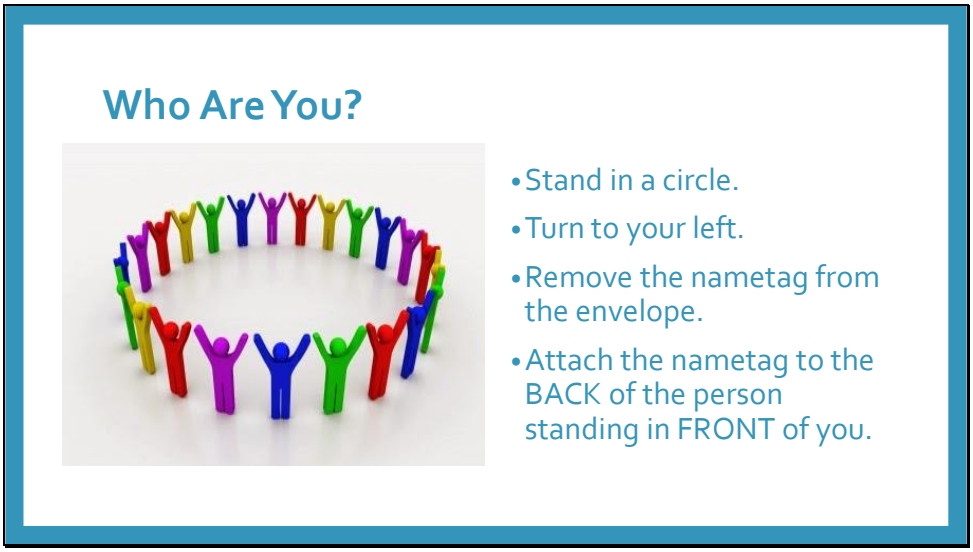
(Trainer notes are included on each of the slides for this presentation. Notes in parentheses are intended for trainer reference only. Sentences in **bold** are examples of what the trainer should say to the audience for each portion of the training. Each slide also contains information on approximate time per slide and materials.)

Time: 2 minutes
Materials: none

Welcome to this session on Small-Group Instruction in Middle School Reading Classroom. This training series was developed as a part of a doctoral program and grounded in research conducted on the impact of a remediation strategy on middle school reading student achievement.

(Introduce self as the presenter, providing some background on your current and previous roles in education.)

Slide 2



(Advance Preparation: Obtain enough self-adhesive nametags-- one per participant, or use address labels. On each nametag/label, write the name of a well-known character from literary works, preferably those of interest to middle school-age students. Place one nametag/label per envelope.)

Time: 5 minutes
Materials: envelopes with nametags (see above)

Let's engage in an activity to get to know each other a little better. Here are the instructions:

- **(Mouse click) First, let's all stand up and get in a circle.**
- **(Mouse click) Now, everyone turn to your left. You should be looking at the back of someone in front of you.**
- **I'm going to come around and hand each of you an envelope. Inside the envelope is a nametag with a secret identity written on it! Do not show or say the name to anyone. (Mouse click) You will remove the nametag from the envelope…**
- **(Mouse click) and attach the nametag to the BACK of the person standing in FRONT of you.**

Slide 3

Time: 15 minutes
Materials: none

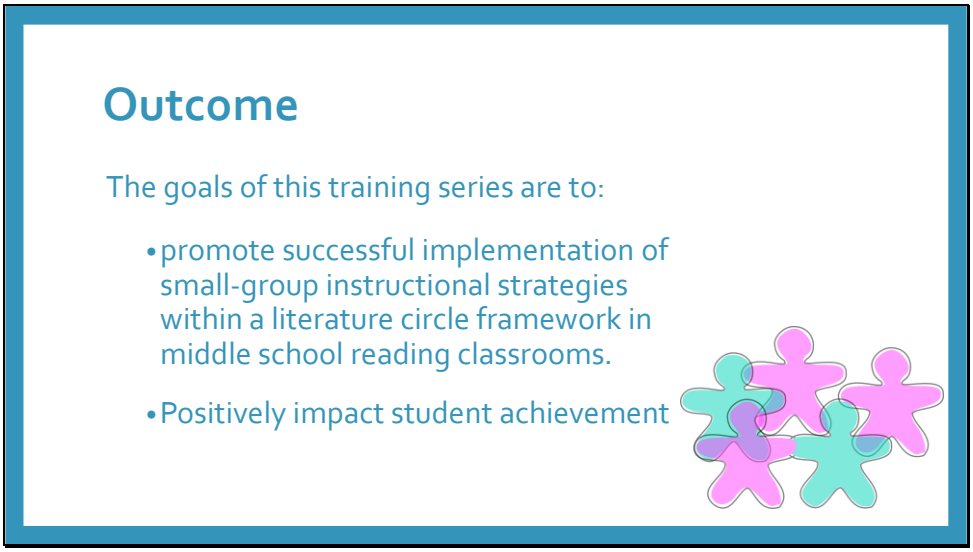
Now the fun begins! Here are the rules for figuring out who you are!

- **Move around the room and ask questions about your secret identity. These can only be, "Yes," or, "No," questions. Participants must answer the question honestly.**
- **You may only ask one question of each person at a time. Each time you must move to a new person and ask another question in your quest to identify yourself.**
- **Once you have gathered enough clues, you may ask, "Am I …?" If you are correct, your name tag should be moved to the front.**
- **Even if you have figured out your own identity, you will remain in the activity to answer others' questions until everyone has solved their identity.**

Does anyone have any questions on the instructions? (Answer any questions.) **If everyone is ready, go!**

(Allow time for participants to move about the room and solve the mystery of their identity. Once complete, have participants rejoin the circle, this time facing the center. Ask that they reveal their "real" identity, sharing their name and what grade level they teach. Once everyone has introduced themselves, thank them for participating and ask participants to return to their seats.)

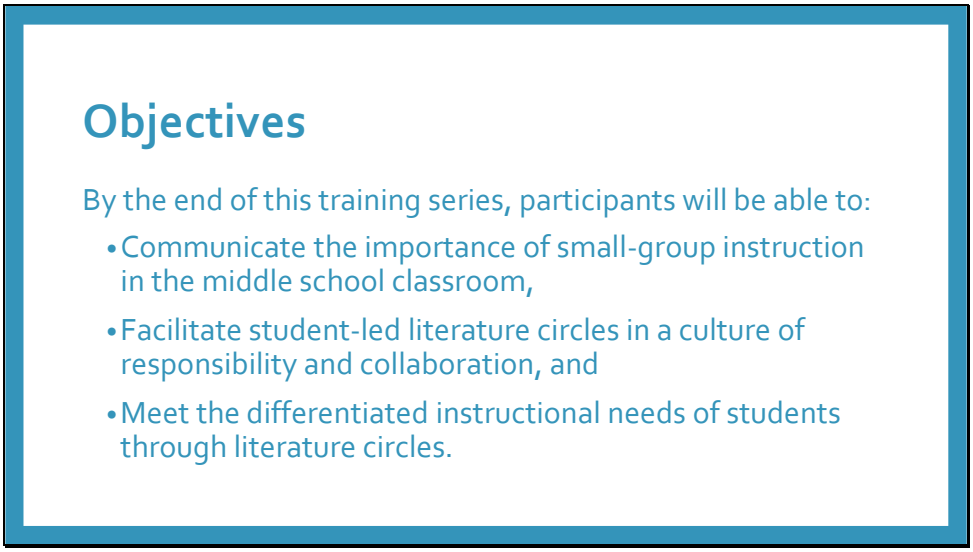
Slide 4



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

Our overall goal with this training series is to (mouse click) **promote successful implementation of small-group instructional strategies in middle school reading classroom. However, as with any training, the ultimate goal** (mouse click) **is to continuously improve our practice so we might positively impact student achievement.**

Slide 5

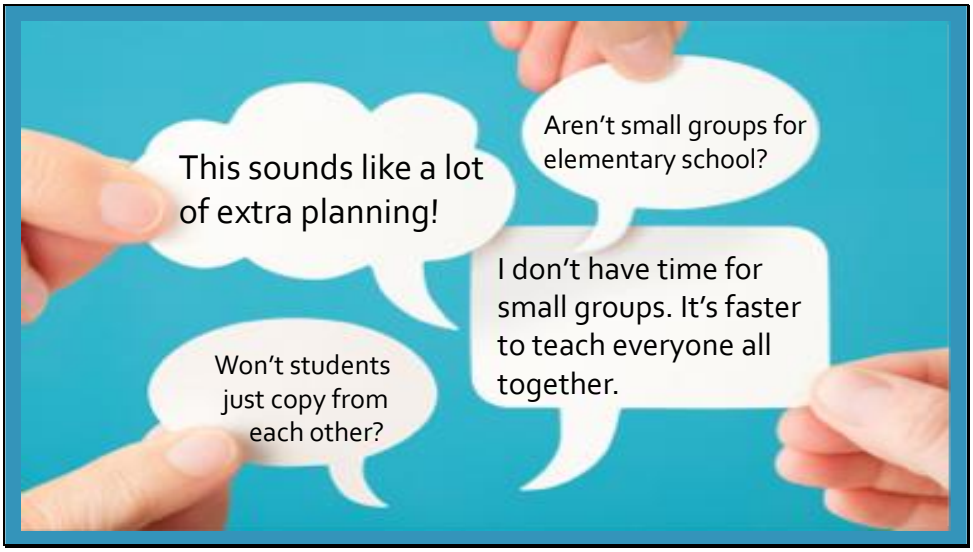


Time: 2 minutes
Materials: none

More specifically, by the end of this training series you will be prepared to:

- (Mouse click) **communicate the importance of small-group instruction in the middle school classroom**
- (Mouse click) **facilitate student-led literature circles in a culture of responsibility and collaboration, and**
- (Mouse click) **meet the differentiated needs of students through literature circles.**

Slide 6



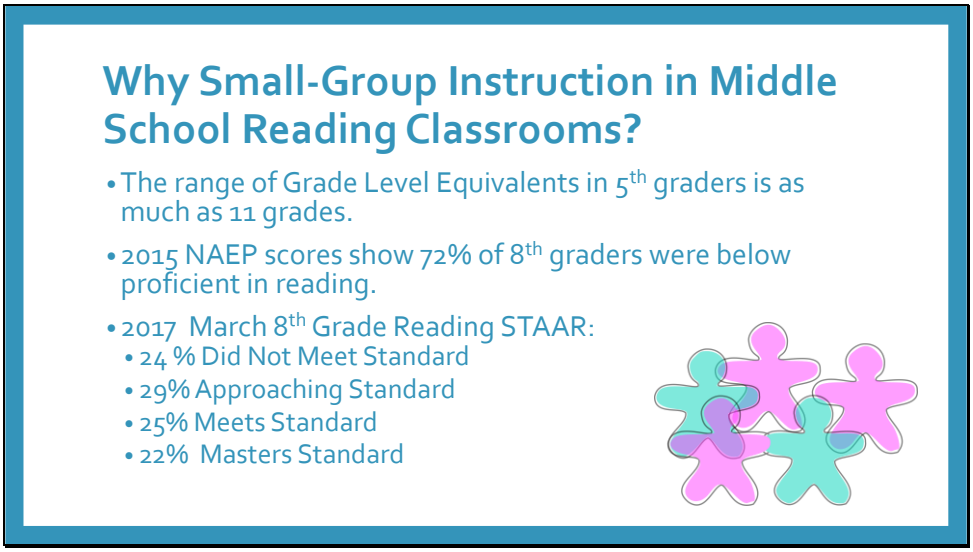
Time: 3 minutes
Materials: none

Each one of us carries a variety of experiences and philosophies regarding pedagogical practices. You might be thinking:

- (Mouse click) **I don't have time for small groups. It's faster to teach everyone all together.**
- (Mouse click) **Aren't small groups for elementary school?**
- (Mouse click) **Won't students just copy from each other?**
- (Mouse click) **This sounds like a lot of extra planning!**

All of these thoughts are natural, especially when exploring changes in your instructional practices. Once you have the foundational pieces we will share in place, you will actually find you are doing LESS work as students take on increased roles and responsibilities in the classroom.

Slide 7



Time: 10 minutes
Materials: none

What does the data tell us about the need for small-group instruction in middle school reading classrooms?

- **A study by Firmender, Reis, and Sweeney used data from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) to identify reading grade level equivalents in elementary students.** (Mouse click) **They found the range of grade level equivalents in 5th graders is as much as 11 grades. Classrooms may have students reading as high as 12th grade, and as low as 1st grade level– all in the same classroom.**
- (Alter this next statement to match the middle grades represented in the school(s) your audience represents.) **You may be wondering, "But I'm a middle school teacher. We don't have 5th graders." These are the students that are coming into your school as 6th graders.**
- **In 2015 the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP,** (mouse click) **indicated 72% of 8th graders were below proficient in reading.**
- **Let's bring it closer to home. (Mouse click) On the 2017 8th grade STAAR reading assessment given in March,**
    - **(Mouse click) 24% of students did not meet grade level standards**
    - **(Mouse click) 29% of students were merely approaching standard**
    - **(Mouse click) 25% of students met standard**
    - **(Mouse click) and 22% of students were at grade level mastery.**

This is just data- not an indictment. The intention is not to place blame on anyone here. The data does paint a picture, though, of the needs of middle school students in the area of reading.

Have a conversation about this information at your table. What does this data mean for us as educators? (Allow tables to engage in discussion for 2-3 minutes.)

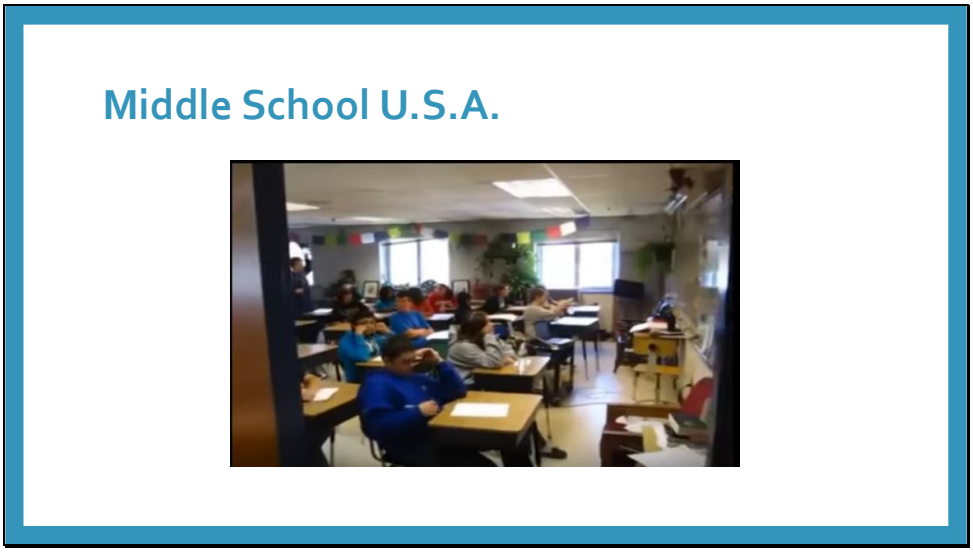
Who will volunteer to share a highlight or two from your table conversation?
(Encourage participants to share. If not mentioned, guide participants to think about the wide range of instructional needs of students, which cannot be addressed effectively through whole-group only instruction.)

(Sources of the data on this slide:
GLE: Firmender, Reis, and Sweeney (see references) a study using ITBS from schools across the country

NAEP: https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/

STAAR:
http://tea.texas.gov/Student_Testing_and_Accountability/Testing/State_of_Texas_Assessments_of_Academic_Readiness_(STAAR)/STAAR_Statewide_Summary_Reports_2016-2017/)

Slide 8



Time: 8 minutes
Materials: internet connection

The data represent the facts of the wide range of reading levels in our middle school reading classrooms. However, let's take a look at what is happening in the majority of middle school classrooms.

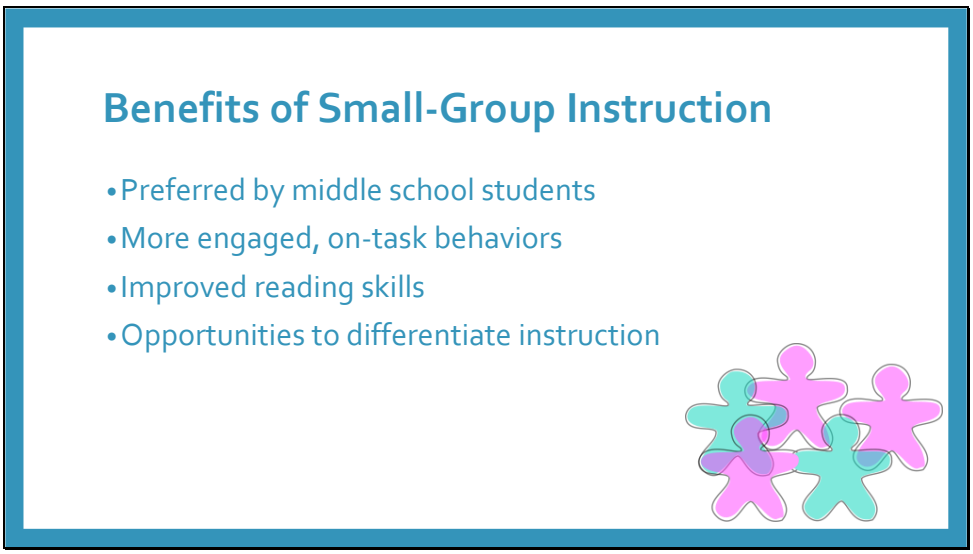
Before we watch, turn to your shoulder partner and talk about what you might expect to see in this video. (Allow about 1 minute for participants to make predictions.)

In the video we will hear from a middle school teacher. He will take us through his journey as he realized what he was doing wasn't working. Watch and see how his experience aligns to your predictions.

(Watch 0:00 to 1:54 of hyperlinked video.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8zbUruOjyQ&t=3s)

Despite the wide range of student needs, whole group instruction is the predominant mode in middle school classrooms. Practices such as whole-group discussion don't adequately support the differentiated instructional needs of students in middle school reading classrooms.

Slide 9



Time: 3 minutes
Materials: none

We could infer from the quantitative data that small-group instruction would allow us to better meet the needs of the wide range of student reading ability in our classrooms.

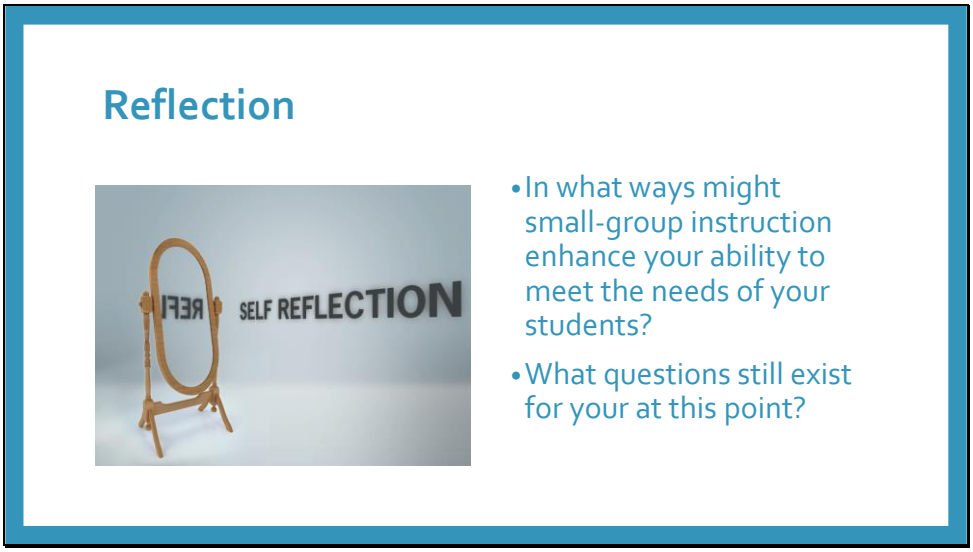
Qualitative studies also indicate multiple benefits of small-group instruction, especially with adolescent readers.

- (Mouse click) **Studies showed that small-group instruction was preferred by middle school students. As you are most likely aware, middle school students are highly social creatures. Opportunities to interact with their peers is important to them, so let's leverage that desire for the purpose of enhancing learning.**
- (Mouse click) **Contrary to what one might think, small-group instruction was show to encourage more engaged, on-task behaviors. Think back to the video we watched earlier. Ping-pong questioning/discussion strategies only allow one student to participate at a time, and those in the back of the classroom we observed became disengaged.**
- (Mouse click) **Of course, in the end it's all about moving our students forward. Small-group instruction proved beneficial for improving reading skills.**

- (Mouse click) **Improving those reading skills can be facilitated through the opportunities to differentiate instruction to meet the wide variety of needs in the middle school classroom we discovered in the data.**

(Sources: Flynn, Zheng, and Swanson (2012); Groff (2014); Hollo and Hirn (2015))

Slide 10



Time: 10 minutes
Materials: participant notepad, chart paper

We've spent time this morning discussing the rationale and benefits associated with small-group instruction in the middle school reading classroom. Take a moment and personally reflect on how this connects to you personally. (Read question from the slide out loud.) **Record your answers on your notepad. We'll take 2-3 minutes to allow you to respond.** (Allow time for participants to reflect in writing.)

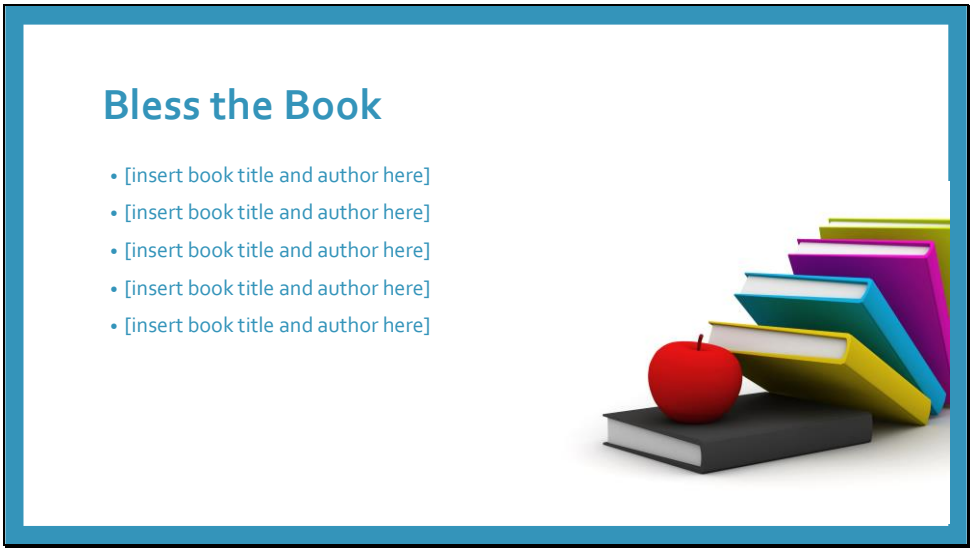
Now that you've had an opportunity to independently process what we've talked about thus far, let's have a partner conversation. Stand up, push in your chairs, and find a person from the other side of the room as your partner. (Facilitate pairing of participants, as needed.) **Have a conversation about how small group instruction can be a powerful tool in your classroom.**
(While partners are talking, circulate the room and listen in to as many conversations as possible.)

With your partner, think about this: (Mouse click and read the second question from the slide. Allow 2-3 minutes for conversation.)

Thank your partner and return to your seats. I want to hear more about the questions you generated. (As participants share, record questions on chart paper.)

As we talked about earlier today, making a change in practice can be uncomfortable. It's natural to have questions. Through the sessions we will have together, hopefully many of these questions will be answered through the content and the continued conversations we have together.

Slide 11



Time: 15 minutes
Materials: 4-5 books for middle school audience; sticky notes

(The purpose of this section is to provide a "brain break" between sections of content and model sharing an overview of books, which is an integral part of initiating literature circles with students. It also exposes reading teachers to titles they may not be familiar with, expanding their knowledge on potential texts to use with students.)

(ADVANCE PREPARATION: Insert book titles and authors on the slide.)

Let's take a little "brain break" and let me share some of my favorite books with you.

