Promoting Reading Comprehension Skills in the Elementary Classroom
Course Syllabus

Catalog Description
The purpose of reading is to comprehend what is being read, and yet research on comprehension has demonstrated that readers differ in how they approach reading and the meaning they take away. By studying good readers, researchers have identified the strategies good readers use to comprehend text. Instructional programs that explicitly teach these strategies have been successful in improving student’s comprehension. In this workshop, participants will examine teaching practices that help students in grades three through five develop concrete strategies for constructing meaning from both narrative and expository text. The goal for strategy instruction is to prepare students to become active and purposeful readers who think about their text before, during and after reading. Finally, participants will explore instructional procedures where students learn how to coordinate key comprehension strategies.

Prerequisites
This is an introductory workshop for teachers, technology specialists, curriculum specialists, professional development specialists, or other school personnel. Participants are expected to have regular access to computers, and proficiency with email and current web-browsers.

Goals
This course will enable participants to:
• Identify comprehension strategies that are important to teach
• Explore how to explicitly teach comprehension strategies and guide students’ practice in applying them
• Help students build story schema (background knowledge about stories) by showing how narrative text has recurring elements (story grammar): characters, settings, conflicts, major events, resolutions, and themes
• Help students draw on their story schema to make predictions about events, and consequences
• Help students distinguish common text structures in informational text in order to better understand and recall the main ideas of the text
• Understand how analyzing question-answer relationships (QAR) can be a useful strategy for approaching comprehension questions

Assessment and Course Requirements
This workshop is divided into six one-week sessions, each of which includes readings, an activity, and an online discussion among workshop participants. The time for completing each session is estimated to be four to five hours. Participants are expected to be engaged in course activities for approximately 30 hours during the six-session course.

Course Products
As a final product, participants will evaluate their own comprehension instruction and program and develop an action plan for making changes to better support reading comprehension in the classroom.

Discussion Participation
Participants will be evaluated on the frequency and quality of their discussion board participation. Participants are required to post a minimum of two substantial postings each session, including one that begins a new thread and one that responds to an existing thread. Postings that begin new threads will be reviewed based on their relevance, demonstrated understanding of course concepts, examples cited, and overall quality. Postings that respond to other participants will be evaluated on relevance, degree to which they extend the discussion, and tone.

Session Overviews:

Session One: Strategies Good Readers Use
Good readers are active and strategic readers. In this session participants will read and learn about effective
strategies that are research-based and promote active and strategic reading. Participants will then assess their own comprehension instruction in terms of these important strategies. Participants will use this needs assessment as the basis for the final project they will submit in the last session of this workshop.

Session Two: Effective Comprehension Instruction
In this session, participants will explore effective comprehension instruction. Specifically, when teachers engage in effective comprehension instruction they explicitly explain what a comprehension strategy is and when to use it. They demonstrate/model how to apply the strategy to reading text, guide students to practice, and help students apply the strategy to their own reading. Through this instructional process, students assume increasing responsibility for the strategic thinking that will help them better comprehend. Participants will explore some of these comprehension strategies through readings and watching a video of a classroom teacher, and then develop a think-aloud that models the strategy of making predictions.

Session Three: Comprehension Instruction for Narrative Text
This session will explore some key comprehension strategies that can help students understand narrative text. The ultimate goal of comprehension strategies is to have students coordinate the use of strategies as they approach text before, during, and after the reading. For example, before reading, questioning can set a purpose; during reading, searching for the main idea of a chapter can focus the students’ attention on determining importance; and after reading, having the students identify key quotes for the main idea can help them summarize. The coordination of several comprehension strategies is required before, during and after reading. In this session, participants will explore how to teach these comprehension strategies and then watch a series of videos that show students engaged in strategic thinking before, during, and after reading with their teacher. Participants will then discuss how to plan for teaching these strategies in their own classroom—what to teach at the beginning of the year and what to teach later.

Session Four: Comprehension Instruction for Informational Text
This session will explore comprehension instruction that can help students understand informational text. Analyzing informational text for its organizational structure is an important strategy for understanding how the key ideas relate to each other. In this session, participants will examine common informational text structures and how visual representations (graphic organizers) of these common text structures can help students identify the organization, see the relationship between key ideas, summarize the key points, and recall the content. Participants will analyze a sample reading passage to see how identifying a text structure and corresponding graphic organizer can be a useful strategy for comprehending the main idea in text and for answering comprehension questions.

Session Five: Orchestrating Several Comprehension Strategies with Question/Answer Relationships (QAR)
In previous sessions, we have talked about individual comprehension strategies, but to comprehend texts, students need to know how to orchestrate several comprehension strategies. To illustrate this orchestration, participants will focus on a teaching procedure in this session that requires the versatile use of several strategies: question-answer relationships. Answering questions by using both information in the text and one’s own knowledge requires students to read between the lines—to infer. Participants will think about how to use QAR in their own instruction by developing comprehension questions for two books of their choosing. Finally, participants may begin working on the final project that they will submit in the next session.

Session Six: Developing an Action Plan for Comprehension Instruction
In this last session, participants will evaluate the comprehension environment and instruction in their classroom program and develop an action plan based on what they have learned in the workshop.

Final Project
For their final project, participants will write an action plan to set goals for their classroom comprehension program. Participants will evaluate their current classroom comprehension program and determine their own next steps for instruction.

1. Review the needs assessment completed in Session 1.

2. Download and print “A Checklist for Assessing the Comprehension Environment and Instruction in the Classroom.” Complete this checklist.
3. Download the Action Plan template. Based on responses to the checklist and the needs assessment for comprehension instruction from Session One, participants will develop an action plan to refine and strengthen their instructional practices in reading comprehension based on what they have learned in this workshop. They will use the template to guide the development of their action plan.