

READ 3520: Teaching Reading in the Middle School

My worst nightmare happens every day –my middle school students aren't reading even close to grade level and I am supposed to teach them science. The ones that can read don't want to. Consequently, I find myself trying to avoid reading altogether. I teach around reading in order to make sure students understand science. - Anonymous, Middle School Teacher

The headline-making reading wars of recent years – pitting phonics against whole language – have obscured the less visible but highly critical issue of reading above elementary grades. Among middle schools across the country a quiet crisis is brewing. This crisis focuses on the reading abilities of adolescent students. – Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko and Hurwitz.

Course Description

This course will investigate the theories, research, issues, practices, and complexities of teaching middle school reading. It will call upon students' personal experience, expectations, and perspectives while incorporating readings. Students will frame reading strategies within the context of middle school curriculum and be asked to identify potential advantages and disadvantages of these strategies as they relate to the learning characteristics of middle-school students. Specifically, course objectives are as follows:

- a) to provide a framework for thinking about teaching reading in middle school;
- b) to explore current research and writings in the area of middle-school literacy;
- c) to identify appropriate strategies that will engage middle-school readers and allow them to be active readers in all classes;
- d) to compare instructional practices for narrative and expository texts;
- e) to identify and explore current issues in the field of middle school literacy;
- f) to present and discuss perspectives regarding assessment, staffing, delivery models, and materials;
- g) to gain a better understanding of what are often referred to as “non-readers”, students with disabilities that impact reading, and the instructional needs of diverse learners;
- h) to initiate and continue a dialogue on the importance of the bridge from elementary to middle school reading and adolescents as readers

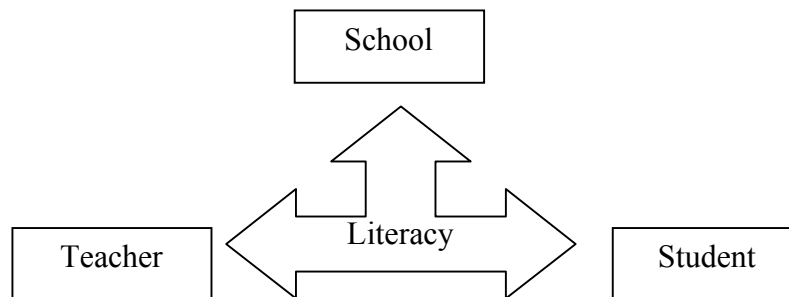
Required Texts

Beers, K. (2003). *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman

Curtis, C.P. (1936) *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. New York: Random House Children's Books.

Interactive Model for Literacy

Literacy is not something that just happens, and a complete and satisfactory definition of literacy is hard to come by. Drawing hard lines around the concept usually leads to disagreements, and the ever-changing nature of the materials that we are expected to “read”—video, resources on the Internet, interactive electronic games, etc.—may seem to make literacy a fuzzier concept than ever. Perhaps the most important understanding about literacy that you should carry forward into this course is that literacy never exists in a vacuum: all sorts of factors have an influence on the literacy of our students (and ourselves!). In this course, we will explore the complexities of literacy in the middle grades using the following framework:



What each brings to the table...

<u>School</u>	<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Student</u>
GPS / QCCs	Theoretical Lens	Affective/Emotional
Curriculum	Beliefs on Reading	Characteristics
Materials	Instruction	Ability/Disability
Assessments	Experiences	Experiences
Setting	Personality	Home / Family

We will use this interactive model to investigate the following domains of literacy:

- Curriculum / Content (including GPS)
- Instruction / Strategies
- Assessment of Readers
- Learner Characteristics of Middle Schoolers and Reluctant Readers
- Affective / Emotional Components (including motivation)

Please keep this interactive framework in mind as we progress through the course. Get in the habit of thinking of yourself as a reader—it is your instructor’s firmly-held belief that teachers who see themselves as readers are better equipped to put themselves into the mindset of a struggling middle school reader. Perhaps you read novels for pleasure, or maybe you’re the kind of reader who turns immediately to the box scores in the daily newspaper, or you know every weather Website and how to read even the most complicated storm statistics—whatever kind of reader you are, connecting with your own reading life can make you a better teacher for the students you want to help.