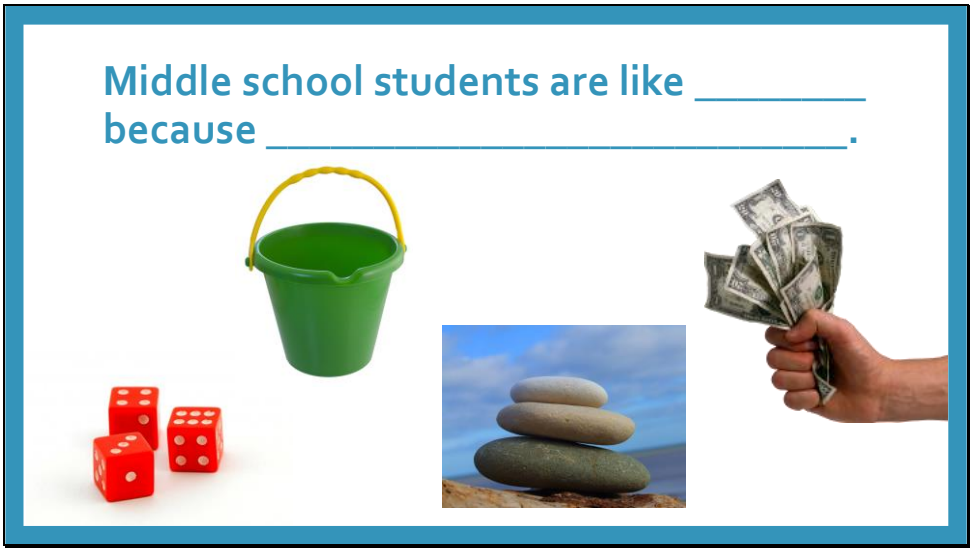
(Share each title and a brief overview of each of the books.)

Sharing books with your students is a way to introduce new titles that they may not have considered prior to your introduction to them. Sometimes all students need is for you to "bless the book." In other words, you advocating the book generates interest and a desire to read these books.

Take a moment and think about some of the titles, authors, or subjects of books you really love that you think your students would enjoy reading. Write your ideas on a sticky note. (Provide 1-2 minutes for participants to record their ideas on a sticky note.)

Save that sticky note in a safe place. Later we'll talk more about how "Bless the Book" is an important step in implementing student-led literary discussions.

Slide 12



Time: 5 minutes
Materials: none

Let's consider the students we see every day in middle school classrooms. Using the pictures here to create analogies, complete the sentence displayed, "Middle school students are like (blank) because (blank)." An example might be middle school students are like a bucket because they want to have their needs filled.

Take a moment and create your own analogy, then share with your table group. (Allow 2-3 minutes for generating and sharing analogies.)

Who would like to share out an analogy they heard that was particularly interesting? (Have a few volunteers share out with the whole group.)

Indeed, middle school students are an interesting group. They come with their own special characteristics.

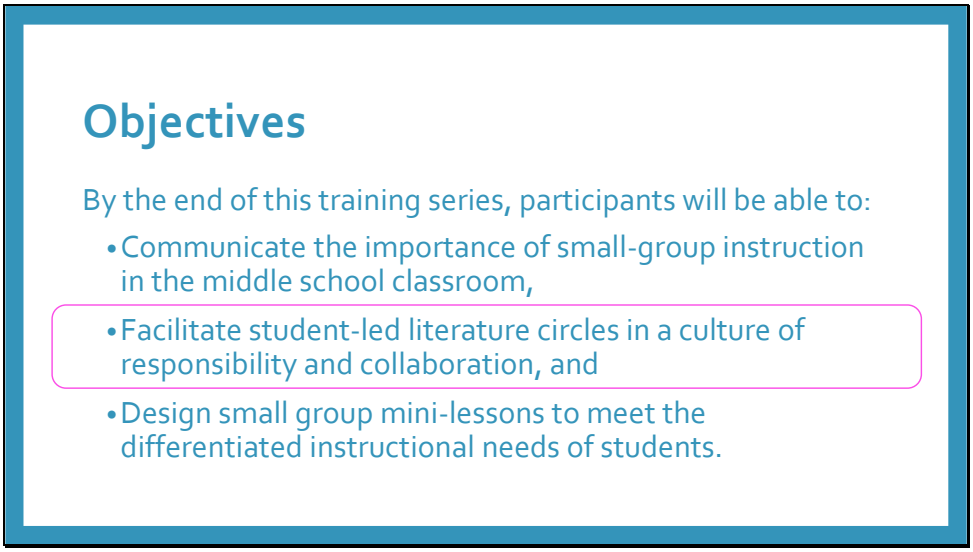
Slide 13

Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

In an article by Tracey Hodges and Erin McTigue, professors at Texas A&M University, two seemingly opposing adolescent needs were described. Middle school-age students have a need for autonomy, yet also a need for connectedness.

Source:
Hodges, T. S., & McTigue, E. M. (2014). Renovating literacy centers for middle grades: Differentiating, reteaching, and motivating. *Clearing House, 87(4*), 155-160. doi:10.1080/00098655.2014.886550

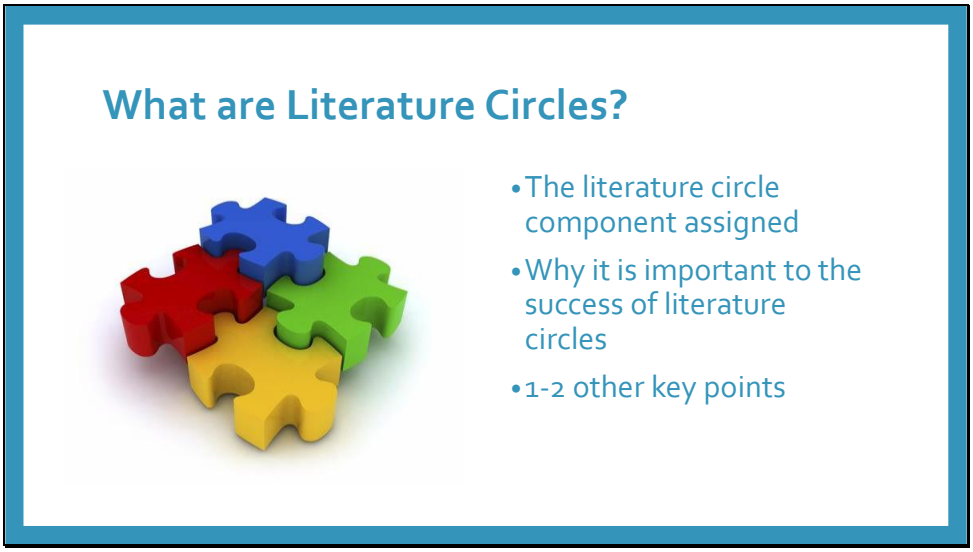
Slide 14



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

Alignment with this dual nature of middle schools students– the need for autonomy and connectedness-- is accomplished through the use of literature circles in reading classrooms. Let's explore more about this instructional strategy.

Slide 15



Time: 45 minutes
Materials: participant copies of *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels

Literature circles were first introduced by Harvey Daniels in the mid-1990s. Initially, literature circles were primarily embraced as an elementary school innovation. However, as mentioned earlier, data indicate the wide range of reading abilities of middle school students, and studies show the efficacy of small-group instruction for improving middle school student achievement.
Literature circles, also known as book clubs and literary circles, is a strategy worth revisiting and applying in the middle school setting.

As part of your training, you are being provided a copy of Daniel's second edition of the book *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*. We will use this book periodically in the training. It will also serve as a valuable resource for you as you implement and refine literature circles in your own classrooms.

To build our understanding of literature circles, we are going to collaboratively explore Daniels' eleven-point definition. Each of you will be assigned one of the "eleven key ingredients," as Daniels describes them, of literature circles. You will read the text excerpt for your assigned point, and be prepared to share the following:

- (Mouse click) **Name the literature circle component that you were assigned**

- (Mouse click) **Describe why it's important to the successful implementation of literature circles**
- (Mouse click) **1-2 other key points you find in your text excerpt you deem important for us to know**

(Have participants turn to page 18 in the text and point out that each key feature is numbered in the text from pages 18-26. Number off participants from 1-11. Participants will read the numbered section that correlates to their assigned number. You may choose to combine some shorter sections and assign both sections to the same participant, or adjust in other ways based on the number of participants. Provide 5-8 minutes for participants to read their assigned sections and prepare their notes to share.)

We'll share out what we found in the order of the 11 key features of literature circles, as described by Daniels. (Facilitate sharing out and conversation for each of the key features.)

Slide 16

Time: 15 min.
Materials: none

Let's take a break. We'll start back up in 15 minutes.

Slide 17

Time: 5 minutes
Materials: chart paper

From the 11-point definition of literature circles we've just reviewed, let's make a list of the things <u>students</u> are doing as a part of their participation in literature circles.
(Capture participant responses on chart paper, translating responses into a list of simple verbs: reading, note-taking, sharing, connecting, questioning, responding, discussing, etc.)

Now let's make a list of the things a <u>teacher</u> is doing when facilitating literature circles in the classroom.
(Capture participant responses again: choosing books, circulating, assessing. This list should be shorter than the student list.)

It appears from the length of these lists that literature circles would shift a lot of responsibility from teachers to students!
We've probably all heard the saying that goes something like, "The person who is doing the most talking is the one that does the most learning." However, research shows that the most common instructional mode in middle schools is teacher-led whole-group instruction. What might be the reasons for the continued use of whole-group instruction at the middle school level, more than any other grade level? (Listen for responses such as discipline concerns, pressure to cover all curriculum content, state assessments, etc.)

References on whole-group tendencies in middle schools:

Lapp, D., Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2012). Identifying why groups work well, then giving grouping another try. *Voices from The Middle, 20*(2), 7-9.
Hollo, A., & Hirn, R. G. (2015). Teacher and student behaviors in the contexts of grade-level and instructional grouping. *Preventing School Failure, 59*(1), 30-39. doi:10.1080/1045988X.2014.919140

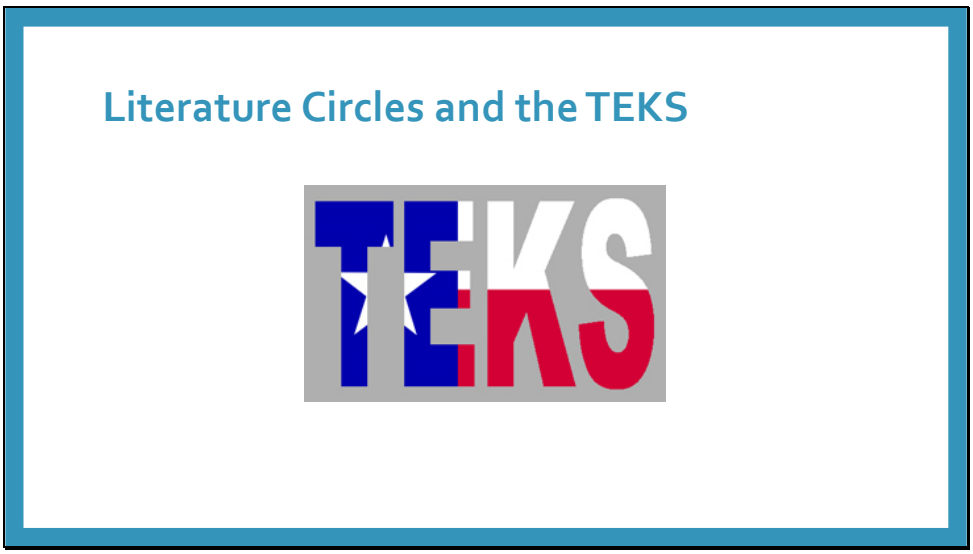
Slide 18

Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

Ultimately, the driving force behind what we do in our classrooms is most likely connected to one of these two things: (mouse click) **the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) or** (mouse click) **the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR).**

Of course, the STAAR assesses components of the TEKS, so let's focus our time there.

Slide 19



Time: 14 minutes
Materials: copies of middle school English Language Arts/Reading TEKS (including Figure 19) obtained from http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/index.html, highlighters

How does incorporating literature circles in our reading classrooms support student acquisition of the TEKS?

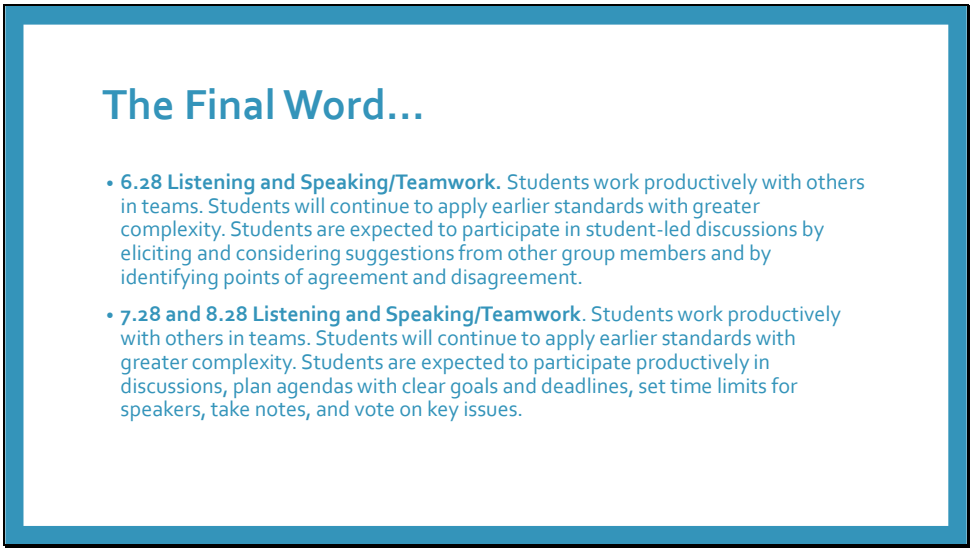
(Distribute copies of TEKS for grades 6-8. NOTE: You can alter the grade span based on the grade levels represented in the local middle school, such as 5-8, 5-6, 7-8, etc.)

Turn to the grade level TEKS you currently teach. Read through the TEKS and highlight any connections between what students would be experiencing as they participate in literature circles. (Provide about 5-8 minutes for participants to read through their grade level TEKS and highlight.)

(If you are presenting to a large audience with several teachers from each grade level, you can do the following: **Now, let's group by the grade levels you teach and discuss your findings. (**Identify areas of the room for each grade level to facilitate regrouping for this discussion. Allow 3-4 minutes for discussion.)

What did you find as you searched for connections between the TEKS and literature circles? (Acknowledge and validate responses.)

Slide 20



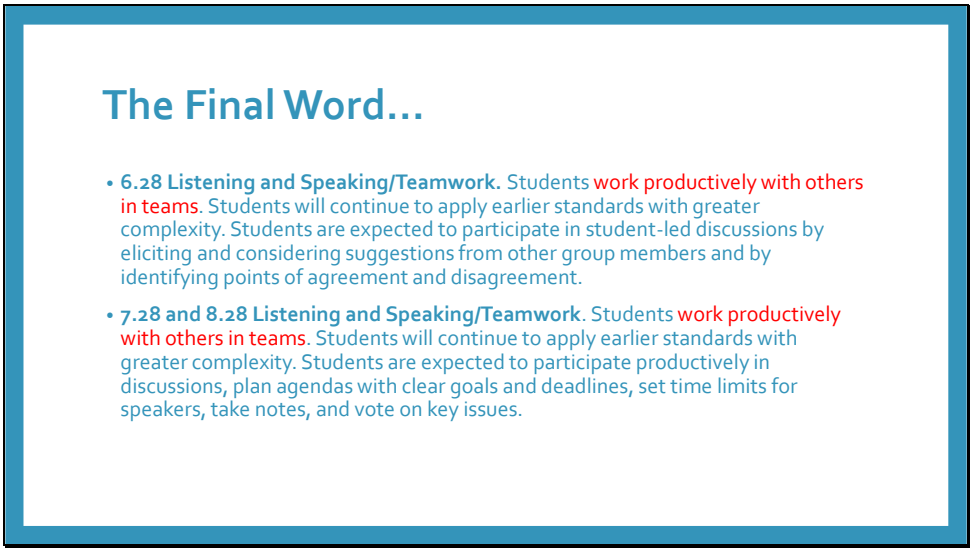
Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

(NOTE: If the displayed TEKS are brought up in the discussion on the previous slide, you can adjust your comments and timing of the slides related to the last TEKS for each grade level.)

I really want to draw your attention to the final ELAR TEKS for each grade level: 6.28, 7.28, and 8.28. These TEKS are located in the often neglected TEKS section, at least in my experience, of Listening and Speaking. These TEKS are about students working in teams. Notice some of the key words and phrases.

(Comment as you click through the following slides on which the words/phrases are highlighted.)

Slide 21



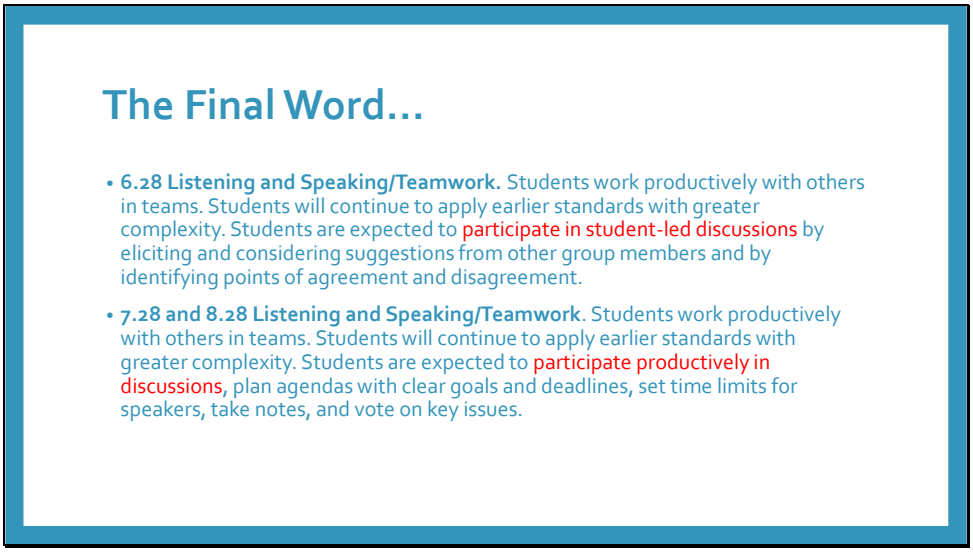
Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

We see that in all grade levels students are expected to, "work productively with others in teams."

(If behavior issues were not included in the discussion of reasons why whole-group instruction is prevalent in middle school classrooms, adjust the comments below.)

One of the challenges of moving away from whole-group instruction we discussed earlier was student behavior and ensuring on-task engagement in learning. As we see here in the TEKS, students learning to work productively with others is an expectation. Literature circles is a framework in which students practice and build towards successful acquisition of students being able to, "work productively with others in teams."

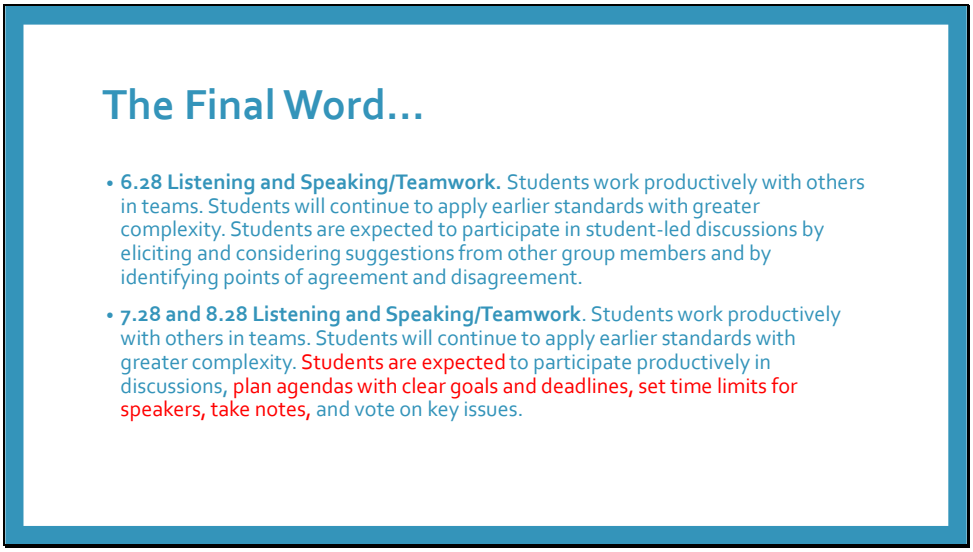
Slide 22



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

We also see that all grade levels students are expected to participate in discussions. The Grade 6 TEKS specifically mention these discussions should be student-led.

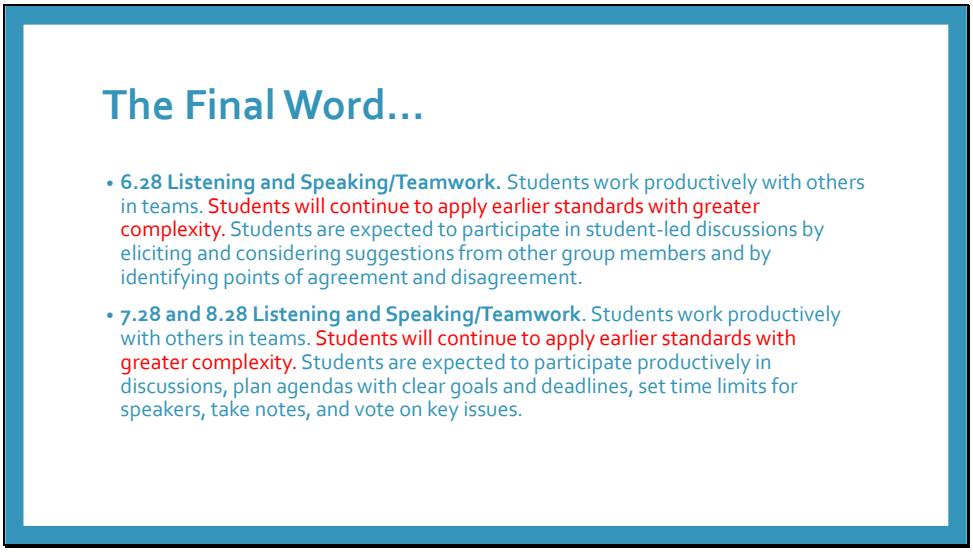
Slide 23



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

While the 7th and 8th grade TEKS don't specifically mention, "student-led," we do see that it's the students who are expected to plan their own agendas and goals, set time limits, and take notes. It might be clearly inferred these opportunities for working in teams are student-led experiences.

Slide 24



Time: 5 minutes
Materials: none

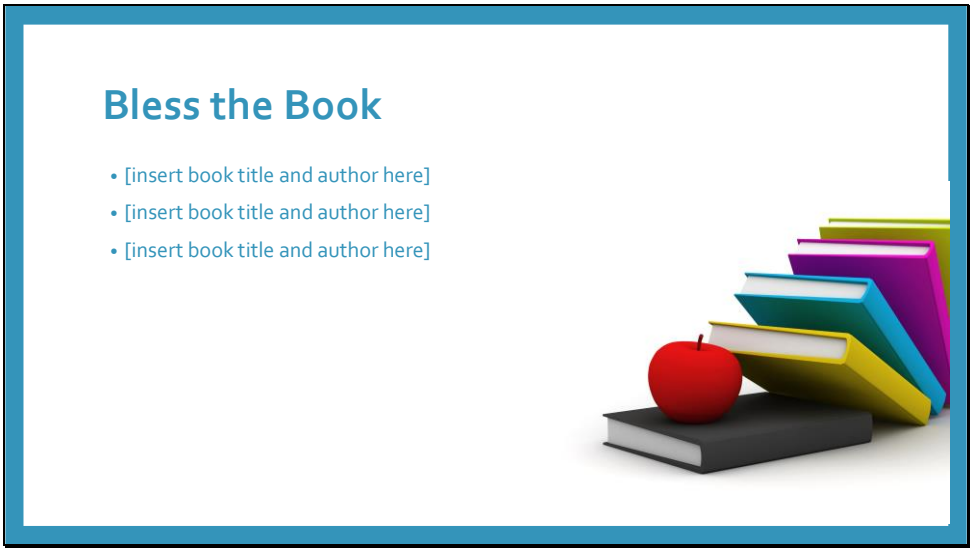
Lastly, let's go back to one point in this TEKS statement I skipped over. One of the concerns many teachers have about using literature circles is the ability to cover the multitude of other standards for which they are responsible.

Here we read, "Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater complexity."

Turn to your shoulder partner and talk about what that means to you….and for you. (Allow 2-3 minutes for discussion. Then ask for volunteers to share with the whole group.)

Literature circles is a vehicle by which students practice and internalize all the knowledge and skills in authentic ways with personally-selected texts, increasing commitment and motivation to engage in reading.

Slide 25



Time: 10 minutes
Materials: 2-3 books for middle school audience; sticky notes

(ADVANCE PREPARATION: Insert book titles and authors on the slide.)

Let's take a look at a few more of my favorite books before we go to lunch.

(Share each title and a brief overview of each of the books.)

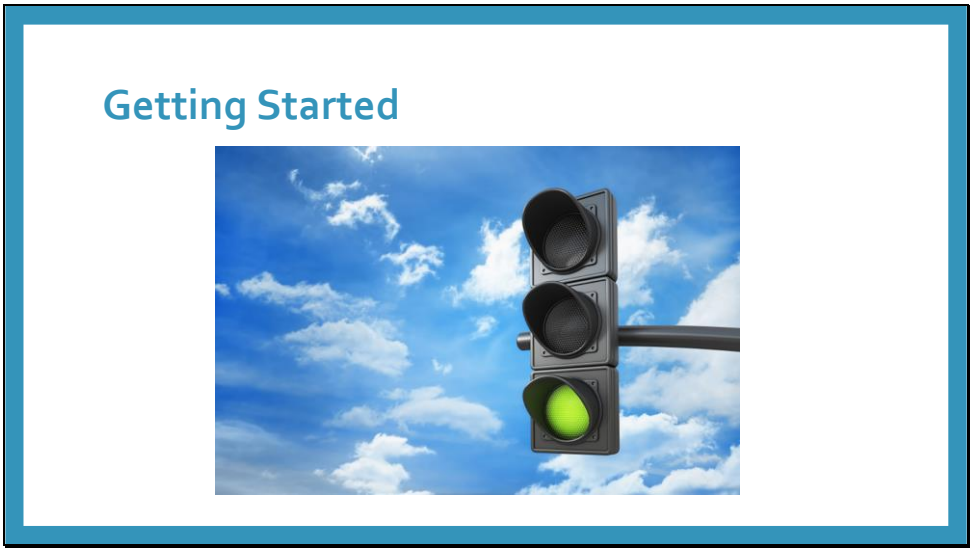
Go back to your sticky note of favorite titles, authors, or subjects of books. Add to your list on the same sticky note, or start another sticky note. (Provide 1-2 minutes for participants to record their ideas on a sticky note.)

You are already starting a potential list of books you might introduce to students as text choices!

Slide 26

Enjoy your lunch and be back at (insert time) **to explore how to begin implementing literature circles.**

Slide 27



Time: 15 minutes
Materials: none

Welcome back. This afternoon we are going to discuss how to get started with literature circles in your classrooms.

Once implemented, the work load is carried by students. However, successful implementation of literature circles requires careful teacher planning and preparation. Let's take a look at some of the initial decisions that need to be made.

(Mouse click) **First, you will need to determine the best grouping scenario to teach the students what literature circles are and what they do in literature circles. The first time students experience a literature circle might be in a whole-group setting so you can model and practice together, or you may decide to explain the processes together and divide students into small groups for practice.**

(Mouse click) **Next, you'll need to decide what text or texts to use for the first attempt at literature circles. This includes whether or not the class is going to use the same text, whether it be a full novel or a short story, or if you will immediately use different texts with students. Note that the grouping listed above the text choices doesn't necessarily determine whether or not you use common or different texts. Independent student groups could still use a common text for the first round of literature circles.**

Talk at your table for a few minutes about the benefits and/or disadvantages of the various options for grouping and type of texts for the first time students experience literature circles. (Provide 5-6 minutes for participants to discuss. Then ask for volunteers to share their ideas.)

Each of these options has benefits and/or disadvantages. There is no one "right" answer. These decisions should be based on a variety of factors, including current practices in your classroom, the readiness of your students, the length of time needed to build student capacity to independently run students groups, and your own comfort level.

(Mouse click) **Another consideration is how you will have students independently respond to the text in preparation for the group discussion. Will you use role sheets, response logs, or simply sticky notes attached to books, or free responses written on consumable texts?**

Let's explore more about the options for student responses to text.

Slide 28

Time: 2 minutes
Materials: none

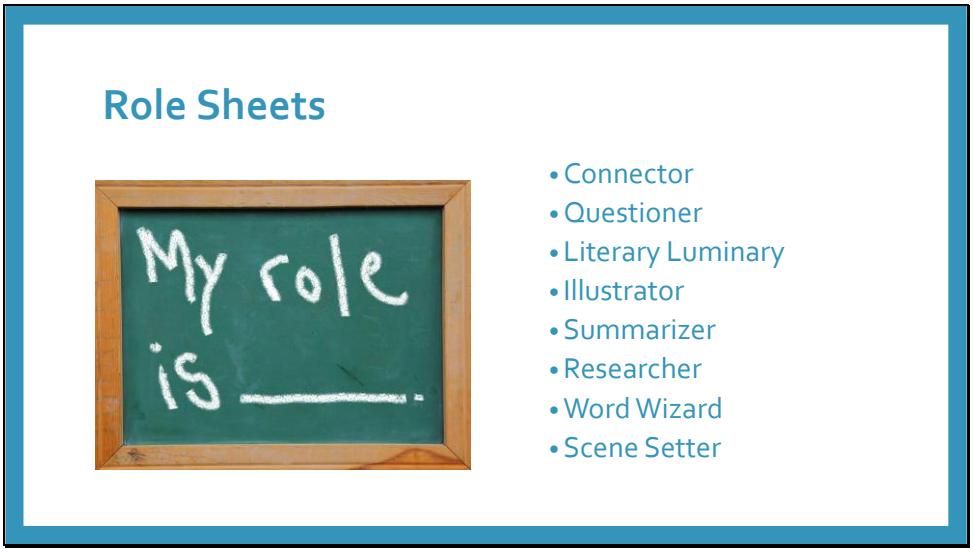
We are going to start with role sheets.

Think about cooperative learning roles such as Group Leader, Materials Manager, Timekeeper, Encourager, etc. Much like these assigned roles for cooperative learning groups, role sheets assign a specific way each group member will prepare for their literature circle meeting.

(Mouse click) **The role sheets are much like training wheels as students become familiar with literature circle procedures. They provide support for students transitioning to more independent roles with greater responsibility for their own learning.**

(Mouse click) **The role sheets also provide guidance for students, leading them to focus their discussion on topics relevant to the state standards, such as summarizing, characterization, connections across texts, and so on, which we are all responsible for teaching.**

Slide 29



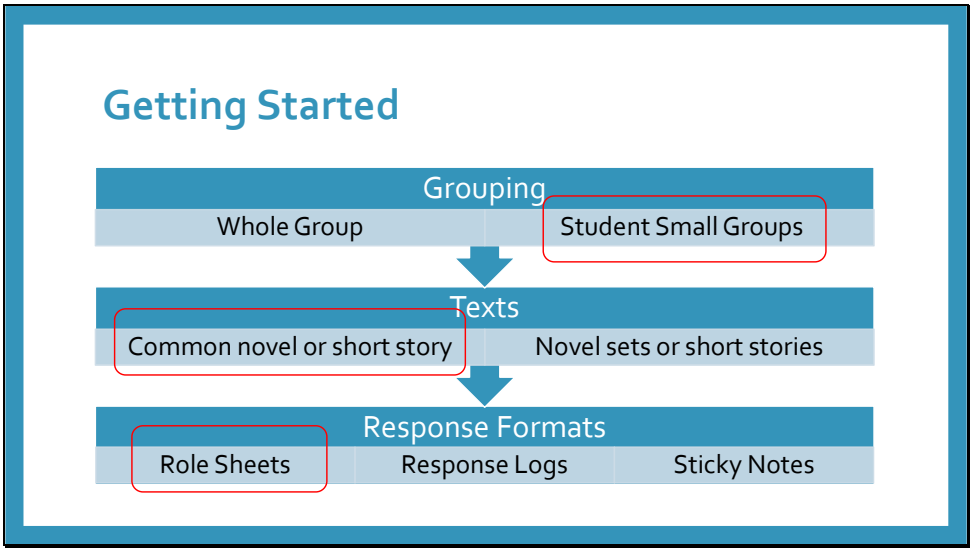
Time: 8 minutes
Materials: participant copies of *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels; copies of a short fiction text selection

Let's engage in an impromptu literature circle with a fiction text. Reorganize at your tables to create groups of 5-6 people. You will need to take your *Literature Circles* books and something to write with and on. (Allow 1-2 minutes for participants to adjust their seating.)

Each of you will be assigned one of the roles listed here: connector, questioner, literary luminary, illustrator, summarizer, research, word wizard, or scene setter. No one in the same group should have the same role. Talk with your group members and decide who will take on each role. (Allow 1-2 minutes for groups to assign roles.)

Now turn to pages 107-114 in your *Literature Circles* books. Within those pages, find the page correlated to your selected role. Silently read the description of the task you will undertake in fulfilling that role. (Allow 1-2 minutes for participants to silently read their role sheet.)

Slide 30



Time: 30 minutes
Materials: participant copies of *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels; copies of a short fiction text selection

Think back to our earlier discussion about getting started. For this activity, we are going to use (mouse click) student small groups, (mouse click) a common text, and (mouse click) role sheets.

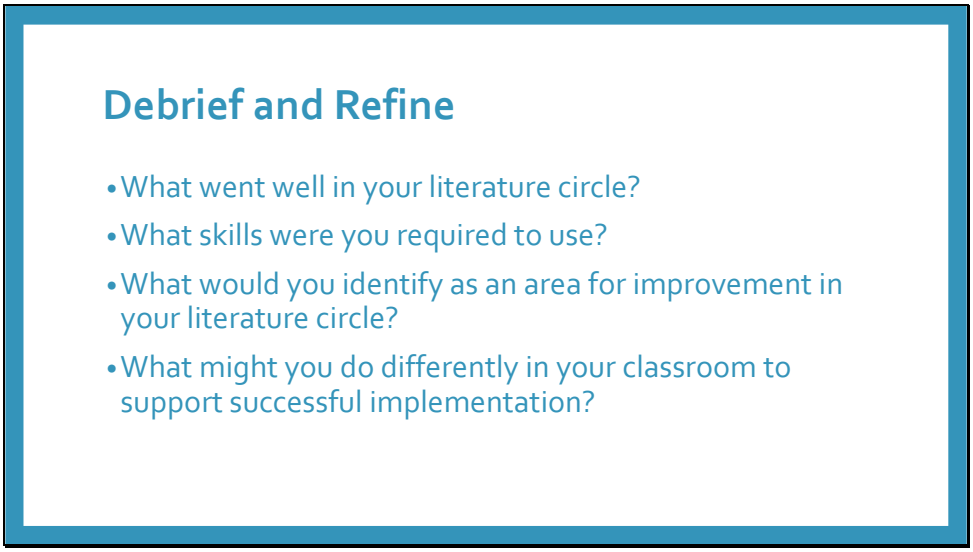
Now that you have your assigned roles, let's take a look at our common text. Silently read the text selection and reflect on the reading with your assigned role sheet. Record your responses and be ready to share with your literature circle group once everyone is finished. (Depending on the length of the selected text, provide time for participants to independently read and respond in writing. While they are working, let any participants in the Research role know they may generate ideas about what they *would* research if time and available technology in the session does not permit them to actually do the research for their role.)

(Circulate and monitor the time it takes for everyone to read and prepare their role-related response. Once it appears all or almost all participants are ready, proceed.)

It's time to engage in a discussion with your literature circle about the reading. You will each share your responses you generated as a part of your assigned role. You may

begin. (Avoid providing additional guidance, such as who goes first or how long each person speaks. Let this be part of the learning.)

Slide 31



Time: 5 minutes
Materials: none

Let's have a short debrief on your experience as a literature circle participant.

(Lead a whole-group discussion using each of the displayed questions.)

The roles you choose to have students use may or may not include all of the roles we explored on pages 107-114. You can decrease the number of roles, if you would like. Also note that roles for nonfiction texts begin on p. 108.

Slide 32

Time: 10 minutes
Materials: internet connection

The use of these role sheets has received much criticism in the professional literature. Let's watch as students interact in a literature circle based on their role sheet assignments. While you watch, jot down your thoughts on the group's collaborative conversation.

(Watch from 0:06 to 5:08. Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltkprzZhyeI&t=17s)

What observations did you make?

Slide 33

Time: 4 minutes
Materials: internet connection

Here is another video of students engaged in a literature circle. Compare the student experience in the first video to this one. Again, jot down your thoughts about the interactions between the students.

(Watch from 4:32-6:22 of the hyperlinked video.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5MIRQ5c0Ws&t=299s)

What did you observe?

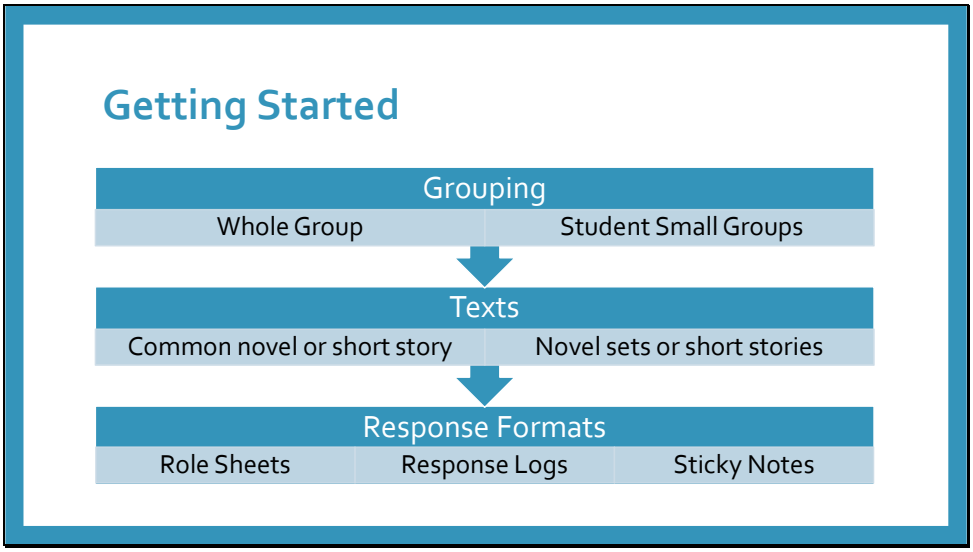
Slide 34

Time: 1 minutes
Materials: none

This is an important point about role sheets. Role sheets are meant to be (mouse click) **temporary. Only use role sheets for the initial support and guidance students might need until they internalize the types of things good readers consider as they process and discuss texts.**

Having said that, know that it takes time and practice for students to become skilled in having deep dialogue about a text. The first attempts may feel and sound uncomfortable. It's OK! Stick with it and the students will grow with practice, feedback, and coaching.

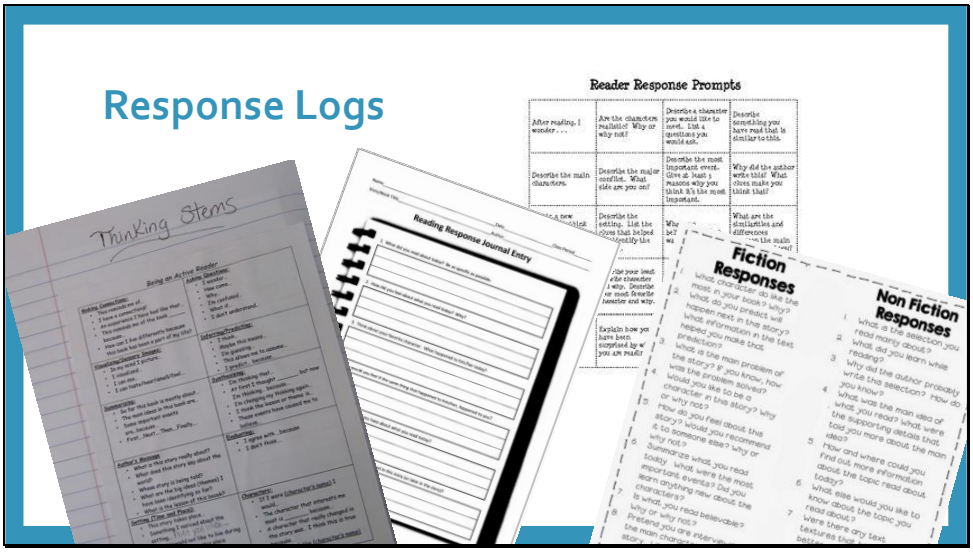
Slide 35



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

What about response logs and sticky notes? These two response options are much more flexible, and you are probably already using some format of this type of free-form response to text in your classroom. The difference between the two is not the content but the materials.

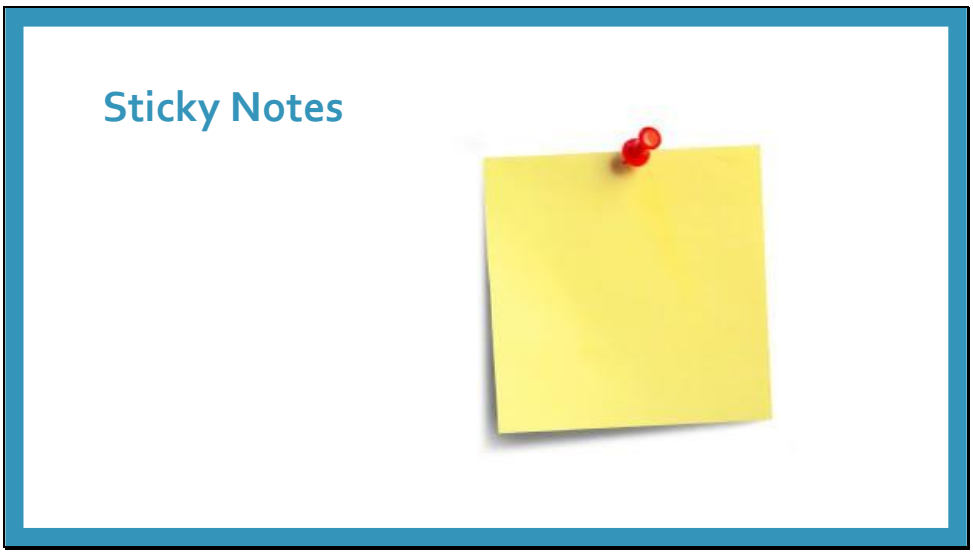
Slide 36



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

Response logs, or reading logs, allow students to record an open-ended personal response to what they have read. There are many resources online providing samples of questions students might journal about after reading a text.

Slide 37



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

Using sticky notes for readers to record their reflections as they read is really helpful when using novels or other non-consumable reading materials. Much like response logs, students record reactions to what they have read. In this case, attaching the sticky note to the section of text connected to their thought.

Slide 38

Time: 7 minutes
Materials: none

Having total freedom to respond in any way the text empowers readers and allows them to interact with the text on a personal level. However, it can be challenging unless students have mastered types of reflective thinking good readers do while they read.
Other than using the response log ideas and sentence stem ideas with students, you can teach them easy-to-remember reminders of possible responses.

Here are a couple I've seen used by teachers.

C.O.W.- By using the acronym C.O.W., (Connections, Observations, and Wonderings.) students can be prompted to write about how the text connects to themselves, other texts, or the world around them. Or, they can record their observations– these might include a part of the text they found interesting, a literary element they noticed, or other things they observed in the reading. Wonderings are questions they have about the text– whether that be clarifications, predictions, or curiosities. As you can see, C.O.W. is quite open-ended and applicable to any type of text.

Another strategy used punctuation marks, and potentially emojis! This strategy is especially helpful if students can write directly on the copy of the text. Sections on which they have questions are marked with a ?. Anything exciting or especially

interesting are marked with a !. Something a student likes, finds funny, or agrees with receives a ☺, while something they dislike, disagree with, or thought was wrong receives a ?. Something the reader feels is really important is marked with an *.

What other methods have you seen, heard about, or used to guide students with open-ended response to text? (Have participants share ideas with the whole group.)

Thank you for sharing your ideas. We can always use additional ideas as we work to refine our craft as educators of reading.
If your students are not ready to have this level of autonomy, remember you can build their competency through the temporary use of literature circle role sheets.

Slide 39

Time: 15 min.
Materials: none

Let's take a break. We'll start back up in 15 minutes.

Slide 40

Time: 5 minutes
Materials: none

Regardless of the decisions on grouping, texts, and response formats, Daniels suggests five key steps.

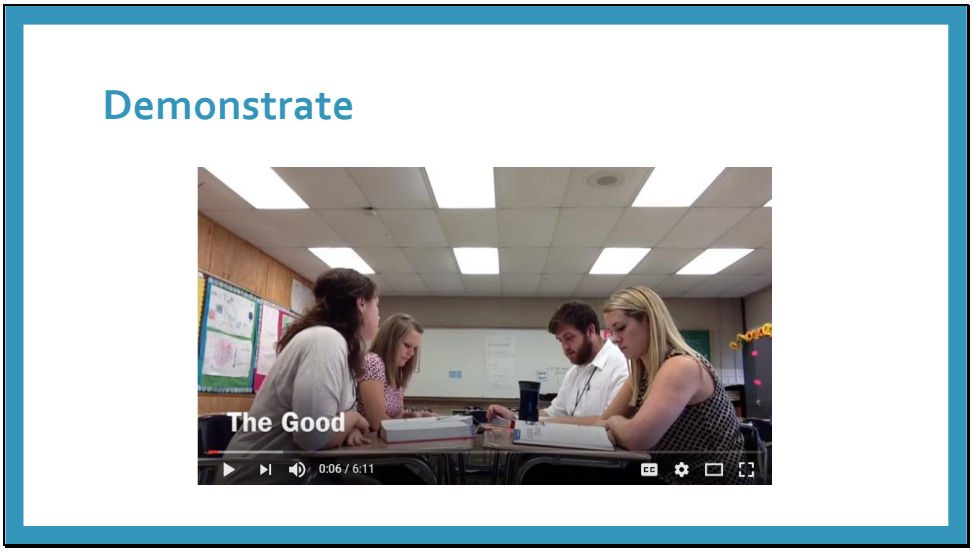
These steps are: (Mouse click as you share each point.)

- **Explain- Tell students what literature circles are and why they are important.**
- **Demonstrate- Provide an example of what literature circles look and sound like. Having a model of a productive literature circle will go a long ways in helping students understand the concept.**
- **Practice- Structure opportunities for students to practice responding to text discussing texts together.**
- **Debrief- Ask students to be reflective about their experience, both in and beyond the initial practice stages. Encourage them to identify things that worked and things that could be improved upon.**
- **Refine- Continue to provide modeling and feedback as you coach students in improving their literature circle process and dialogue.**

Which of these steps have we done today? (Responses should include all steps, although "Demonstrate" was not done explicitly, so that may not be mentioned. Participants did watch the videos comparing collaborative conversation and deep dialogue.) **Of course, we are spending much more time on some steps than you would**

with your students, and much less time on other steps. You will need to consider your perceived readiness of the students you teach, and adjust based on the outcomes of each step.

Slide 41



Time: 10 minutes
Materials: internet connection

A step we did not explicitly do was "Demonstrate." You were provided opportunities to view portions of literature circles in the videos comparing collaborative conversations and deep dialogue. However, these were not specifically called out as fulfillment of the "Demonstrate" step.

Daniels suggests providing students a live or video-recorded example of what literature circles look and sound like. As you watch, consider how a video such as this one would be helpful to show to students.

(Watch the hyperlinked video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCZxi-WF7z0)

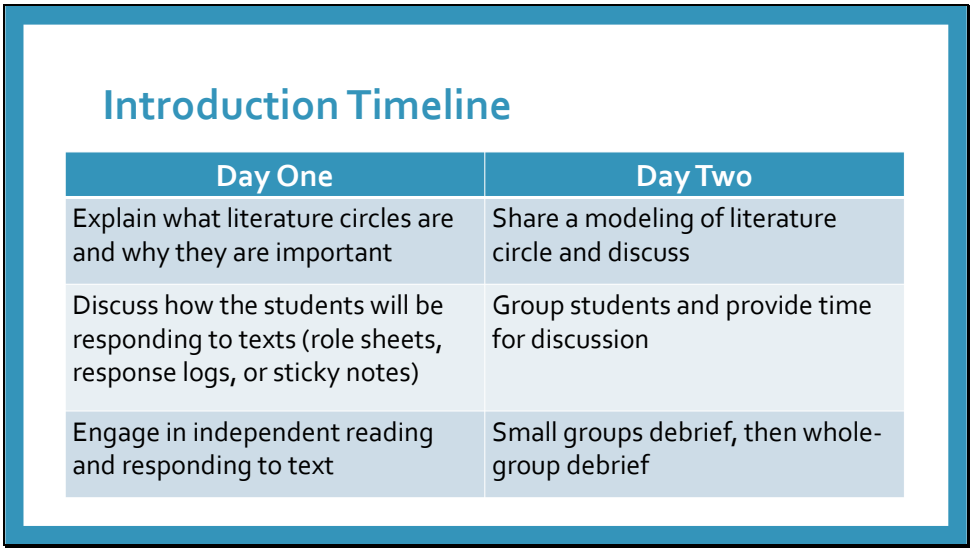
What are your thoughts about the video? (Allow participants to share. If not mentioned, prompt discussion about teachers playing the role of students, providing both good and bad examples, etc.)