Course Requirements

This course will be based on a total of 200 points broken down into the following components:

- A) Participation (7 points): Participation in an online course consists of turning in assignments on time and corresponding with your instructor and peers in a professional manner. Posts and emails should be composed as if you were sitting in a classroom. You are not “graded” on spelling and grammar mechanics in any e-mail posting, so you should not let your good thoughts be stifled by fears about editing failures; on the other hand, you may benefit from preparing your comments and responses in a Word document, proofreading for clarity and content, then cutting and pasting into a WebCT posting. (Note: Prepared papers like the Literacy Profile and the Text Set narrative are expected to be carefully edited and proofread. Points may be deducted in these more formal pieces for mechanics.)
- B) Literacy Profile (20 points): This project offers an opportunity for you to examine yourself as a reader. Most of us have had significant experiences with reading in our past; for example, that sinking, cold feeling you may have experienced when called on to read aloud in class. Understanding who you are as a reader and how you got that way will help you be a better teacher of struggling adolescents. Full instructions for the project are available in Module 1.
- C) Book Club (20 points): During our Book Club segment, we will be reading *The Watsons go to Birmingham*, a novel written against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Era of the 1960’s. Discussions of this book will be entirely on-line, and this format presents certain challenges and opportunities. For 5 weeks, you will be reading and discussing the novel on-line with your peers and your professor. **Please DO NOT begin reading ahead of time.** The purpose of the Book Club is to read together in “real time”, not to get the book finished before the due date. Full instructions are available in Module 4.
- D) Text Set (20 points): Many struggling middle school readers need support accessing and understanding content presented in their textbooks. By building a text set of materials around a particular curricular topic, you will gain experience in supporting students in their textbook reading. You will write a reflective narrative to accompany your selections, and the narrative should show evidence of (1) your strategies for locating materials, (2) your criteria for choosing texts, and (3) your understanding of “what counts” as a text in the instruction of adolescent readers. Full instructions and definitions are available in Module 9. (Note: building a text set can be difficult when you’ve never done one before: after you’ve created one, you’ll be ready to do dozens! Your instructor is available to answer questions and address concerns every step of the way.)
- E) Quizzes (14 @ 8 pts. each): Within each module, there is a short quiz. These quizzes are timed and consist of 8 objective questions (T/F, multiple-choice). They will be released at the beginning date of each module. Please be aware of the cut-off times of these quizzes. Once the cut-off time has passed, you will not be able to access the quiz. You may take the quizzes at any time prior to the due date. Once you access the quiz, you

cannot exit out and re-re-enter. Please find a quiet place and give yourself enough time to complete these quizzes in one sitting. Often, inclement weather can affect Internet access, so be mindful of the weather. You will not be granted re-entry or a “do-over” due to weather related issues. If you have time-related concerns that cannot be addressed by taking the quiz at any point during the module, you must address those with me well before the deadline—not doing so puts you at risk of receiving no credit for the quiz.

- F) Online Discussion (21 points—3 points per module): Modules 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 require some discussion and response; for example, you might be asked to comment on some aspect of the week’s reading, or you might undertake an assigned activity and share your experience with the group, or perhaps you might be given a particular case of reading difficulty in the middle grades and asked to recommend strategies. Each week’s Online Discussion during the above modules will be clearly assigned within the module, and each week’s discussion is worth 3 points. The process, along with some recommendations for this kind of asynchronous discussion, is outlined for you on the WebCT homepage: click on the link labeled “About OnlineDiscussion”. During the first 10 days of class (Module 1) we’ll be practicing online discussion so that you know what is expected of you—these first discussions will not be graded, but your participation in them will be noted as part of your Participation points.

General Considerations

1. Email

All communications that require a personal response will need to be carried out via email or phone. The email you should use to contact the instructor is the instructor’s WebCT email and not his or her other email addresses. The reason for this is to make sure that record keeping of correspondences can be easily tracked and that emails do not get “lost” or overlooked by going to an email address that may not be monitored as closely. The discussion board is a place for us to discuss course topics and for you to work in groups. (Your questions or concerns about the course may get overlooked in the discussion area). Email will be an important means of communicating with your instructor outside of class. You should strive for professionalism, clarity and efficiency in your communication. If you are trying to communicate multiple ideas/issues/ questions, it is recommended that you use an outline format with your questions numbered (e.g., 1, 2, 3, etc.) along with a brief statement (1 to 3 sentences) summarizing your points. If necessary, your instructor will ask for clarification, so save yourself time by articulating your questions as well as possible the first time.