Slide 42

Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

So how would these key steps look on a schedule?

Slide 43



Time: 5 minutes
Materials: none

There is not a one-size-fits all timeline for rolling out literature circles classrooms. The timing depends on factors such as student readiness, length of class periods, and more.

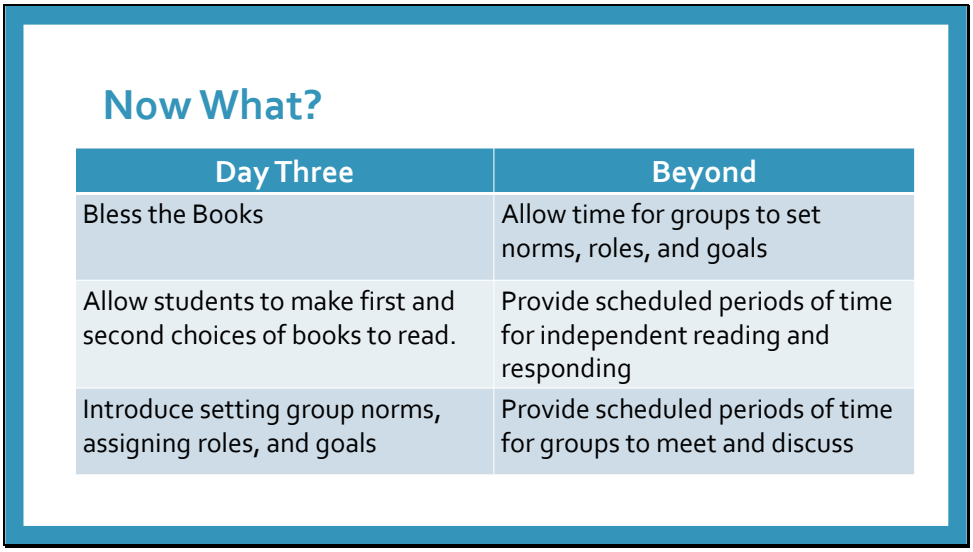
Here is one way the introduction to literature circles might be approached.

(Go over the information on the slide, starting with Day 1 and then Day 2. Make connections to activities participants engaged in earlier.)

Of course, there are many variations to this timeline. For example, students could be first grouped with role-alike classmates to compare and refine responses before meeting with their literature circle group whose members all had different roles. Another strategy would be to have students participate in a Fish Bowl literature circle in which one group of students conducted their literature circle while the other students observed and noted what went well and what could be improved.

A key takeaway here is to know that literature circle introductions and initial experiences require careful planning and preparation.

Slide 44



Time: 10 minutes
Materials: none

So, now what? You've introduced literature circles to the class and practiced the procedures with them. Now what?

Let's take a look at what Day 3 and beyond might look like.

(Mouse click)

- **Day 3 might be the day you, "Bless the Books!" Much like I've shared with you today, you will select a number of books to present to students. You will need to consider the availability of copies for the number of students you have as well as the interests of the students.**
- **Allow students to select a first and second choice of the book they would like to read as part of their literature circle experience. It's natural to be concerned that students will strategically select books so they can be grouped with their friends. While we want to encourage getting to know and working with a variety of people, student groups based on friendship do carry some benefits. Members are more likely to feel committed to the group and motivated by loyalty to complete tasks and not let their friends down. On the other hand, if you want to group students by true interest in books, you can have students submit a "secret ballot" identifying their first and second choices. Ultimately, how you determine group composition is**

up to you. Notice that students are not assigned books on Day 3. You will need time outside of class to review student choices and create groups.

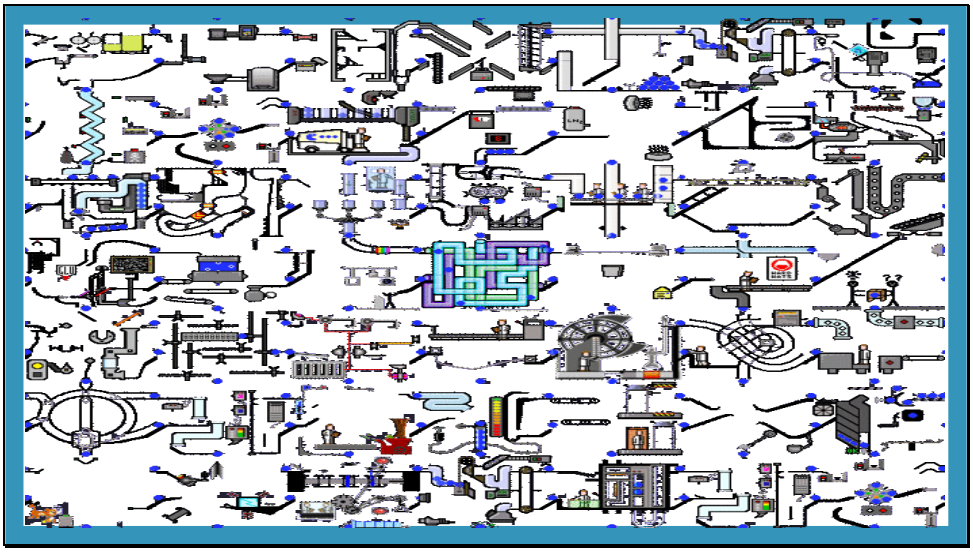
- **The last literature circle-related task on Day 3 is to introduce setting group norms, assigning roles, and setting goals. You will want to discuss types of norms students might consider, such as how they will maintain equitable amounts of time for each person to share, expectations for listening while others are sharing, coming to the circle prepared, or if reading ahead will be allowed, and, if so, rules on "spoilers." You will also guide students to determine how they will assign roles and set reading goals– the amount of text to be read between literature circle meetings.**

Beyond Day 3-

- **Once you have shared which students will be grouped together and who will be reading which book, have groups gather to set norms, roles, and goals.**
- **Then, provide scheduled periods of time for independent reading and responding. In-class time and out-of-class time can be used for this task. The amount of in-class time is dependent on how reliably students complete the work out-of-class. This will vary based on your students and other assignment loads.**
- **You will also need to schedule periods of time for groups to meet and discuss what they've read and recorded on their role sheets, logs, or sticky notes, depending on which response method you select.**
- **The frequency and length of time you will allow your students to read independently, respond, and meet during class will need to be shared with the students to inform their goals– the amount to text to be read by the next group meeting.**

What is your role during this time? Remember at the beginning of the day when we generated lists of what students would be doing and what you, the teacher, would be doing? It's now time for you to let the students do most of the work! Your role on discussion days is to circulate, listen, provide feedback, and coach students as they refine their expertise participating in literature circles.

Slide 45



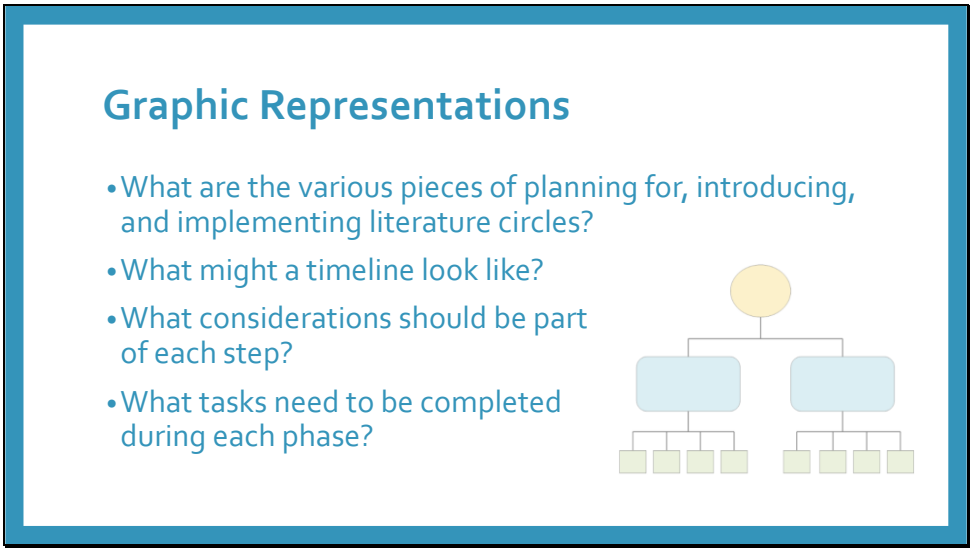
Time: 2 minutes
Materials: chart paper

I'm sure by now your mind feels a little bit like this trying to figure out all the various components for planning, introducing, and implementing literature circles. There are, indeed, multiple pieces you need to consider and many decisions you need to make.

To process and try to make sense of the many pieces, I am going to ask you to work in small groups and create a graphic organizer to represent how the various things we've discussed today work together.

Much like shown here (indicate the displayed slide) **this is a complex process.**

Slide 46



Time: 38 minutes
Materials: chart paper

Here are some questions to start your thinking. (Read through the displayed questions.)

Of course, you can use any graphic organizer format you wish. This is an opportunity for you to process the information and organize it in a way that makes sense to you.

Works in groups of 2 or 3 to create your graphic organizer and display it on chart paper. You will have about 25 minutes to complete your chart.

(After 25 minutes, or when groups have completed their chart, ask groups to display their work on the walls.)

Now we will combine three groups together to create larger groups. You will travel together to each of your groups' posters and share what you created. (NOTE: If you are presenting the session to a small number of participants, groups can each share their work with the whole group.)

(Once all groups have shared, have groups return to their seats.)

What are your key take-aways from creating your graphic representation and hearing the presentations of the other groups? (Ask for volunteers to share.)

Slide 47

Time: 8 minutes
Materials: chart paper, sticky notes

(NOTE: The purpose of the activity on this slide is to get participants looking forward to Day 2 of the training and hearing answers to their questions. The questions generated by the participants may also provide the trainer an opportunity to make some adjustments to Day 2 content to meet the needs of the participants.)

We have covered a great deal of information today. I'm sure there are still questions about literature circles you have that are unanswered. In preparation for tomorrow's time together, let's take the time to generate those questions.

Everyone will take one sticky note. On the sticky note, write at least three questions. These might be clarifications about what we've talked about today, questions about something we haven't yet covered, or questions about challenges you might face regarding implementation of literature circles. No questions are off limits! (Provide 2-3 minutes for participants to write questions independently.)

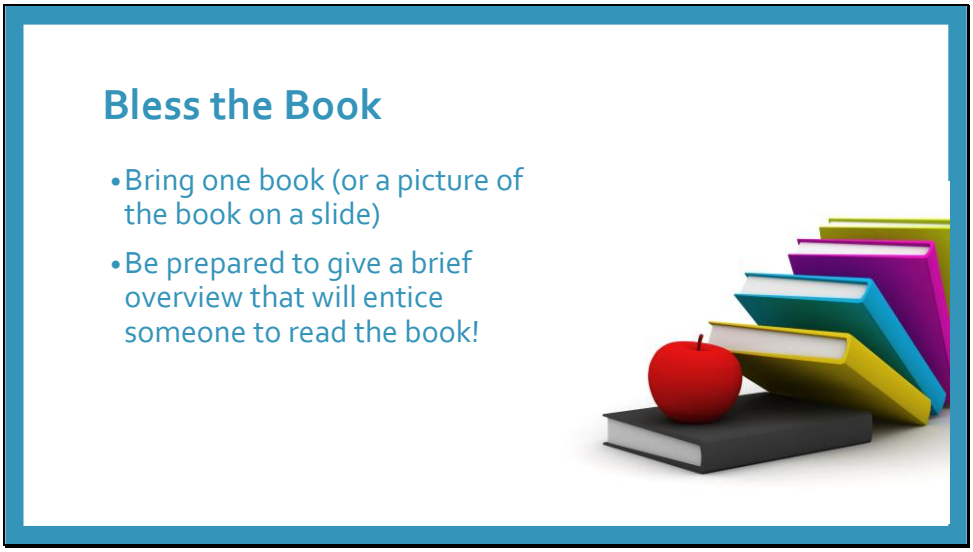
Now, if everyone will stand, we are going to popcorn from one person to the next around each table to call out questions. We are going to use the rule of no repeats-- if someone calls out a question you have, cross it. Once we've gone around the room enough times that your questions have all been shared, you will be seated. I will capture your questions on chart paper.

(Guide participants to begin sharing questions in turn. Record questions on chart paper.)

This is a great list of questions. Throughout the day tomorrow (adjust the day comment based on when the second day of training will occur) **we will mark off each answered question, and address any remaining questions at the end of the day.**

Thank you for your commitment today to learning about literature circles.

Slide 48



Time: 2 minutes
Materials: none

Now, for your homework! Tomorrow (adjust the day comments based on when the second day of training will occur) **you will share one of your favorite middle school appropriate books with us. Either bring the book or prepare a slide with a picture of the book on it. You may not repeat any of the titles I shared today.**

Tomorrow you will, "Bless the Book!"

Thank you for your commitment to learning today. Have a great evening.

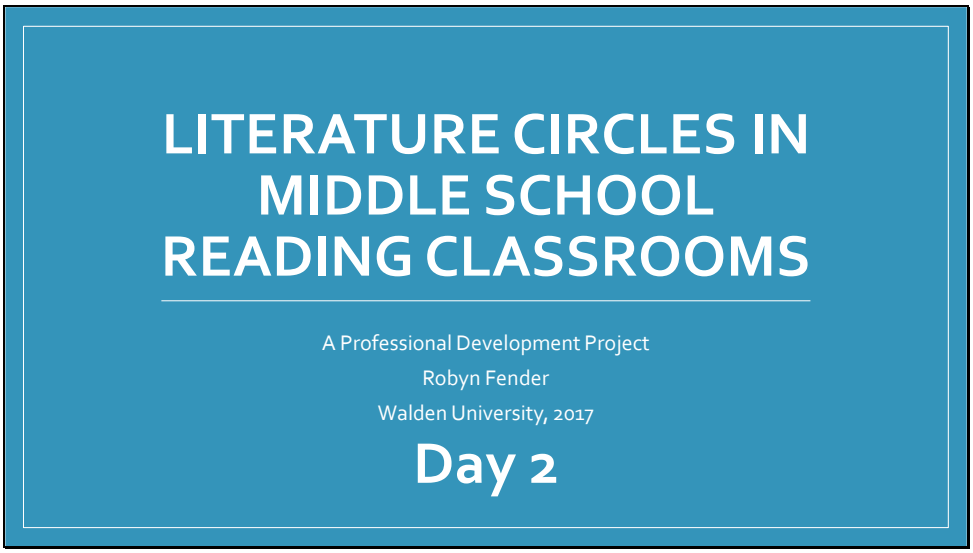
Literature Circles in Middle School Reading Classrooms
Training Outline- Day 2

Section	Slide	Timing	Overview	Materials
Introduction	1-3	3 min.	Welcome Outcomes and Objectives	None
	4	2 min.	Looking Back	Chart of questions from Day 1
	5	10 min.	Bless the Book preparation	Internet access; Email address, Google Drive or Dropbox location, and/or USB drive
Books, Books, Books	6	10 min.	Materials for literature circles Introduction of nonfiction literature circles	copies of Nonfiction Discussion Sheet (1 per participant), copies of books *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (1 per participant)
	7-8	60 min.	Engaging in nonfiction literature circles Introduction of the Membership Grip Charting key ideas	copies of Nonfiction Discussion Sheet (1 per participant), copies of books *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (1 per participant); copies of Membership Grid (1 per group of 4-5 participants); chart paper (1 piece per group of 4-5 participants)
	9	10 min.	Debrief and Refine	None

Break	10	15 min.	Provide time for participants to take care of personal needs.	
Bless the Book	11	10 min.	Participants share books	Participant-provided books
Assessment	12	3 min.	Introduce assessment in literature circles	None
	13	22 min.	Generating ideas for observation checklists and/or rubrics	copies of *Literature Circle Observation Checklist* handout (1 per participant)
Bless the Book	14	10 min.	Participants share books	Participant-provided books
Schedules in Literature Circles	15-16	4 min.	Time and Schedules for Literature Circles Rationale for Time Commitment	copies of books *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (1 per participant)
	17-20	13 min.	Sample Schedules	
	21	3 min.	Reflection on Schedules	
Questions and Curiosities	22	5 min.	Review charted questions Generate new questions and curiosities	Chart paper with questions from Day 1; sticky notes
Lunch	23		Break for lunch.	
Differentiated Instruction and Literature Circles	24-29	27 min.	Defining Differentiated Instruction • Participant definitions • Tomlinson definition	Copies of *Differentiated Instruction is…* handout (1 per participant); chart paper as an optional supply to groups

	30-31	23 min.	Elements of Differentiated Instruction in Literature Circles	Printed table copies of slides 25-28, chart paper (optional for participant use)
Break	32	15 min.	Provide time for participants to take care of personal needs.	
Questions and Curiosities	33	15 min.	Review charted questions Group discussion on any remaining questions	Chart paper with questions from Day 1 and pre-lunch questions
Purposeful Planning	34	8 min.	Introduce *Things to Consider* handout	Copies of the *Things to Consider* handout (1 per participant)
	35-36	70 min.	Provide guided planning time for participants	
Closing	37	2 min.	Thank participants Share contact information Set the stage for networking	none

Slide 1



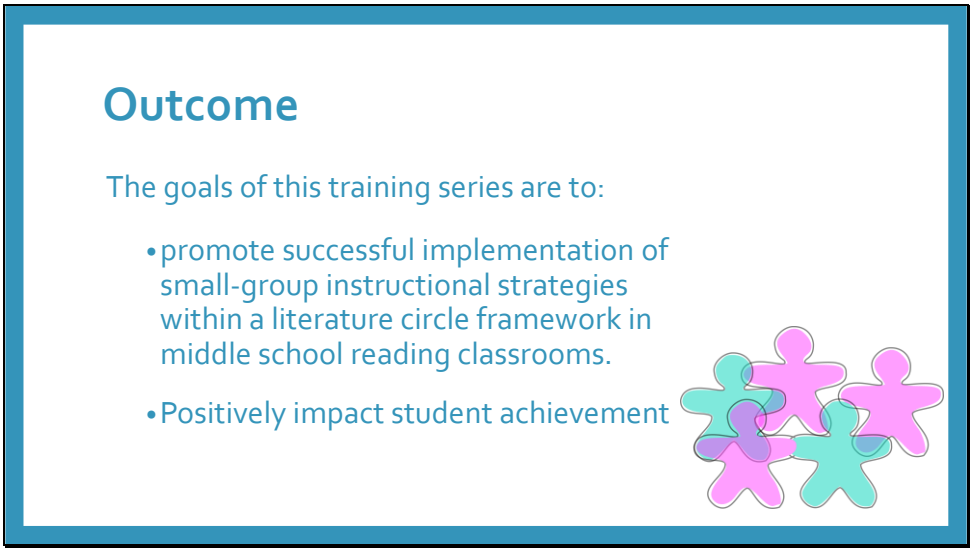
(Trainer notes are included on each of the slides for this presentation. Notes in parentheses are intended for trainer reference only. Sentences in **bold** are examples of what the trainer should say to the audience for each portion of the training. Each slide also contains information on approximate time per slide and materials.)

Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

Welcome to Day 2 on Small-Group Instruction in Middle School Reading Classroom. This training series was developed as a part of a doctoral program and grounded in research conducted on the impact of a remediation strategy on middle school reading student achievement.

Today we will further explore literature circles as a means of supporting students develop reading skills in self-sufficient small groups. We will also look at how the literature circle structure can fit into the broader scope of middle school reading classroom practices.

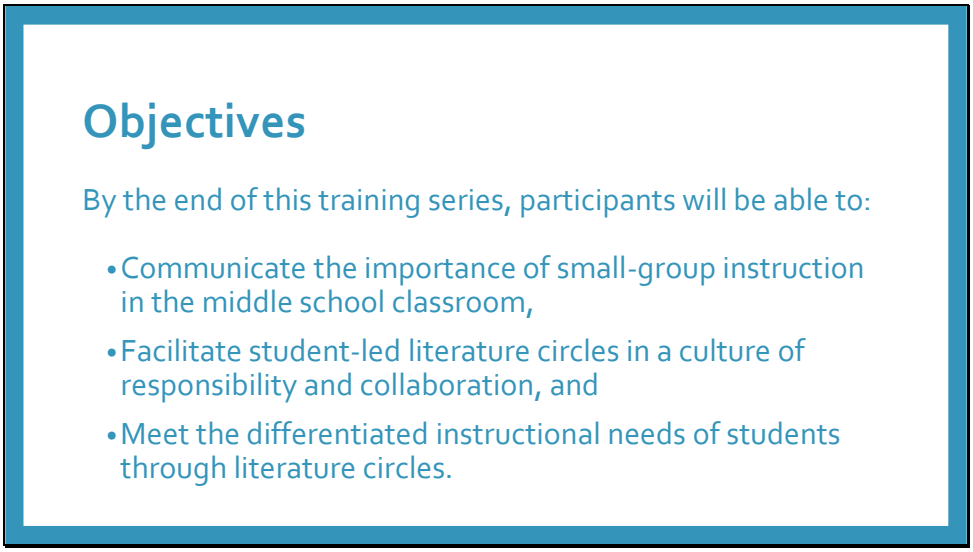
Slide 2



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

As mentioned previously, our overall goal with this training series is to (mouse click) **promote successful implementation of small-group instructional strategies in middle school reading classroom. However, as with any training, the ultimate goal** (mouse click) **is to continuously improve our practice so we might positively impact student achievement.**

Slide 3



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

Today we will expand on the second objective

- (Mouse click) **facilitate student-led literature circles in a culture of responsibility and collaboration, and we will also cover the third objective,**
- (Mouse click) **Understand how literature circles can help you meet the differentiated need of students.**

Slide 4

Time: 2 minutes
Materials: none

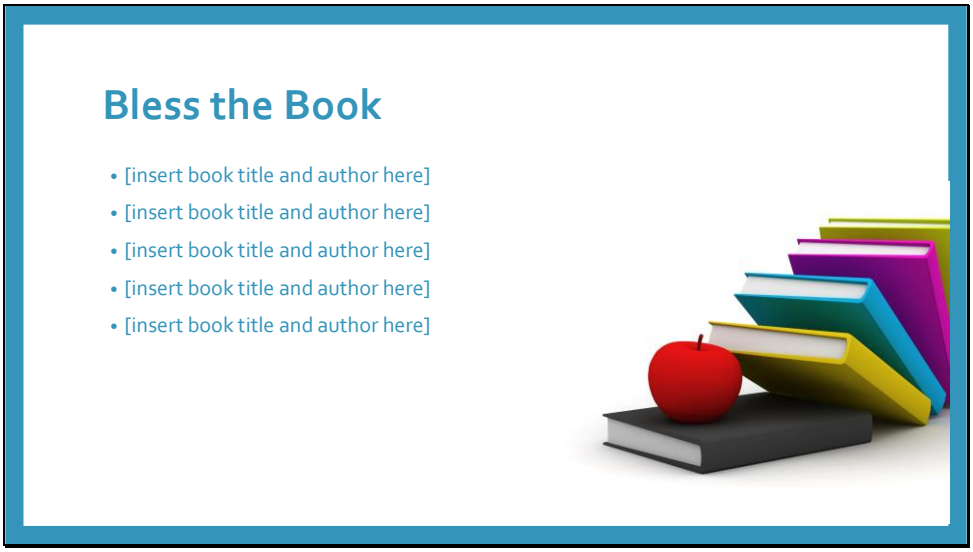
(NOTE: Post the chart paper with the list of questions generated from the previous session. Throughout the day, mark questions answered by today's session content.)

Before we move on, let's take a look at where we have been. In our last session we:

- **Looked at the research on small-group instruction in middle school settings, including the data on the large range of reading levels in middle schools classrooms and the efficacy of small groups to meet the differentiated needs**
- **We looked at the characteristics of middle school students– specifically their seemingly conflicting need for both autonomy and connectedness, both of which can be met through literature circles**
- **Through a jigsaw activity, the 11-point definition of literature circles was explored**
- **Connections to literature circles were discovered in the state standards**
- **In the afternoon we spent a great deal of time on the complexity of initiated literature circles**
- **Lastly, we spent some time looking forward by generating a list of things we wanted to know more about.**

As you see, I have the charted questions posted here so we can monitor our progress in responding to these questions and curiosities. Questions not answered directly through the content of today's session will be addressed at the end of the day.

Slide 5



Time: 5-10 minutes
Materials: participant-selected books; internet connection

(NOTE: Time for this slide is dependent on how many participants brought physical copies of the book they would like to share and how many created a power point slide with a picture of the book. Time allotted here includes time for participants to email, upload, or transfer their slide with a USB drive. As the trainer, you will incorporate any participant slides to the training slide deck at lunchtime or during break, depending on how many need to be added. Participants who brought the physical book will share their books in the morning. Participants who created a slide will share in the afternoon or after a morning break– whenever the slides are able to be incorporated.)

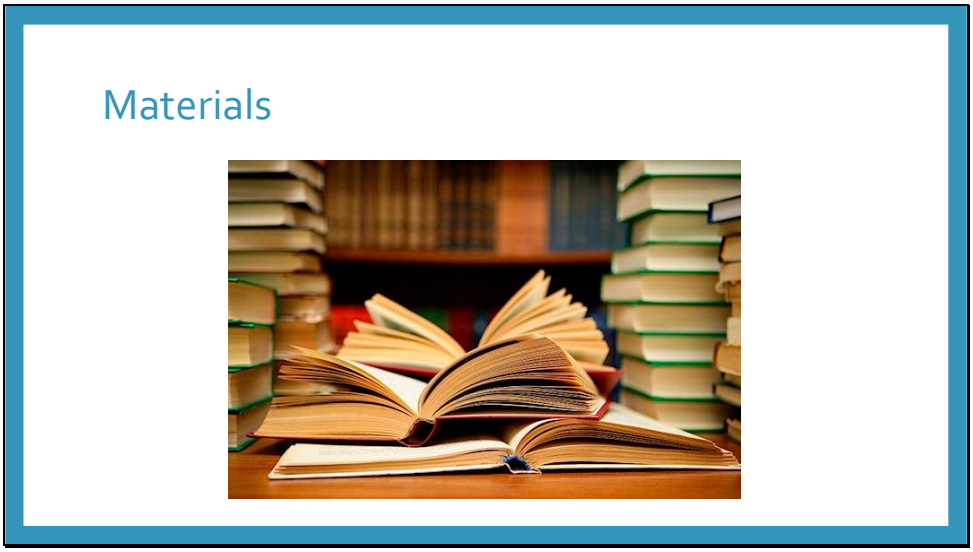
Of course, we can't forget about our homework! Hopefully each of you were able to decide on a book to bless today. How many of you brought a physical copy of the book? (Hold up a book for emphasis.) **How many of you created a power point slide with a picture of your selected book?** (Point to the projected slide here for emphasis.)

At this time, we are going to ask that any slides created be emailed/uploaded/transferred (adjust language based on your selected and/or available options for collecting slides) **so they can be incorporated into the training slide deck and ready for viewing when it is your time to share.** (Provide directions for participants, such as giving them an email address or a file location, such as Google Drive or Dropbox. Assist participants with transfers using a USB drive.)

Thank you for coming prepared to share books that you love. I'm looking forward to hearing about these selections throughout the day.

OK, why wait? Those of you that brought a physical copy of the book, who would like to volunteer to kick off our morning with Bless the Book? (Depending on the size of the group, ask a few volunteers to share their books.)

Slide 6



Time: 10 minutes
Materials: copies of *Nonfiction Discussion Sheet* handout (1 per participant), copies of books *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (1 per participant)

Let's think for a moment…what are the materials you need for literature circles? (Allow participants to volunteer responses.) **Ultimately, what's the one thing you need?** (Mouse click) **Of course, it's books!**

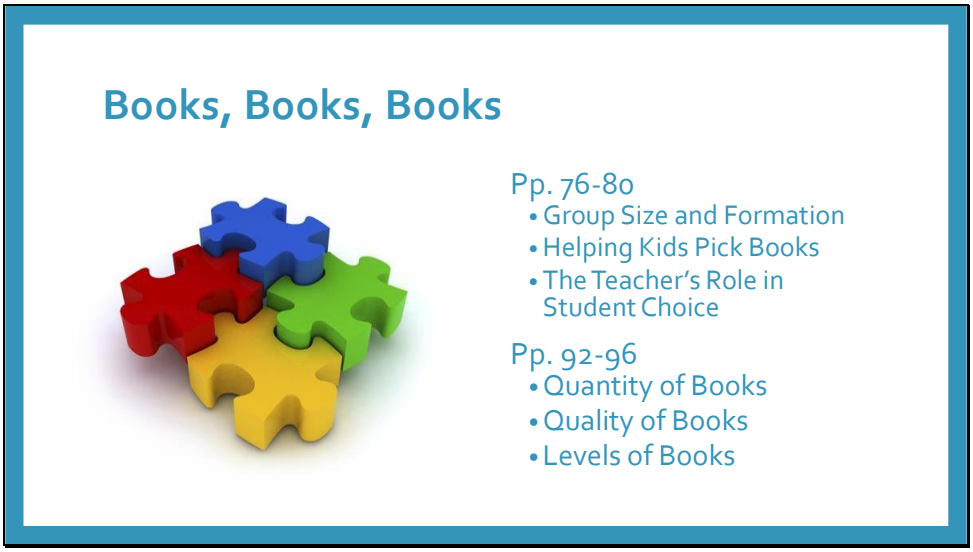
We've discussed a few of our favorite books for middle school reading. How do we know which books to use for literature circle content? How many options should we give students? And, what if we don't have the luxury of multiple copies of multiple books? Then what?

We are going to discover more about choosing books, and helping students choose books to form literature circle groups, through a literature circle ourselves. Chapter 13 in Daniels' book is about nonfiction literature circles. As expository text becomes more prevalent in reading classrooms, it's important to note that literature circles can be used for more than fiction.

I'm going to provide each of you a copy of page 204 from the book. (Distribute copies.) **This is a sample guidance sheet for reading and discussing nonfiction text as a literature circle group, similar to the role sheets we discussed yesterday for fiction selections. Before we look closely at this Nonfiction Discussion Sheet, what do you remember from our discussion yesterday about role sheets?** (If not mentioned, prompt participants to recall that role sheets should be temporary supports as students build their response and discussion skills.)

Take a moment to read over the Nonfiction Discussion Sheet. (Allow 1-2 minutes for independent review of the handout.) **How do the suggestions on this handout connect to your current reader response practices? To our discussion yesterday?** (You might point out how the questions connect to C.O.W. and the punctuation/emoji marking system shared on Day 1.)

Slide 7



Time: 20 minutes
Materials: copies of *Nonfiction Discussion Sheet* handout (1 per participant), copies of books *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (1 per participant)

To honor the importance of choice in literature circles, I'm going to give you the option to select one of two sections. Of course, I'm hoping we will have volunteers for both sections for our collective learning!

The first section is on pages 76-80. This section talks about forming groups based on student choices of text and your role in guiding that process.

The second option is on pages 92-96 and focuses on the teacher pre-work of selecting the right books to offer up as student choices. This section will cover quantity and quality, as well as considerations regarding levels of books.

(Poll the audience on which section they would like to read, encouraging both sections to be selected.)

We'll take about 15 minutes for independent reading of your selected section. Remember to respond to the text using the Nonfiction Discussion Sheet. After 15 minutes we'll rearrange into literature circles by common text for discussion.

Slide 8

Time: 40 minutes
Materials: copies of *Nonfiction Discussion Sheet* handout (1 per participant), copies of books *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (1 per participant); copies of Membership Grid (1 per group of 4-5 participants); chart paper (1 piece per group of 4-5 participants)

Now, let's rearrange into groups of participants who read like texts. Those that read pages 76-80, how many should be in a group with experienced readers? (4-5 people) **Take your book, the Nonfiction Discussion Sheet, and any other notes you created with you.**

(Allow participants to rearrange into groups, encouraging sufficient space between groups so conversations within groups can be heard without distractions from other groups.)

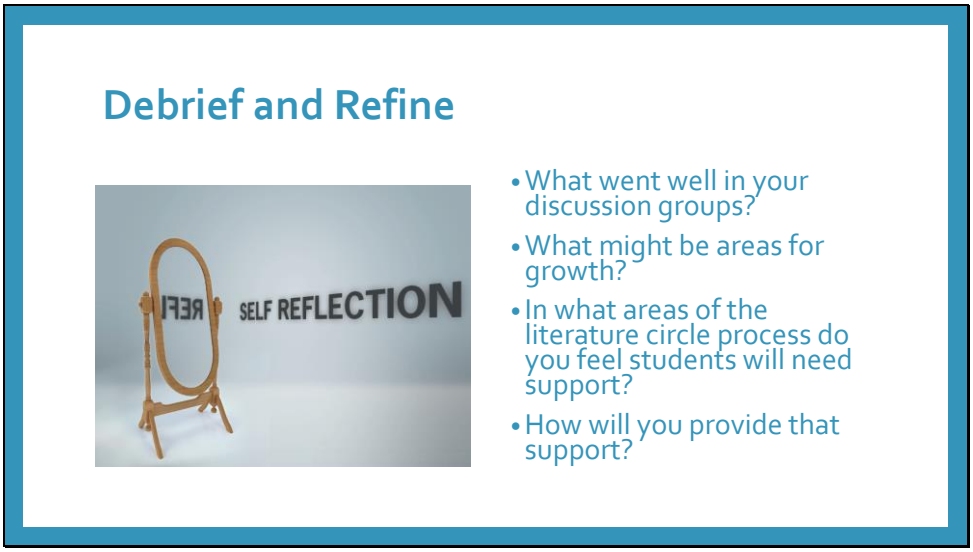
Yesterday we talked about groups developing norms during their first literature circle meeting. Today we'll do another team-building step for new literature circle groups. (Mouse click) **The Membership Grid is one way for groups to get to know each other better and build comradery.** (Deliver one copy of the Membership Grid to each group.) **Find out a little bit more about your group members now by completing the grid. I've prepopulated a few topics in the left-hand column. As a group you can determine which topics you'd like to respond to. I've left a couple blank for you to generate your own topics.** (Allow 3-5 minutes for completing the Membership Grid.) **When using**

Membership Grids with students, you would have them generate and respond to one topic each time the group meets. This activity helps build relationships between group members and serves as a warm-up for conversation before jumping into talk about the text.

(Mouse click) **At this time spend about 15 minutes discussing your section, using the Nonfiction Discussion Sheet as a guide. Be prepared to share key points and insights with the whole group later.** (Circulate and support conversation as needed.)

Now that you've talked about the text, I'd like for you as a group to record on chart paper 3-5 key points that everyone needs to know as they implement literature circles. (Provide about 5 minutes for groups to create their chart. Then have each group share their list with the whole group.)

Slide 9



Time: 10 minutes
Materials: none

Remember the debrief at the end of literature circle meetings provides opportunities for students to be reflective and continue to improve.

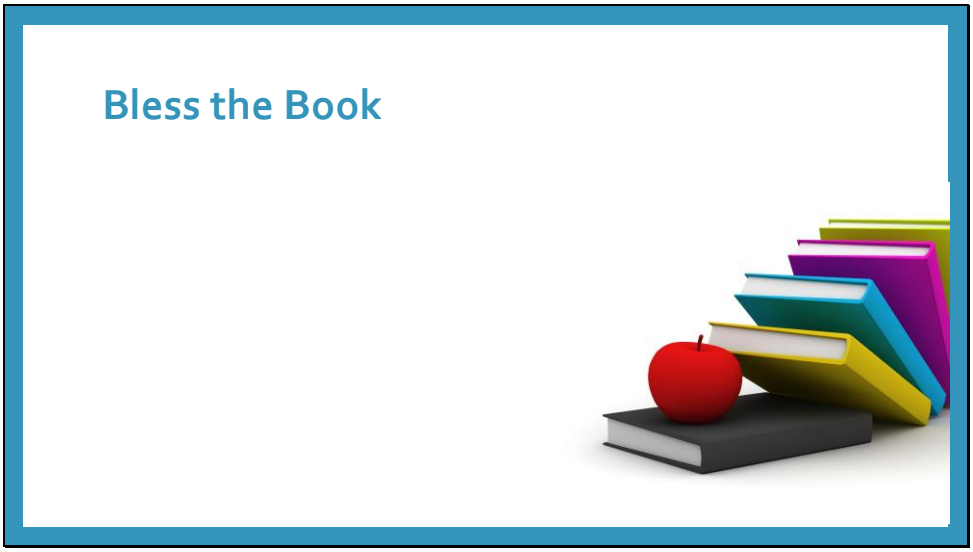
Let's debrief our nonfiction literature circle experience using these key questions.
(Read questions as displayed and facilitate a whole-group discussion.)

Slide 10

Time: 15 min.
Materials: none

Let's take a break. We'll start back up in 15 minutes.

Slide 11



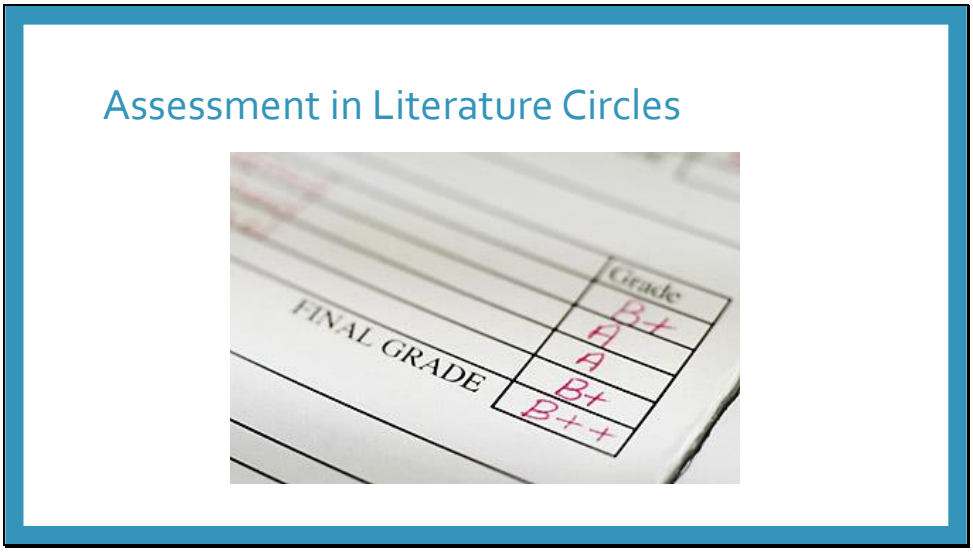
Time: 10 minutes
Materials: participant-provided books

(ADVANCE PREPARATION: Add slides, if needed, for participant-selected book titles.)

It's time for Bless the Book! Let's hear from a few more of our colleagues.

(Provide time for a few more participants to share their favorite books to use with middle school students.)

Slide 12

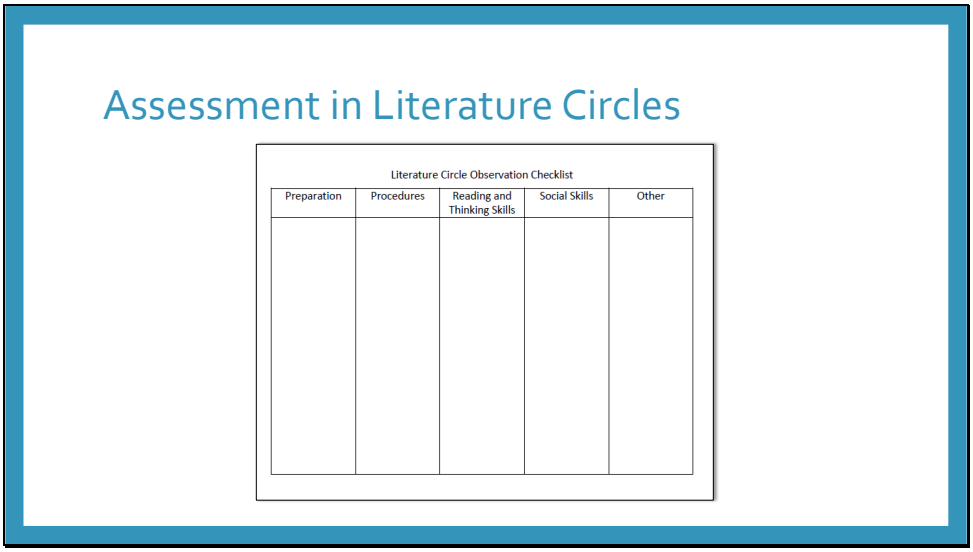


Time: 3 minutes
Materials: none

It's time to talk about a topic I'm sure has been on everyone's mind. How do I fulfill the district/campus requirement for X-number of grades per week if I'm using literature circles? As you might imagine, the goal of deep dialogue doesn't translate to grades the same way worksheets and quizzes do. However, literature circles can develop the complex skills and lifelong love of reading those assessment methods cannot. How do we advocate for literature circles yet still meet grading requirements?

Evaluating students' performance while they engage in literature circles actually aligns with best practices of focusing assessment on formative measures. One of your best tools for evaluating student performance in literature circles leverages the great deal of freedom you have while students are leading their own discussions– you can circulate the room and observe groups as they work!

Slide 13



Time: 22 minutes
Materials: copies of *Literature Circle Observation Checklist* handout (1 per participant)

What does a successful literature circle look and sound like? I'm going to provide you a chart that looks like the one displayed here.

At your table, talk about what students need to know and be able to do not only as a participant in a literature circle, but as a good reader. What does good preparation and participation look like? What do we want to hear and see that would represent good reading and thinking skills? What social skills would be evident in a highly-functioning literature circle? I've also provided an "Other" column for other ideas you might have on what could be evaluated.

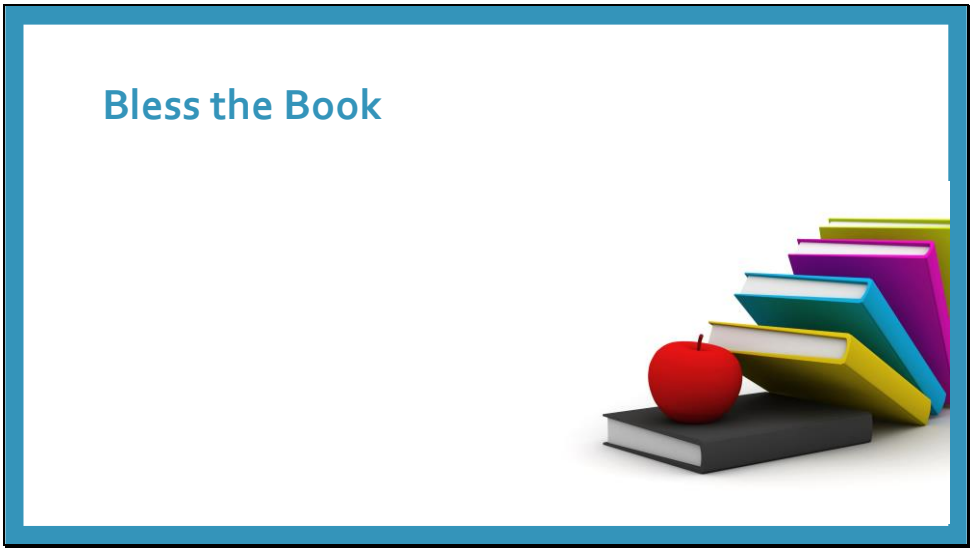
We'll spend about 15 minutes completing these tables. Make sure each person records ideas on their own chart for a follow-up activity. (Allow time for table talk.)

Now that you've worked with those at your table, take your chart and find a partner from another table. Share with each other, returning to your table once you are finished. (Give pairs about 5 minutes to share ideas.)

A natural outcome of these charts is the development of a rubric or a checklist you could use in your classrooms to formatively evaluate students as they engage in literature circles. In a perfect world discussions about literature would be evaluation-

free. Our reality, however, requires assessment measures. For more information and ideas about assessment within a literature circle format, you can refer to Chapter 12 of your Daniels book.

Slide 14



Time: 15 minutes
Materials: participant-provided books

(ADVANCE PREPARATION: Add slides, if needed, for participant-selected book titles.)

It's time for another Bless the Book! Let's hear from a few more of our colleagues.

(Provide time for a few more participants to share their favorite books to use with middle school students.)

Slide 15

Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

Let's talk about the timing and scheduling of literature circles.

For initial training and implementation, it is recommended that teachers commit 2-3 hours of class time per week to train and guide students as they engage in their first round of literature circles. For secondary teachers, this may be a challenge with the large amount of curriculum needing to be covered and the short amount of time for each class period with students.

Slide 16

Time: 4 minutes
Materials: copies of books *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (1 per participant)

On page 81 of your books, Daniels outlines three things to remember when you consider the large amount of class time literature circles will fill initially.

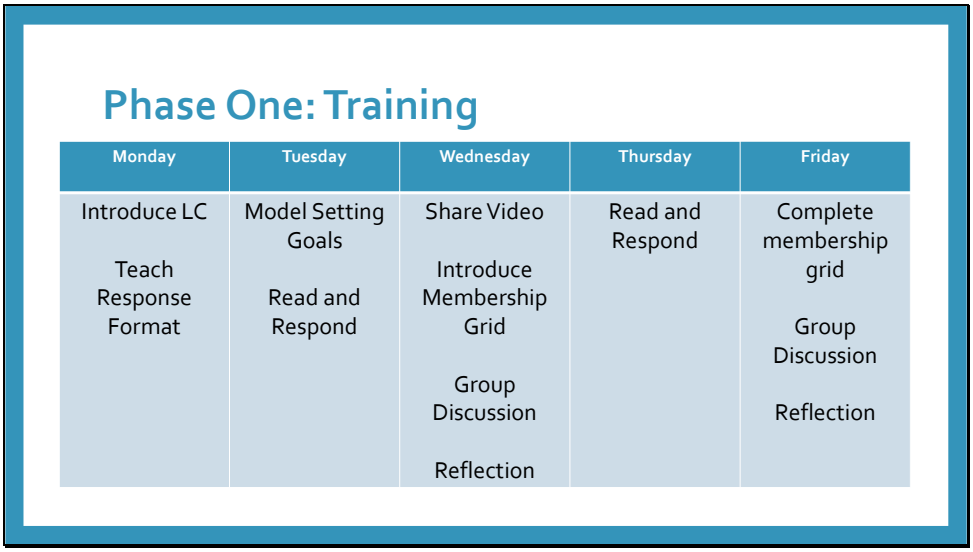
(Mouse click for each point.)

First, remember literature circles are a research-based strategy. Our goal is, over time, to replace less effective reading activities with more effective reading activities.

Secondly, we are making a long-term initial investment that will serve us well as students engage in literature circles again and again in more condensed time frames.

Lastly, once the class has learned the processes and procedures, you can "recapture" pockets of time to do all those other things you need to do for your curriculum that fall outside of the realm of literature circles. Over time, students can do more of their preparation for literature circles, such as independent reading and response options, outside of class.

Slide 17

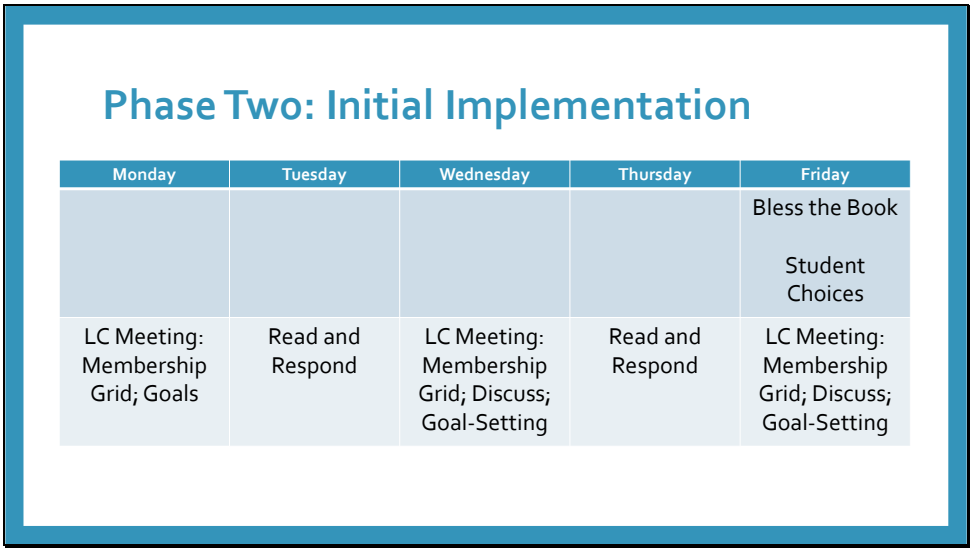


Time: 4 minutes
Materials: none

Here is one scenario for phase one of the process where literature circle components and practices are first introduced and practiced. (Talk about events on each of the days as shown. Mention that because middle school days are organized by class periods, this initial teaching of literature circles might be on a short story which the whole class reads rather than sets of longer books.)