2. Discussion Boards

The discussion boards will serve multiple purposes for us this semester. Besides our targeted use of them during Book Club and during Modules 2, 3, 9, 10, 11 and 13, the discussion boards will be a forum in which you, as a class, can build learning communities to address issues of interest to you. Posts to the discussion boards should be considered analogous to a discussion that would take place in a typical college classroom. With this comparison in mind, the asynchronous nature of online discussion (meaning there will be a lag time between people’s posts) will allow you to

make thoughtful, well –written comments to the boards. (Note: see the previous note about spelling and mechanical issues: while you’re not being graded on mechanics, you still should make the best effort to present your ideas as clearly and carefully as possible.)

Posts must be 1) posted to the correct discussion group and 2) “threaded”: if they are a response to a question from the instructor or a previous post by another student, do not “compose a new post” but “reply” to the previous post. Careful “threading” makes a dialogue easier to follow

3. Due Dates

All assignments should be submitted ON or BEFORE THE ASSIGNED DUE DATE AS MARKED ON THE COURSE CALENDAR. Please be aware that due dates are subject to change, and read your Important Announcements daily. Everyone is busy with school and work; however, your decision to register for this course is an indication that you have made your success in READ 3520 a high priority. Assignments turned in past the due date will not be accepted without reasonable justification. Obviously, crises take place (e.g., death in the family, child who is sick, etc.) that can reasonably result in missed deadlines, and your instructor will deal with such cases on an individual basis. Examples of unreasonable requests include frequent computer malfunctions, outside class-work, travel, or job responsibilities that inhibit meeting the required deadlines. If you anticipate missing a deadline on an assignment, you should send an email (before the deadline) with the following information:

- (a) The circumstances that require that you miss the assignment.
- (b) The date you intend to submit the assignment.

Whether an extension is allowed will be at the instructor's discretion on a case-by-case basis. Assignments submitted late without a written extension from the instructor will incur a 10%-per-day penalty. After one week, the grade for the assignment will be entered as a zero.

4. Grading Concerns

Many times during the course of a semester students will have concerns regarding the assignment of a particular grade. Some of the grading is subjective (e.g., points earned for professionalism and discussion boards) while other aspects are more objective (e.g., quizzes). If you have concerns regarding a particular grade, then please contact your instructor to discuss your grade; in addition, you should submit your work with a typed memo indicating your concerns.

5. Academic Honesty:

To plagiarize is "to steal and pass off as one's own the ideas or words of another" (Webster, 1967, p. 646), or to not acknowledge the author of an idea. If plagiarism is evident, the student may receive zero points for the assignment, and/or a grade of "F" for the course, and may be expelled from the University. For specific information, review the UGA publication *A Culture of Honesty: Policies and Procedures on Academic Honesty* which can be found at: http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/academic_honesty/culture_honesty.htm.

6. Final course grades. Your final grade will be based on the number of points accrued from the submission of required products, combined with professionalism points. There is a total of 200 possible points in the course.

7. Incompletes: The assignment of “incompletes” is discouraged and will be used only in cases of extreme emergencies where satisfactory progress has been demonstrated and a passing grade may be earned. In the event that an "I" grade is appropriate, students should notify the instructor at the time such circumstances arise. Upon notification, a course completion contract between the student and instructor will be developed before the last week of the semester.

8. Students with documented disabilities who anticipate a need for special accommodations in this course should meet with the instructor early in the semester.

References for Further Reading

Your textbook presents an excellent list of books and articles for further reading (p. 369-378). The brief list of titles below (books only) is adapted from Beers’ list, and will provide you with some good starting places for learning more about topics in middle school reading that interest you.

Allen, J. (1999). *Words Words Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4-12*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Allen, J. (2000). *Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

Beers, K. (2001.) *Reading Strategies Handbook*. Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Blevins, W. (2001). *Teaching Phonics and Word Study in the Intermediate Grades*. New York: Scholastic.

Schoenbach, R., Greenleaf, C., Cziko, C., and Hurwitz, L. (1999). *Reading for Understanding: A Guide to Improving Reading in Middle and High School Classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers.

Tovani, C. (2000). *I Read It But I Don't Get It*. York, ME: Stenhouse.