Where might be pockets of time during this week that the class might engage in mini-lessons for the "usual" curriculum components? (Note that there are pockets of time on almost every day, except possibly Wednesday here, for such lessons.)

Slide 18



Time: 4 minutes
Materials: none

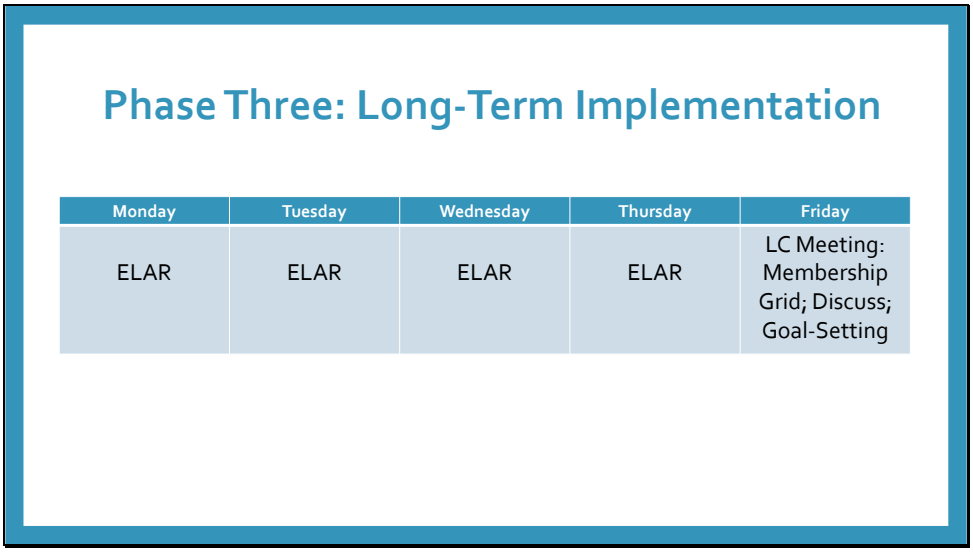
Here is what the schedule might look like after the initial training. Here the students are engaging in their first round of literature circles with books. Notice in this schedule, the teacher introduced the options on Friday so assigning students to groups based on their text selections could be done over the weekend. Then, the following week alternated between LC meeting days and reading and responding days. This cycle would continue on subsequent weeks.

Considering the amount of time in each of your class periods, where do you see potential for time you can commit to other curricular requirements? (Possible answers might include half the period dedicated to literature circles and half the period dedicated to other items.) **In a double-blocking scenario, if even becomes easier, as mandated curriculum might be covered in one class period and the other class period could be dedicated to literature circles.**

Also consider this: where might there be time in this schedule for you to meet the individual needs of students? What might that look like? (Possible answers might include working with small groups for short periods of time while others are reading independently or providing scaffolded support for students as they read and respond.) **So often in traditional instruction finding time to meet with struggling students is a**

challenge. With a literature circle structure, you have much more flexibility in how you spend your time as a teacher.

Slide 19



Time: 4 minutes
Materials: none

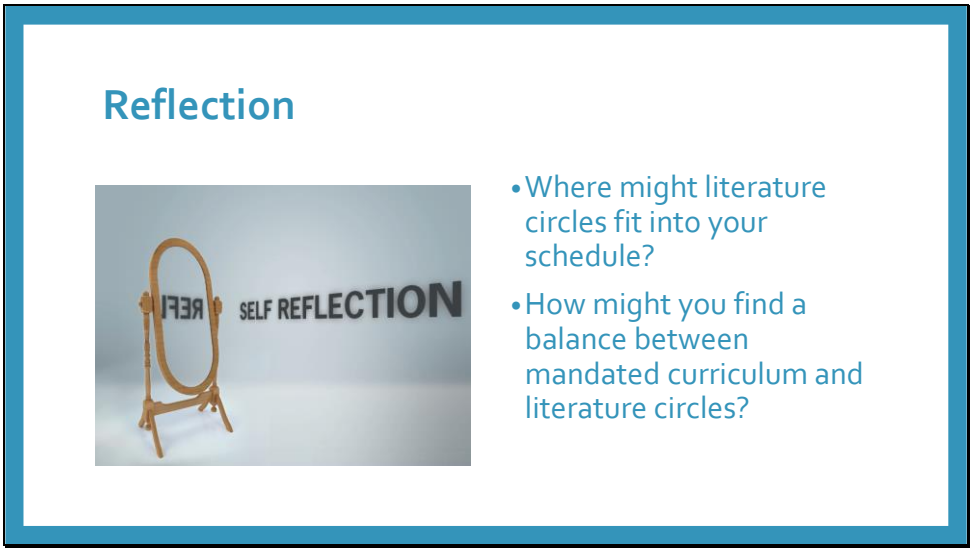
Lastly, here is Phase Three, which you may or may not choose to use. This phase shows literature circles meeting once a week, in this case on Fridays, with all reading and response preparation done as outside of class homework.

Depending on the amount of training, practice and support your students' needs, you may transition through the training, initial implementation, and long-term implementation more quickly. However, what might be some dangers if you move to this level of independence too soon? (Ask for volunteers to share their thoughts.)

Releasing students to perform their literature circle roles outside of class too soon can slow the internalization of the processes and procedures, damaging the goal of creating self-directed learners for the long-term.

The schedule samples I've shared here are based on samples provided in your Daniels book on pages 82-83. You can mark those for quick reference.

Slide 20



Time: 3 minutes
Materials: none

Take a moment to reflect on what I've shared about time and schedule commitments for the training and implementation phases on literature circles. Jot down some ideas in response to these two questions. (Read questions on the slide.) **At the end of the day you will have some time to plan in more detail.** (Provide participants 2-3 minutes to write a reflection.)

Slide 21

Time: 5 minutes
Materials: charted list of questions from previous session; sticky notes

Let's check in on the questions we charted out yesterday and see which questions we've answered so far this morning. What questions do you see we've already answered?

(Have participants review the charted questions and point out which ones have been covered through the morning content. Place a check mark beside/on each question that has been answered already.)

Before we go to lunch for today, I would like everyone to take a sticky note. Review the unanswered questions on the chart. What additional questions have now come to mind that we didn't record yesterday and remain yet unanswered? Please write those questions on your sticky note and attach them on the door frame on your way out for lunch.

(NOTE: Over the lunch break, compile the additional questions and add them to the chart. All previously remaining questions and these new questions should be marked with the question number from Chapter 14 of the Daniels book that best aligns to the charted questions. This will be a part of an activity after lunch. Questions which are not covered in the Daniels book can be saved for group discussion at the end of the day.)

Slide 22

Enjoy your lunch and be back at (insert time) **to explore how scheduling literature circles can fulfill curriculum requirements and discuss how literature circles can meet the differentiated needs of students.**

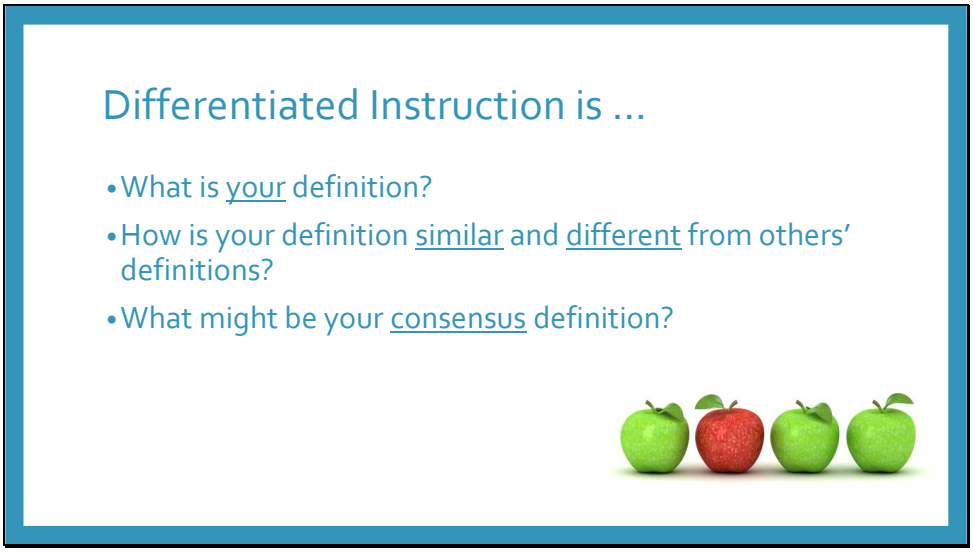
Slide 23

Timing: 1 minute
Materials: none

The discussed earlier, our classrooms are filled with students of many different levels. Howard Gardner said… (read slide).

This statement is a "battle cry" of sorts to consider how we might change our instructional practices to meet the multitude of needs represented in our classrooms.

Slide 24



Timing: 10 minutes
Materials: *Differentiated Instruction is…* handout

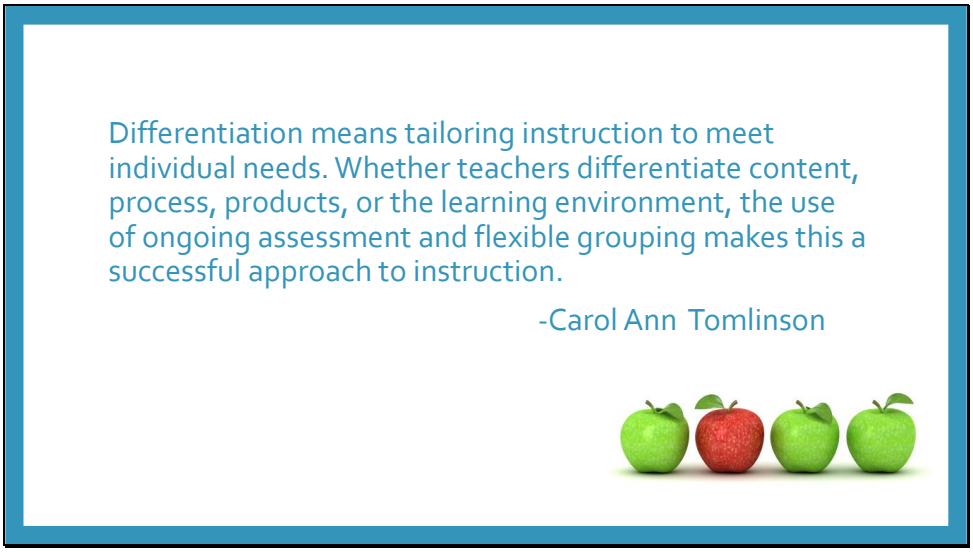
We hear frequently that differentiated instruction is a key element in meeting this wide variety of student needs. To engage in a dialogue on this topic, let's first calibrate on our definition of differentiated instruction.

(Provide each participant a copy of the *Differentiated Instruction is…* handout.) **On your handout, take a minute to independently write what your definition of differentiated instruction is.** (Allow participants to write for 1-2 minutes.)

Now, in triads, share and compare your definitions. Record the similarities and differences between your definitions. Once your analysis is complete, develop a refined consensus definition. (Allow participants to work together for 5-7 minutes.)

(Ask for volunteers to share their consensus definitions with the whole group.)

Slide 25

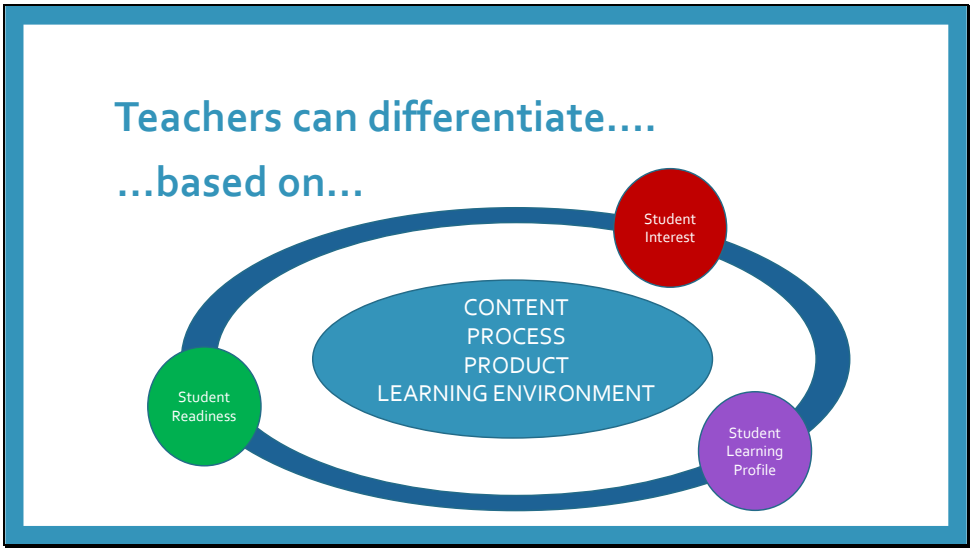


Timing: 5 minutes
Materials: none

Carol Ann Tomlinson is a well-known author in the field of differentiated instruction. She says… (read displayed definition).

Where do your definitions align with Tomlinson's definition? What new ideas are represented in your definition that were not included in the definitions you generated?

Slide 26



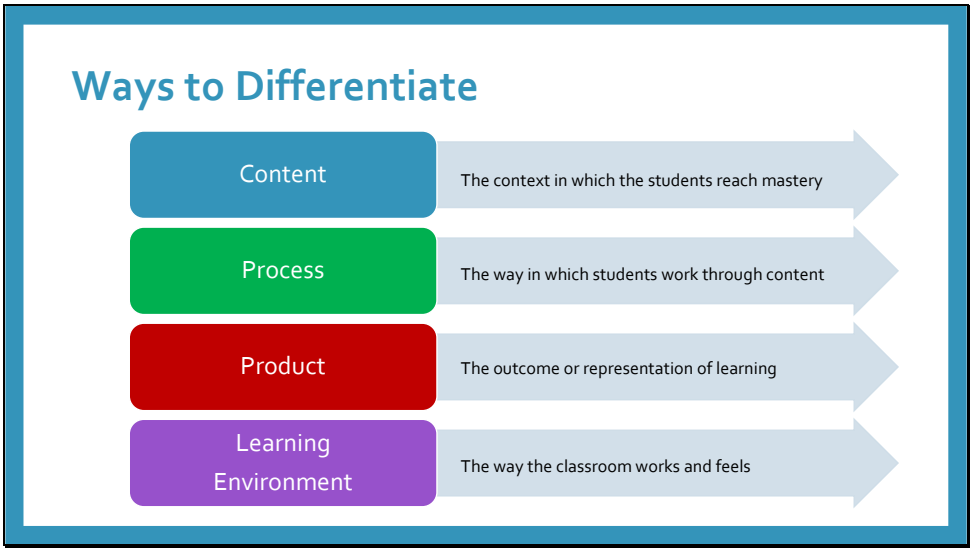
Timing: 1 minute
Materials: none

Here's another way of representing differentiated instruction: Teachers can differentiate the (mouse click) content, process, product, and/or the learning environment…

(Mouse click) **based on:** (Mouse click for each circle) **student readiness, student interest, and student learning styles.**

What does that all mean? Let's take a closer look.

Slide 27



Time: 5 minutes
Materials: none

First, let's talk about the content. Content is the "what" of instruction. A reading classroom is a little different than content-specific subjects, as a course in reading is designed to improve skills as well as build understanding of literary elements and expose students to a variety of genres. Consider the concept of antagonist versus protagonist. Is there more than one reading selection through which students could apply this concept? Of course. We could differentiate the TEXT in which students apply or practice the concepts or skills.

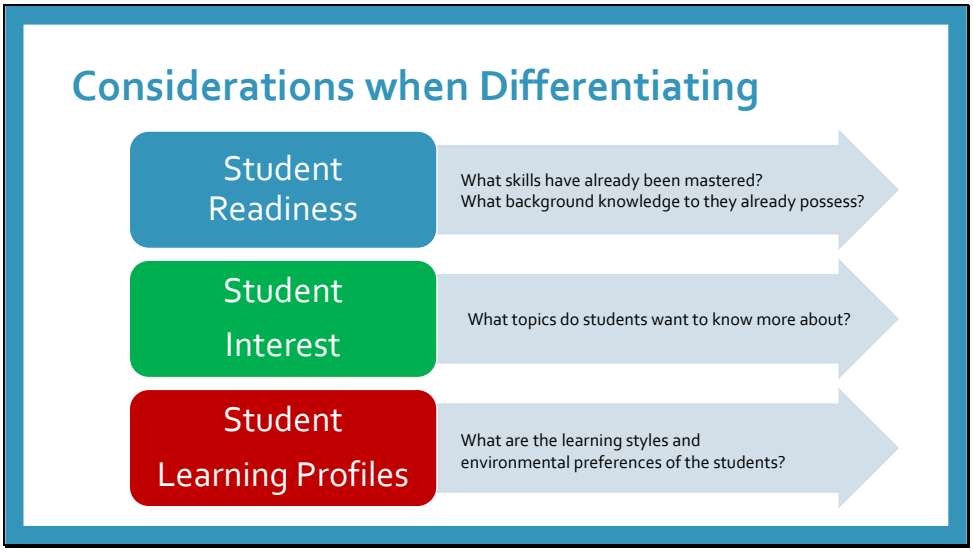
Process- (mouse click) **To differentiate by process is to change the way students experience the content. This could include the level of supports they receive, the length of time allotted for progression through the content, or the lens through which they negotiate the content.**

Products- (mouse click) **What are some of the products you've been asked to generate throughout this training? (possible responses: key ideas on chart paper, personal reflections, book presentations, discussion, analogies, graphic representations) Let's do a lightning round whip-around to name as many different products students might be asked to create in school. Everyone stand. When I point to you, name a student product. I will start on one side of the room and, as quickly as possible, point to each person in the room, then we'll start over again. If you cannot think of another product,**

you will sit down when it's your turn. Let's see how many different products we can name!

The way we work and feel in the learning environment (mouse click) **is also a way to differentiate. This is about the elements of the setting, such as the lighting, seating options, or the noise level. The "way we work" could be grouping configurations or expectations.**

Slide 28



Time: 5 minutes
Materials: none

Of course, determining ways to differentiate the content, process, product, and learning should be considered through the lenses of student readiness, interest, and learning profiles. Differentiation is not change for the sake of change, it's making adjustments based on the specific needs of students in classroom in order to help them learn better.

Student readiness considerations (mouse click) **include the academic areas of mastery or areas for growth and student background knowledge. When using literature circles, student readiness may also include the developmental level of the student's collaboration and dialogue skills.**

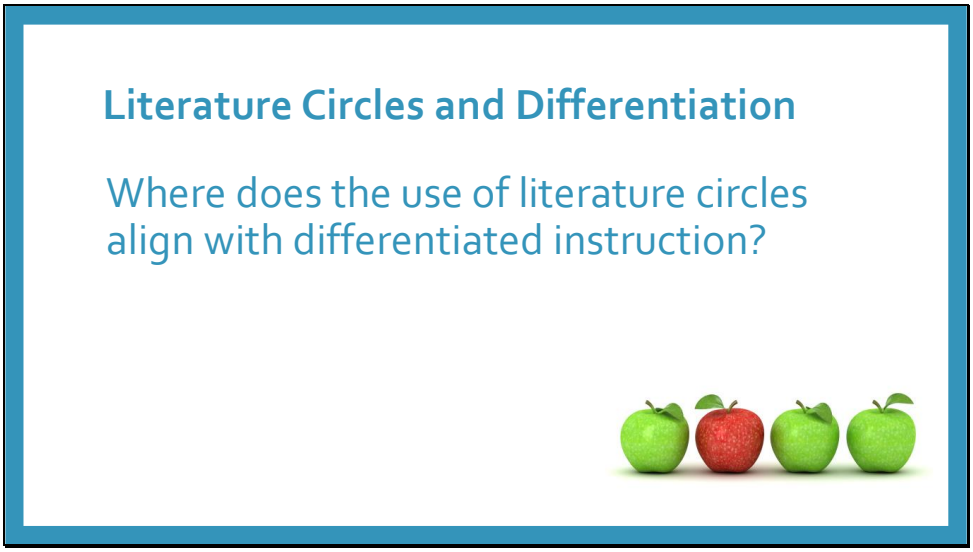
Student interest (mouse click) **is exactly what it sounds like– what topics do the students find interesting? Research suggests that students will successfully read through and comprehend texts above their reading level if the topic is something in which they are highly interested.**

Knowing the learning (mouse click) **profiles of your students include such things as identifying whether they are primarily auditory, visual, or kinesthetic learners. Do the students prefer independent or collaborative work? What in the classroom might**

prove to be a distraction to your students? What cultural and social influences are a part of who they are?

Each of these three considerations can, and should, influence the content, processes, products, and learning environment prevalent in your classroom. How might you assess these areas? (Possible answers might include prior assessment data, interest inventories, learning profile inventories, and simply observation and discussion.)

Slide 29



Timing: 15-20 minutes
Materials: table copies of Slides 25-28, chart paper (optional)

Considering all the things we've just covered, have a table conversation about this question: Where does the use of literature circles align with differentiated instruction? You may collect your thought using chart paper, if you wish.

(Allow participants to discuss for 10-15 minutes. Then ask groups to share out.)

Slide 30

Timing: 1 minute
Materials: none

One important point to make, differentiation does not mean making a different lesson plan for every student! It also doesn't mean you consistently need to differentiate in all the areas of content, process, product, and learning environment. If you try to do so, you might feel a little like this (mouse click).

The key is determining what the most beneficial areas to differentiate are is to consider those that will increase the growth of your students.

Slide 31

Time: 15 min.
Materials: none

Let's take a break. We'll start back up in 15 minutes.

Slide 32

Time: 15 minutes
Materials: chart paper with questions from Day 1; copies of books *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (1 per participant)

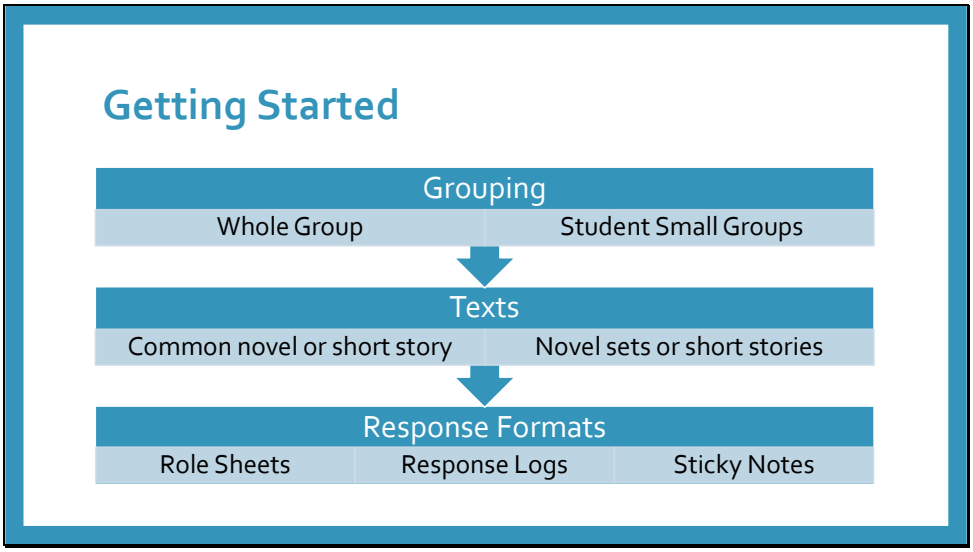
(ADVANCE PREPARATION: During lunch time the charted questions should have been updated. See slide 21 for more information.)

Let's take one last look at our charted questions. As you can see, I've added the questions from the lunchtime sticky notes.

Some of the questions you asked are common questions that have been heard before, and are addressed in the Daniels text. I've noted those questions with numbers. Turn in your books to page 224 where Daniels begins to respond to common questions and concerns.

Divide up those remaining questions notated with page numbers on our chart amongst your table group members. (Reorganize some participants so tables have similar numbers of people.) **Read the responses to the questions you've selected and share a summary of the response with your table.** (Depending on the number of questions on the chart that match questions in the text, you can adjust the grouping for this activity–pairs, triads, etc.)

Slide 33

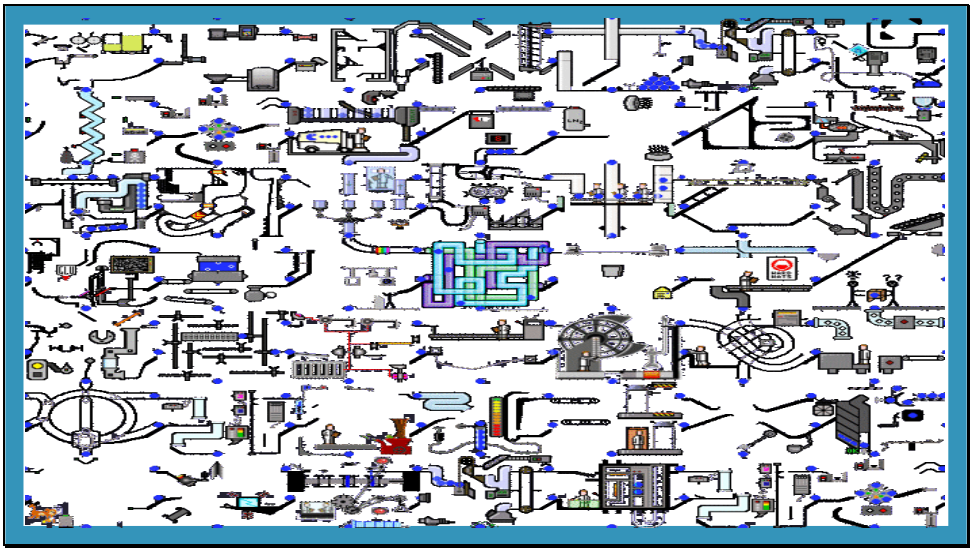


Time: 3 minutes
Materials: copies of *Things to Consider* handout (1 per participant)

So, where do you begin? You may recall this chart from our conversation yesterday. This might be a good place to start in your planning. Will you conduct your training as a whole group, or will you model and ask students to practice in small groups? Will you use a common novel, a short stories, or multiple texts as you train students in the literature circle protocols? How do you want students to engage with the text as they read? Will you teach the role sheets, continue, refine, or initiate a response log, or have students use sticky notes?

These are just some of the decisions you will need to make as you plan. I've also provided you a handout labeled *Things to Consider* as you create your plan for implementing literature circles. This document provides some additional questions to help you think about things you need to consider in your planning and preparation process.

Slide 34



Time: 2 minutes
Materials: chart paper

Remember this? Hopefully today you've achieved a little more clarity on implementing literature circles. You may not yet feel ready to conquer the strategy at this level of complexity. However,,, (Click to the next slide to finish.)

Slide 35

Time: 75 minutes
Materials: participant- and presenter-provided resources, as available

You are certainly ready to at least start thinking of your next steps. The remainder of the session time will maybe give you time to think about your next steps. Utilize what you've learned, your implementation checklist, and your personal resources to start planning for implementation of literature circles in your classroom.

(Mouse click to stop the domino motion in the gif once planning has started.)

(Support participants as they plan initial implementation of literature circles, taking into consideration the various stages of readiness on the part of your participants. Coach, guide, and provide resources as needed.)

Slide 36

Time: 2 minutes
Materials: none

Thank you for your participation in this two-day introduction to literature circles. I look forward to our time together for Day 3 at which time you'll be able to share your successes and have the opportunity to problem-solve around your challenges with colleagues.

This is a great opportunity, if you have not done so already, to get contact information for those here whom you don't work on your campus. They can be a valuable resource in this new endeavor. (Presenter also shares their contact information.)

Day Two Handouts

Nonfiction Discussion Sheet

Name
Title of Reading Author

While you are reading or after you have finished reading, please prepare for the group meeting by doing the following:

Connections: What personal connections did you make with the text? Did it remind you of past experiences, people, or events in your life? Did it make you think of anything happening in the news, around school, or in other material you have read?

Discussion Questions: Jot down a few questions you would like to discuss with your group. They could be questions that came to your mind while reading, questions you'd like to ask the author, questions you'd like to investigate, or any other questions you think the group might like to discuss.

Passages: Mark some lines or sections in the text that caught your attention—sections that somehow "jumped out" at you as you read. These might be passages that seem especially important, puzzling, beautiful, strange, well written, controversial, or striking in some other way. Be ready to read these aloud to the group or ask someone else to read them.

Illustration: On the back of this sheet, quickly sketch a picture related to your reading. This can be a drawing, cartoon, diagram, flowchart— whatever. You can draw a picture of something that's specifically talked about in the text or something from your own experience or feelings, something the reading made you think about. Be ready to show your picture to your group and talk about it.

Source: Daniels, H. (2002) *Literature circles: Voice* and *choice in book clubs & reading groups*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Literature Circle Membership Grid

Name:
Literature Circle Text:
Starting Date:

Topics and Dates	**Group Members**			

Modified from: Daniels, H., & Steineke, N. (2004). *Mini-lessons for Literature Circles*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Literature Circle Observation Checklist

Preparation	
Procedures	
Reading and Thinking Skills	
Social Skills	
Other	

Differentiated Instruction Is…

My Definition:	
Similarities	**Differences**
Our Definition:	

Things to Consider

Below are just some of the considerations that you will need to navigate as you begin planning for implementation of literature circles in your middle school classroom. Reflect on these questions and use your answers to guide your next steps in your planning process.

1. What text(s) will you use? Will all students use a common text or will you assign different texts? What sources for these texts are available to you?

2. How will the students be grouped? Will you conduct the literature circle as a whole-group activity, as part of the initial training and practice, or will you have students work together in small groups?

3. How will you have students respond as they reflect while reading and/or after reading?

4. Where in your curricular calendar might be a productive place to teach students the literature circle processes and procedures? How much time and/or how many days will you spend? How will literature circles become a part of the ongoing curricular calendar?

5. What curriculum elements might be conducive to cover through literature circles instead of traditional instructional practices?

6. How will you hold students accountable for their participation and their learning? How will you assess their growth in reading skills?

7. How will you support individual students and groups as they practice and refine their skills of collaborative dialogue around texts?

8. What resources do you have to help you problem-solve challenges that arise, as well as celebrate successes?

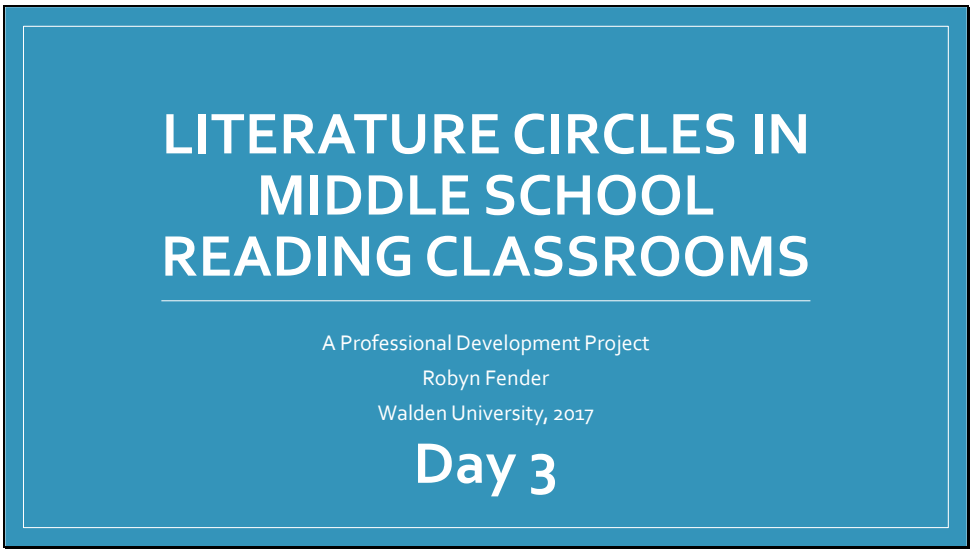
Literature Circles in Middle School Reading Classrooms

Training Outline- Day 3

Section	Slide	Timing	Overview	Materials
Introduction	1-2	31 min.	Welcome Energizer Activity	12" balloons (1 per participant + 1 more per each group of 6-8 people), Sharpie markers, lawn-size trash bags (1 per each group of 6-8 people)
	3-5	4 min.	Outcome, Objectives, and Agenda	None
Success Stories	6	10 min.	Success Story Set-Up	Chairs Timer
		25 min.	"Speed Dating" partner sharing	
		10 min.	Debrief	
Break	7	15 min.	Provide time for participants to take care of personal needs.	
Consultancy Protocol	8	10 min.	Introducing the Protocol Quick Write on Dilemma	Timer
	9	45 min.	Engage in Protocol	
Lunch	10	Break for Lunch	Lunch	
Consultancy (Cont.)	11	33 min.	Consultancy Protocols- Round 2	Timer
		5 min.	Debrief	
Key Steps	12	3 min.	Introduce Mini-Lessons Activity	Timer; copies of *Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles* book by Daniels and Steineke (1 copy per participant)
	13	35 min.	Group Work	
	14	30 min.	Group Presentations	

Closing	15	5 min.	Three Stars and a Wish	Sticky notes
		3 min.	Send-Off	None

Slide 1



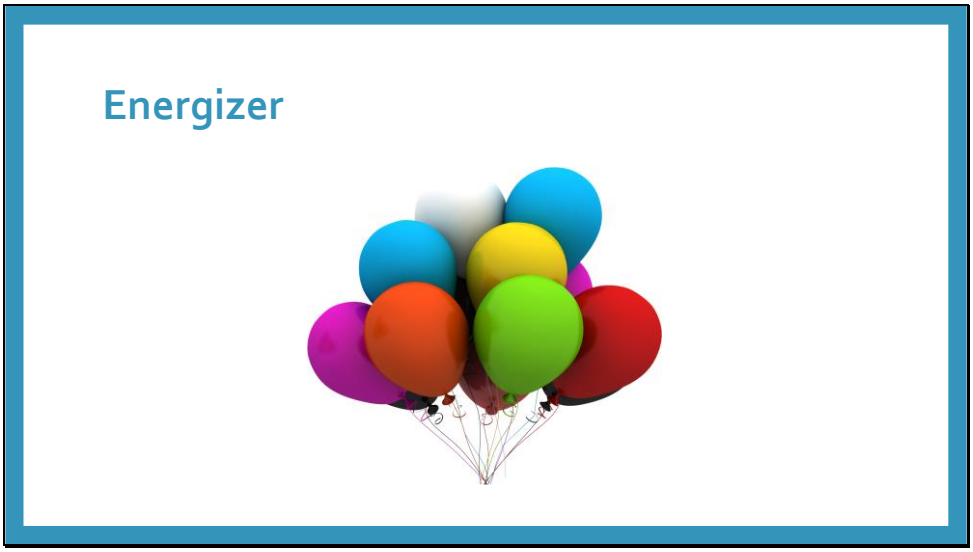
(Trainer notes are included on each of the slides for this presentation. Notes in parentheses are intended for trainer reference only. Sentences in **bold** are examples of what the trainer should say to the audience for each portion of the training. Each slide also contains information on approximate time per slide and materials.)

(NOTE: Day 3 of this training series is intended to be presented approximately 90 days after participants have had the first two days of training. This allows time for them to introduce and implement literature circles in their classroom. The purpose of Day 3 is to celebrate successes and trouble-shoot challenges. About a month before the training, communicate with the participants and ask that they bring a success story to share with the group as well as a challenge related to their implementation of literature circles with which they would like help.)

Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

Welcome back! I'm glad to see each of you here again, and I'm looking forward to hearing about your experiences with this strategy in your classrooms!

Slide 2



Time: 30 minutes
Materials: 12" balloons (1 per participant + 1 half-filled with water per each group of 6-8 people), Sharpie markers, lawn-size trash bags (1 per each group of 6-8 people)

Let's start with a little energizer! I'm going to give everyone a balloon to blow up. While you are doing that, organize yourselves into groups of 6-8 people. (Direct participants to some of the larger open spaces in the training room.) **Form a circle with your group members.**

Now that you are in your circle groups, I'm going to provide a few Sharpie markers to the group. Pass these around as each person silently writes on their balloon that one benefit of literature circles, using as few words as possible for time sake. This could be a benefit to the students or to the teacher. Start writing now– we'll share what you wrote in a moment. (Allow time for participants to write. Circulate and assist in passing/providing Sharpie markers where needed. Collect markers as participants finish.)

Here is a trash bag for each group. We are going to do another lightening round so we can hear everyone's responses. As quickly as possible, call out the benefit you recorded on your balloon and then place your balloon in your group's trash bag. Call out your response even if someone else already said it. (Guide participants to each call out their benefit as quickly as possible.)

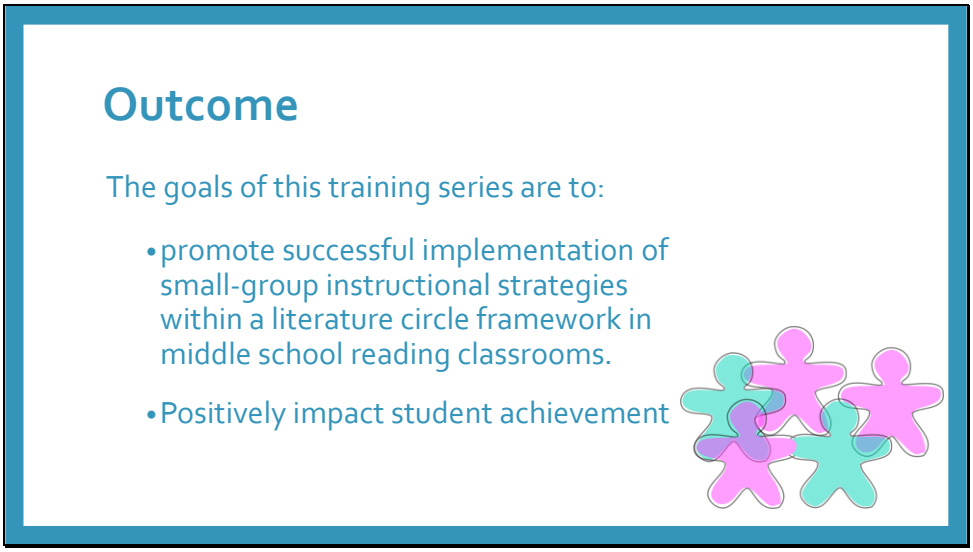
As you can see, there are many potential benefits to literature circles. Now, loosely, but securely, tie the top of the trash bag. We are going to have a little competition. As a group, predict how many time you can volley this trash bag in the air without letting it touch the ground in 15 seconds. No one person can pop the bag in the air twice in a row, and if it touches the ground you have to start over. (Provide time for teams to predict, then time the groups for 15 seconds as they count. Celebrate successes.)

Place your trash bag on the floor and untie the top. Here is a special balloon for each group. (Hand one person in the group a water-filled balloon and 1 Sharpie marker.) **This feels a little more weighty! As I'm sure you have experienced with your implementation, literature circles are not without their challenges. Talk as a group about those challenges. The person in each group with the balloon will serve as your recorder, documenting those challenges on the balloon.** (Allow time for teams to generate and record challenges. Then popcorn out some of those challenges to the whole group.)

This time, leaving the trash bag on the floor, add the special balloon and tie the top securely. (Make sure no one picks up the trash bag.) **Again, predict how many time you can volley the trash bag in the air for 15 seconds.** (Allow time for teams to predict. Remind them of the rules and time groups for 15 seconds.)

What are your take-aways from this activity? (Possible responses may include that things are great when there are no challenges or that challenges must be addressed to capitalize on the benefits of literature circles.)

Slide 3

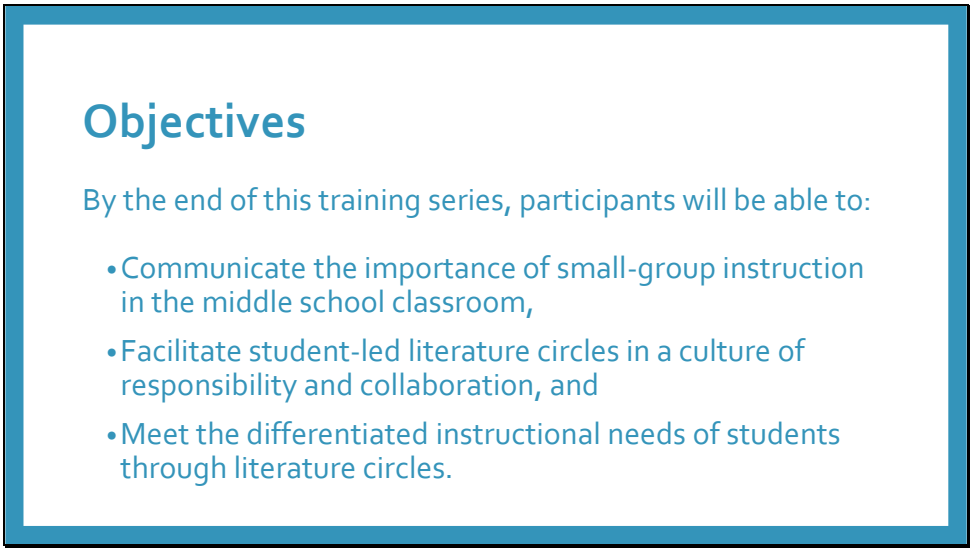


Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

It has been awhile since we have been together, so let's review our outcomes.

As mentioned previously, our overall goal with this training series is to (mouse click) **promote successful implementation of small-group instructional strategies in middle school reading classroom. However, as with any training, the ultimate goal** (mouse click) **is to continuously improve our practice so we might positively impact student achievement.**

Slide 4



Time: 1 minute
Materials: none

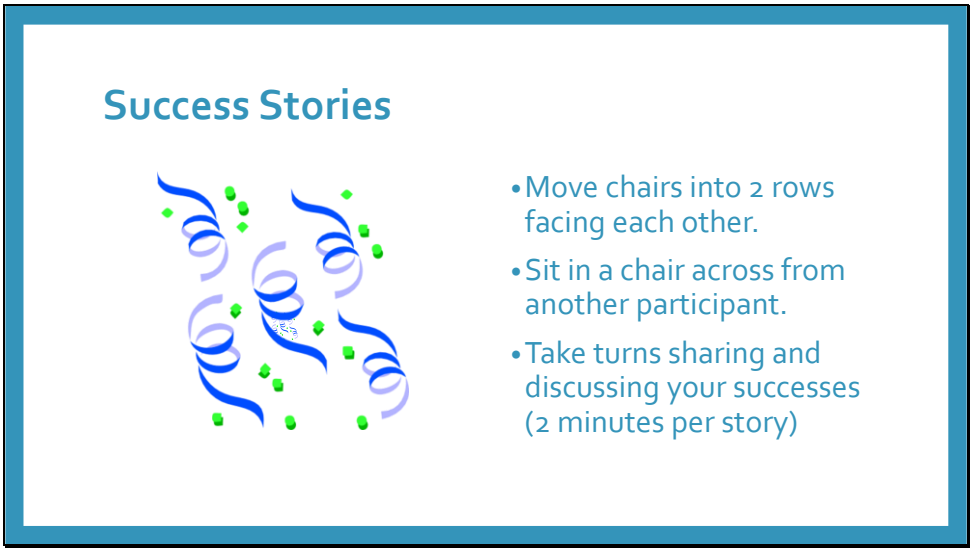
The objectives for this series have been… (read through each of the objectives).

Slide 5

Time: 2 minutes
Materials: none

Today serves as an opportunity to celebrate our successes and refine our practices through problem-solving activities.

Slide 6



Time: 45 minutes
Materials: participant chairs moved into 2 facing rows, 1 chair per participant, timer

Let's start by celebrating our successes. We are going to do this "speed dating" style. This will allow you to have multiple conversations with colleagues about their successes and ask questions on what you would personally like to know more about.

(Mouse click) **We'll start by moving chairs into 2 rows facing each other.** (Direct participants to the area of the room where chairs will be placed.) **Be sure to leave some space between chairs to the right and to the left so conversations can occur without too much neighboring distraction.** (2-3 feet between side-by-side chairs is sufficient. The rows can curve around the room, as needed.) (Mouse click) **Find a seat and get ready to share your success story with the person sitting across from you. I will serve as your time keeper.** (Mouse click) **You will spend 4 minutes with this partner. For the first 2 minutes one of you will share your success story and your partner can ask additional questions. When I give the signal that the 2 minutes is up, the other partner will then share and answer questions. Are there any questions about the directions?** (Answer questions and then start the timer. After 2 minutes, signal that the other participant should then share their story. Proceed after 4 minutes has been provided and both parties have shared their success story. If you have an odd number of participants, the facilitator will participate in the conversation as well as time the activity.)

Now it's time to move. Everyone stand up and thank your current partner. One row will move one seat to the right; one row will move one seat to the left. If you are at the end of the row, you will loop around and take the seat at the other end of the row. Have a seat, and begin sharing as I continue timing. (Repeat this pattern for about 5-6 cycles.)

Thank your final partner, grab a chair, and move back to your tables.

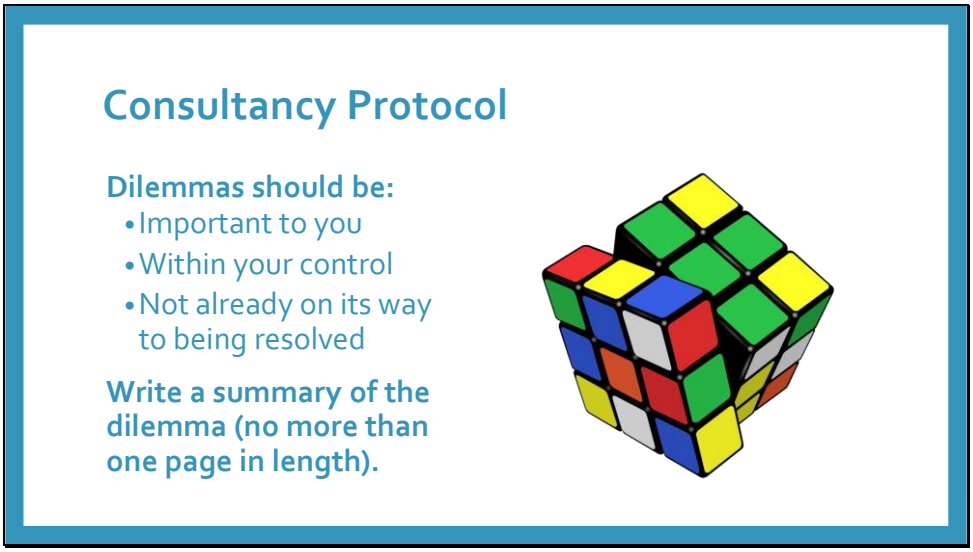
What are some of the most inspiring stories you heard, or what ideas did you hear about that you would like to apply in your classroom? (Solicit volunteers to share responses to these debrief questions.) **Take a moment to jot down those ideas in your notebook as a reminder for later.**

Slide 7

Time: 15 minutes
Materials: none

Let's take a break. We'll start back up in 15 minutes.

Slide 8



Time: 10 minutes
Materials: timer

For part of our challenge problem-solving we are going to use a Consultancy Protocol. This is a process developed by the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), a professional development organization originally founded at Brown University and then moved to Harmony Education Center in Bloomington, Indiana. They are best known for their work around Critical Friends. The Consultancy Protocol uses a specific sequence of steps to follow as a group of colleagues discusses and problem-solves around a dilemma. We are going to use this protocol today to collaboratively address the challenges you are experiencing with literature circle implementation.

To start, I want you to think about one of the biggest challenges you are experiencing. We are going to do an independent quick write about each of our dilemmas. Here are some criteria to consider before selecting and writing about your dilemma:
(mouse click for each point)

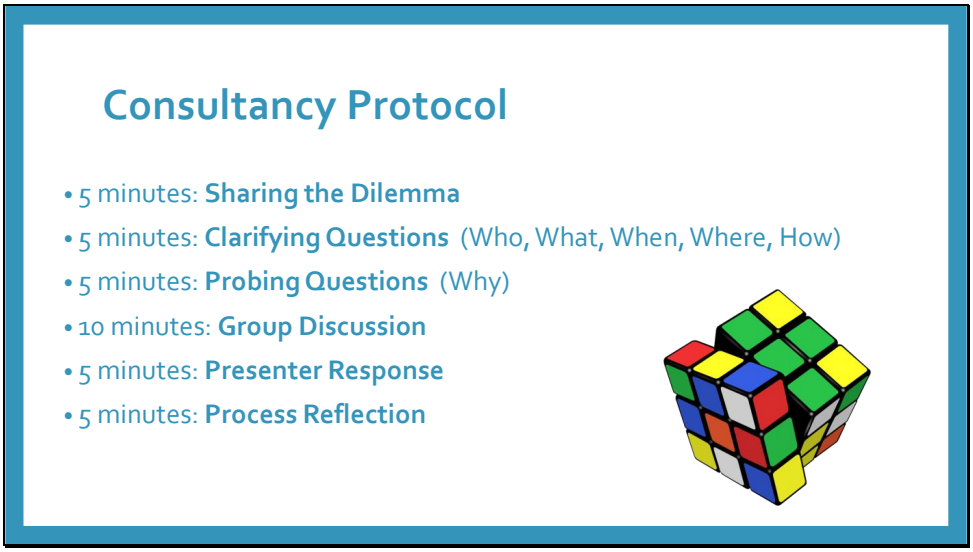
- **The dilemma should be important to you. It should be something you on which you really want help on that would improve your literature circle practice.**
- **It should be something within your control to impact. If it's something truly out of your hands– something over which you have no influence, avoid that dilemma.**
- **Lastly, the dilemma you choose to share shouldn't be something you are already on your way to resolving. Choose a dilemma that still has you "stuck."**

I'm going to give you about 5 minutes to write about your dilemma. This is the opportunity to craft a "snapshot" of the issue that you will share with your consultancy group. Be as detailed as possible, but do not exceed one page.

(Time the writing activity for 5 minutes.)

As a final step in your preparation, take a moment to review what you've written. Then craft a question that summarizes what key challenge you want an answer to.

Slide 9



Timing: 110 minutes
Materials: Timer

Here are the rest of the steps in a timed Consultancy Protocol. (NOTE: In consideration of the training time, some of the allotted time for each step has been shortened from the NSRF recommendations.)

In a moment I'll ask you to move into groups of 4-5 participants. Once seated together, you will decide who will go first. (Mouse click) **That person will start by sharing their written dilemma, concluding with their key question.**
(Mouse click) **Then the other group members go through two phases of questioning. The first 5 minutes is using only clarifying questions– learning more about who, what, when, where, and how of the dilemma. You are attempting to get all of the facts.**
(Mouse click) **The second phase of questioning allows the "why" questions for 5 minutes.**
(Mouse click) **Then, the presenter removes themselves from the group, either pulling their chair out of the circle or by turning their chair so their back faces the rest of the group. This is important as the rest of the group discusses and problem-solves around the issue FOR the presenter, who listens in on the discussion and takes notes. Without removing yourself from the group, it's too tempting to engage in the discussion or for the questioning phases to continue.**
(Mouse click) **Lastly, the presenter returns to the group and verbally reflects and responds to the group discussion and suggestions.**

Move into groups of 4 participants. Once everyone is settled and you've selected the first presenter, I'll start the timer. (Provide time for participants to relocate and select a presenter. Then serve as the time keeper for each step.)

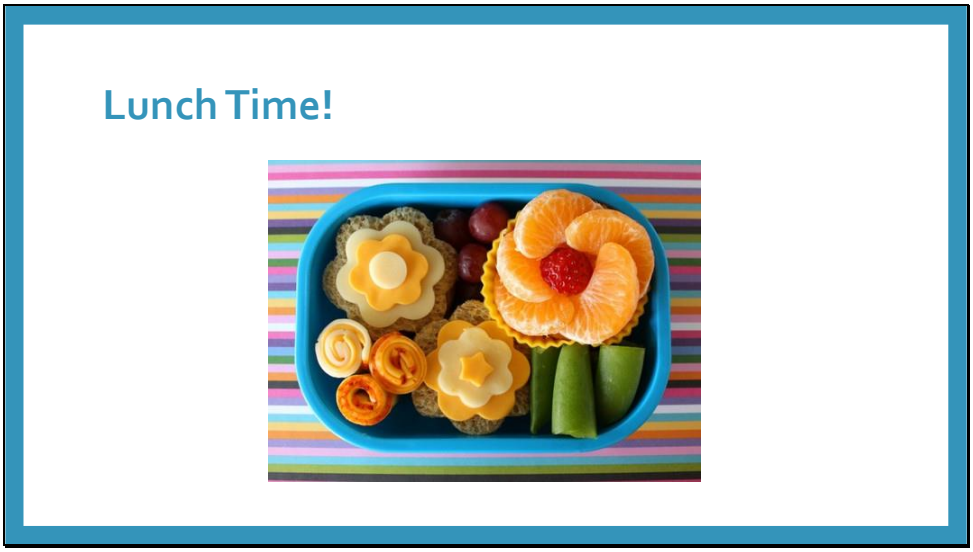
(Mouse click) **Now that you've completed one round of the consultancy protocol, I want to share one final step. As a whole group let's reflect on the consultancy protocol process. What went well? What would you do differently next time?** (Lead a whole-group debrief of the process.)

We are going to do two more rounds of the consultancy protocol. Determine who the next presenter will be. We'll do a whole-group debrief again after we've finished both rounds. (Serve as the time keeper for each step through 2 more rounds.)

Now let's debrief the consultancy protocol process. What improvement did you as you engaged in the protocol multiple times? How might this protocol be useful back on campus?

I encourage you to continue problem-solving your challenges during lunch. If you didn't get an opportunity to share your dilemma today, you may find the activities after lunch may provide some answers for you.

Slide 10



Enjoy your lunch and be back at (insert time).

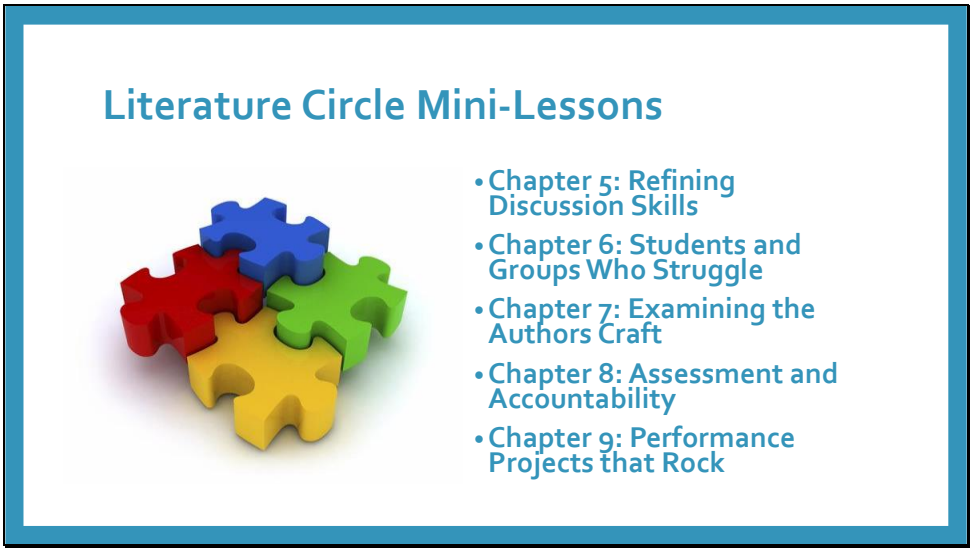
Slide 11

Timing: 5 minutes
Materials: copies of *Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles* by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke (1 per participant)

I'm sure as you were talking about both the successes and the challenges you heard some similarities to your own experiences. Daniels has co-authored a book with Nancy Steineke outlining some mini-lessons you might use with your students to refine their literature circle experiences. For the remainder of today's training we are going to jigsaw some of the sections of mini-lessons, working in literature circle triads. (Adjust the group size and the number of sections based on the number of participants.)

Find a triad, then we'll take turns selecting sections to read.

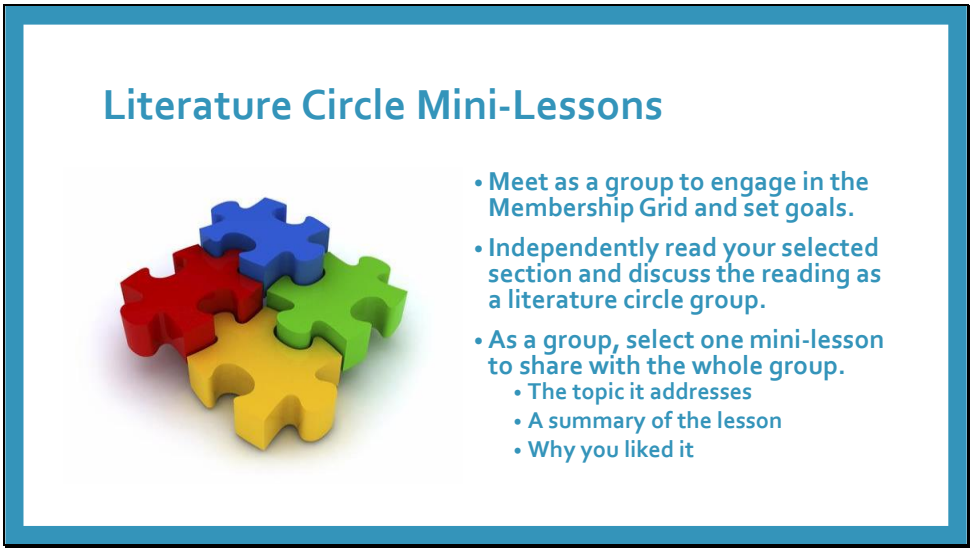
Slide 12



Timing: 5 minutes
Materials: copies of *Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles* by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke (1 per participant); timer

Here are the sections from which to choose. (Facilitate selection of sections, asking each group to pick a different section.)

Slide 13



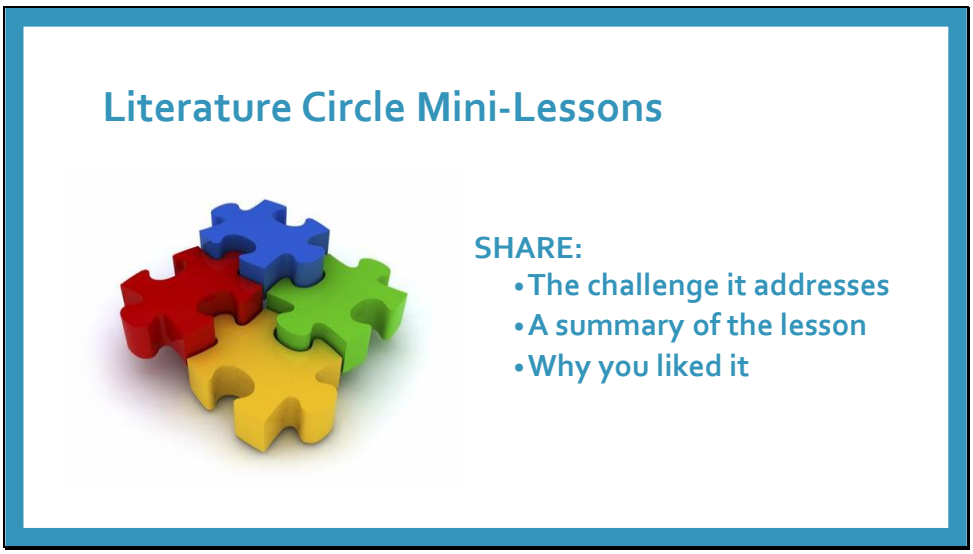
Timing: 95 minutes
Materials: copies of *Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles* by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke (1 per participant); copies of the *Membership Grid* handout (1 per group)

To reinforce literature circles in practice, you will first meet with your group to complete a Membership Grid and set goals. For today, your goal will be a time goal for completing the independent reading and how the team will record their thoughts about the reading.

After everyone has read and reflected, your group will meet and discuss the reading. Then the group will select one of the mini-lessons from their section to share with the whole group. Your group will share the topic the lesson addresses, a summary of the mini-lesson, and then comment on why you liked the mini-lesson.

Your afternoon break will be at your discretion while you and your partners read and prepare what you will share. You will have 90 minutes of work time before we share. (Start a timer, preferably one visible to participants.)

Slide 14



Timing: 35 minutes
Materials: none

Each group will have about 5 minutes to share their selected mini-lesson.

(Ask groups to take turns sharing their favorite lesson from each of their sections with the whole group.)

There are many more mini-lessons in the book that you might find helpful in helping you and your students become more skilled in implementing literature circles.

Slide 15

Time: 3 minutes
Materials: sticky notes

As we conclude our time together, I would like for each of you to reflect on this learning experience from Day 1 of training through today. On a sticky note, please provide me three stars and a wish. (Read through the directions as listed on the slide. Provide a few minutes for participants to reflect and respond in writing.)

Slide 16

Time: 2 minutes
Materials: none

Thank you again for your participation in this training series on literature circles. If you need further assistance, feel free to contact me.

As you leave today, please attach your Three Stars and a Wish sticky note to the doorframe (or designate an alternate location)**.**

Day Three Handout

Literature Circle Membership Grid

Name:
Literature Circle Text:
Starting Date:

Topics and Dates	**Group Members**			

Modified from: Daniels, H., & Steineke, N. (2004). *Mini-lessons for Literature Circles*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Appendix B: Sample Transcript

Teacher Interview #1

Tell me a little bit about yourself and your experience here at Lytle.

This will be my 4th year teaching. My first year was as a math teacher. Two years after that I was an ELA teacher, and then this year I am currently a math teacher. And I've been in 8th grade all four years.

OK. Thank you for that. I have about 9 questions about your experience in OFYP, especially about that year that you were in ELA. There are some of these questions that are open that you might actually be able to share your experience from the math perspective as well.

Oh, OK.

First, tell be about your experience with the Optional Flexible Year Program on this campus.

My experience—I had to do it 3 years. So, my first year was in math, so that one doesn't really matter now. My last 2 years was in ELA. We used our benchmark data to decide if they were going to stay or be allowed to go home for that week. What we would do was to take that data and create lessons based off what we saw was the weakest area and we would just focus on….usually it was just 2-3 areas, more directed towards Readiness Standards. I believe one year we focused on poetry and main idea. The other year was inferencing and summaries.

Describe your perceptions of the student experience in OFYP.

Well, I've seen multiple perceptions. I've seen where kids enjoy it because it is a smaller group and the atmosphere is a little less scary for them, so they are more likely to ask questions and sit there one-on-one and really give 100%. But I've also seen where kids think it's a waste of time and they sit and do absolutely nothing. I've also heard from kids that get sent home that they don't like to go home that week because they miss out on a whole week of school because they are usually your kids who thrive in school. I've also heard certain classes are more "fun," and I think it has to do with possibly activities that they do or just a game versus them actually learning.

In those classes that students perceive as more fun in core content areas, elective areas, or…"

Because what we do is take elective teachers and feed them in to the classes and work with them, they are more core, but they may be a nontested core. So, it's not as scary for the teachers, if they don't really get the concept it's ok, that kind of thing.

In what, if any, does OFYP motivate students to improve their reading performance?

I think the whole week off for some of them that have never had it off, I think that is a motivation. They really strive for a week off of school. Who wouldn't want that? But, like I said, sometimes the kids who know they are going to be off don't want to be off. I don't know if they are really…they aren't really motivated to, you know, have that week off. I think it's a bittersweet moment for the ones that have never had off they are wanting to strive to have that week off, but for the ones that have that week off, because

they already have it, I don't know if it's any motivation for them because they don't want to go home.

Describe any instances in which the OFYP does not motivate students to improve their performance in reading. Anything to add to what you've already said?

I do, I have heard the comment, "So, I'm not going to pass anyway so there's no point in even trying." So, I mean, I think there's that.

How has the OFYP been structured, specifically in the area of reading? Here's where you might share your schedule, how you group students, all those details.

OK, so we've done it multiple different ways. We've done it where we've had like morning all to core, and then we've separated into smaller groups, and then we kind of rotate like every 45 minutes to an hour. And then in the afternoon it's been electives where they get to kind of, you know, play and have their athletics and stuff like that. Then we've also had it where it's longer class periods so, I want to say it was like 90 minutes one year. They would just rotate like normal. They would get a schedule and they would rotate. And we had about 12-15 kids in each group. So we would work small groups. There were two teachers in there.

You mentioned earlier that the elective teachers came in and worked with the core teachers.

Yea, and so it would be kind of like co-teaching.

How were the students grouped?

They were usually grouped based on previous STAAR data or benchmark, or both combined. So I'd have more of the like middle group in one group so I could do some

more, deeper thinking kind of questions and comprehension stuff with them. Then I would have the really low group together so we could work to get those basic skills to where we needed them to be.

Tell me how the curriculum and resources used during the OFYP for reading remediation improved student achievement?

Um…[pause]

Why don't you start by telling me what was the curriculum? What were those resources?

The resources I used were like Cscope/TEKS Resource System. We would use that as a guide for, obviously, the standard, stuff they needed. Then we would also use their textbook. We would use like testing banks so we could have testing like questions. Then I also had a STAAR Ready resource that we could use to really focus when we got to the questions part. It would have examples of what they might ask you on the test.

How was the curriculum and resources during OFYP different from the regular day?

I think it wasn't necessarily different. I think we just went at a slower pace. Or, we went more in detailed. I don't think I used anything different, I think I just really focused on…I focused on inferencing, so I'm going to pull everything I can on inferencing and we can really break it down so you can understand it. But I don't think the resources were different. I think the way that they were used was different.

In ways, if any, has the OFYP allowed your school to better meet the needs of student struggling in reading?

Like I said the smaller group and them being a little more willing and less afraid of asking questions or slowing down and working one-on-one with the teacher. And then they also felt that they were all in the same boat, like they were all on equal ground, so I think it really let them take that wall down and just feel a little safer and not have the pressure of the kids who always answer, or afraid of what of what others might think of them.

Since OFYP is no longer being utilized this year, how might students struggling in reading be affected?

I think they probably won't have the opportunity of slowing down for 2 or 3 really big concepts, like summarizing or inferencing, that will be tested. I think they will hurt with not having that opportunity to sit with the teacher and have it the way she teaches it or just that time to teach it, because that's what I think it really is—that time and that slower pace that they need that they'll be struggling with this year because they won't have that.

I'm curious, since the campus or the district has decided not to use OFYP, what is the plan this year to meet the needs of those students?

We have what's called Playbook and it's like a 30-minute after lunch time designated for remediation. And so, reading particularly, I know she's going over certain concepts that are weak and she's focusing on those, and most likely going at a slower pace. We've grouped the kids where it's "bubble kids," lower reading levels, and they have that time with her or they have that time with another teacher to focus strictly on ELA.

Is that Playbook time all core content, all assessed areas…?

Right now we are focusing on core, so for the 8th grade we've split it into math and reading. Until the STAAR test it will be that way. It's the core teachers who are really working with the lower kids. With the ones that are higher, those mostly likely for the Flex that would go home, are still doing math and reading, but they are doing it on their own—self-paced. They have a teacher in the room, though.

And they are supervised by a noncore teacher?

Yes

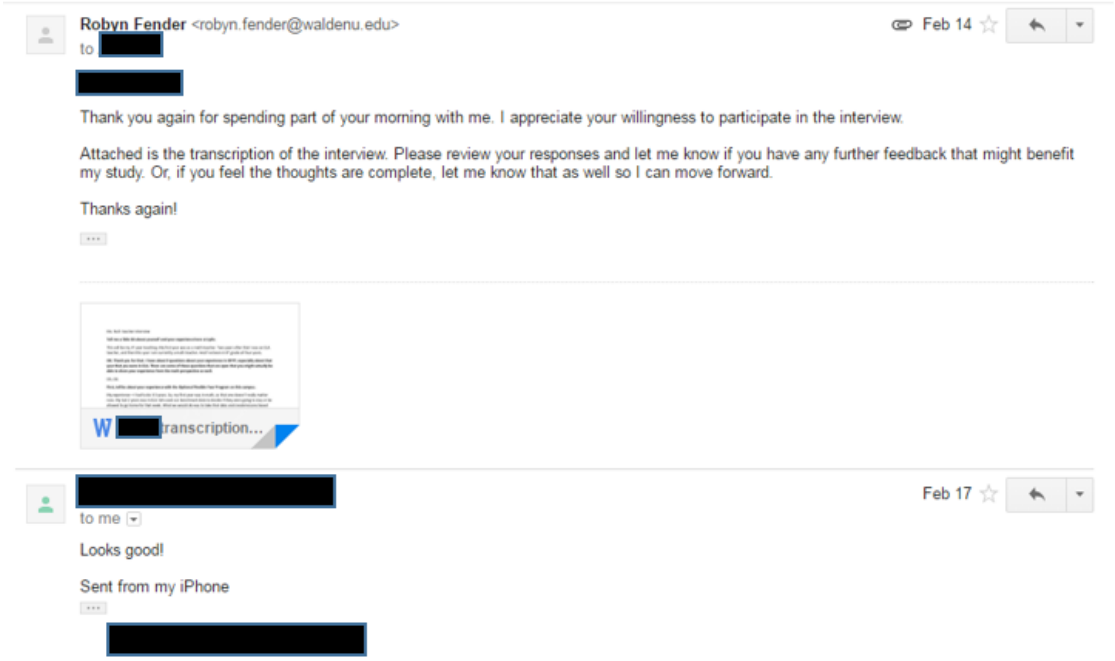
Is this a new strategy this year?

No, we actually implemented it 2 years ago.

What other information, if any, would you like to provide regarding OFYP?

I would say that I think it's effective if you have the right qualification for the kids, or requirements, because, I think I saw, one year we had a really low class and they were just all generally low and we had really big remediation classes during Flex. That made it hard. Those class sizes, we didn't have that one-on-one as much. So I think we struggled with just because we had just like 30 kids go home that week. I do see whenever we do have the smaller classes and we work one-on one with the kids it will benefit the majority of them. It won't always benefit all of them, but the majority of them I do see improvement.

Appendix C: Evidence of Member Checking



Robyn Fender <robyn.fender@waldenu.edu> Feb 14

to [redacted]

[redacted]

Thank you again for spending part of your morning with me. I appreciate your willingness to participate in the interview.

Attached is the transcription of the interview. Please review your responses and let me know if you have any further feedback that might benefit my study. Or, if you feel the thoughts are complete, let me know that as well so I can move forward.

Thanks again!

W [redacted]transcription...

[redacted] Feb 17

to me

Looks good!

Sent from my iPhone

[redacted]

Appendix D: Sampling of Responses from Questionnaire

1. Describe your experiences with the Optional Flexible Year Program (OFYP).	2. What are the benefits, or problems, of using OFYP for student remediation?	3. In your opinion, how do the curriculum and resources used during OFYP help to improve student achievement?
i'm a classroom teacher what worked with students that struggled on tested subject, based on predetermined criteria from admin.	Benefits: struggling students get smaller class sizes and can get more 1 on 1 attention from a teacher. Problems: Our system had 70% to 80% of students in the OFYP, thus cancelling the opportunity for that 1 on 1 from a teacher. Some classes felt like the regular school year.	I don't think it did.
I had only experienced the OFYP last year, as it was my first year teaching in the state of Texas. It was overall an unpleasant experience due to the fact that it is hard to hold students accountable for those weeks.	There are benefits if the students are willing to work. However, the majority of the students who are required to attend these flex weeks are typically the students who don't want to work throughout the year. Those who did complete the work and actively participated did benefit from the flex weeks. However, again, it is hard to hold students accountable. Especially the flex week in June.	In all honesty, I don't think it helped improve student achievement. I had been new to the idea of an OFYP and was not given much direction, other than to create a RWL and inter-disciplinary plan to re-teach the concepts.

It was stressful and hard to work with kids who didn't want to be here and only see school as social time. The last week of school OFYP, was much more difficult. Simply because you have NOTHING to hold them accountable. As an elective teacher, I was asked to create content and lessons for topics I knew little about. As I got everything set up and ready to go, I always found my lesson and contact was at a much higher level than the students could handle. I always had to backup and regroup to a level the students could handle. Once had 5 math to cover in a 2.5 hour period. I discovered I had to spend the entire 2.5 hours explaining how to multiply numbers with decimals. With lots of practice, I had all students multiplying fractions with confidence by the end of the time I had with them.	If benefits were taken advantage of then it would have been helpful to have students who have the desire to be here. Problems were majority of students forced to be here are lower than the growth percentage needed to pass. Student engagement was probably the most challenging. Because of the way Flex Days were set up and scheduled (for example, at the end of the year) many student felt the year was over and Flex Training had no meaning for them.	If the student achievement was taken advantage of then it would have been beneficial, however only a few students were here to improve their scores and get something out of the week. It was even tougher the last week of school. For may Flex sessions, I was expected to work with the core teachers on what the students needed. Many times, the core teachers did not wish to share (or maybe did not have time to share). I ended up doing the best I can coming up with what students needed and wanted to do.
The Flex weeks could have had an impact except for the fact that teachers were instructed to make it game like, fun and exciting so students would want to come and would not feel punished for having to be here.	The biggest benefit was small groups of students to help/assist. The biggest challenge was elective teachers being assigned a core subject to remediate. The core teacher did all the planning, work and more to have multiple elective teachers call in sick or mid-week take students to the gym or	The small group setting with a core teacher that would focus on one major weakness and use repetition and a variety of learning strategies/techniques would help some students.

outside.

Multiple years of experience, some of which were good and others not.	The timing of the days was always a major problem. If close to spring break, passing students lost a week of instructional time. To compensate the dates changed and were divided up better. However the poor students needed more dates.	Focus was given on tested subjects.