

Example of a Well-Designed Course

1. SPECIFIC CONTEXT

- The subject matter: Education
- The title of the course: **Language Arts for Special Needs Adolescents**
- Typical class size: 20-25
- Level of Course: Graduate
- Mode of delivery: Hybrid
- Type of institution: Comprehensive college, largely undergraduate with small professional graduate programs
- Audience: Practicing Special Education Teachers

2. BIG PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

“Language Arts for Special Needs Adolescents” was designed to help special education teachers meet the “Highly Qualified Teacher” (HQT) content requirement in English/Language Arts established by *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB).

The course had three major objectives. Participants would:

- 1) increase their understanding of the Ohio Language Arts Content Standards
- 2) have opportunities to learn about and practice evidence-based strategies that enhance reading and writing skills; and
- 3) refine their own literacy skills so that they can convey enthusiasm about reading and writing to their students.

The following is taken from the course syllabus:

“Participants will:

1. gain an understanding of Ohio English/Language Arts (ELA) standards and learn to apply them to instruction for students with disabilities.
2. review standards-based model lessons in ELA and determine how they can be adapted for special education students.
3. enhance their own literacy skills so that they can convey enthusiasm about reading and writing to their students.
4. develop a repertoire of pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading teaching routines and learning strategies aimed at enhancing fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
5. develop a repertoire of teaching routines and learning strategies for demand and process writing
6. find new and engaging ways to teach word recognition, grammar, spelling, and punctuation to adolescents”

3. SITUATIONAL FACTORS/ SPECIAL PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGE

Strong Negative Attitudes Initially. On an online survey administered prior to the first session, one-third of the teachers expressed negative feelings about having to take the course and approximately one-half took a neutral stance. While they were not subject area specialists, they felt quite qualified, based on their extensive experience with special needs youngsters.

I knew that I had to build on and celebrate participants' prior knowledge, provide resources that would be deemed useful and practical, and create a positive climate that would allow a community of practice to develop across the ten class meetings. It was both rewarding and challenging to teach a course that required me to make "lemons out of lemonade" (i.e., to take the NCLB requirement that seemed arbitrary and unfair and find a way to get participants to feel that the course was worthwhile).

4. 3-COLUMN TABLE

Learning Goals:	Assessment Activities:	Learning Activities:
Learning how to learn: Students should be able to locate and evaluate Web-based resources that can enhance their teaching practices.	Peer review of online literacy resources	Construction of a course Web site with links to peer-reviewed online resources that demonstrate best literacy practices
Caring: Students should have opportunities to talk about classroom highs and lows.	Interactive logs kept by learning communities (with course instructor responses)	Learning community meetings held for one hour each week across the term (ten minutes set aside for "highs" and "lows")
Human dimension: In order to promote positive interdependence, students should share teaching strategies and resources.	Online discussion forums Final presentation by each learning community with class debriefing	Collaborative learning strategies employed by the learning communities (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991)
Foundational knowledge: Students should enhance their knowledge of English/language arts standards and standards-based instruction.	Classroom assessment techniques: Exit slips and one minute papers (Angelo and Cross, 1993)	Mini-lessons modeling best practices
Application: Students should try out standards-based instruction in their own classrooms.	Classroom assessment techniques End-of-term survey	Classroom discussion
Integration: Students should link personal and	Individual reading/writing	Writing a teaching autobiography and keeping

professional literacy skills.	conferences	a reading log
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5. WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week	Segment 1 Small Group Learning Communities	Segment 2 Whole Class Standards-Based Mini- Lessons	Segment 3 Individualized Personal Literacy Activities
1	Learning Communities: Participants select one of four topics (strategies for struggling readers, demand writing to a prompt, grammar instruction, and content area literacy), based on personal preference, and join a group. Each group is a separate learning community with a set of guiding questions, readings and an online discussion forum. The communities are responsible for a 30 minute Power Point presentation at the end of the course that includes web-based resources.	Activity Related to English/Language Arts Content Standards: Taking one grade level and aligning the indicators with Bloom's taxonomy. Mini-lesson (voice) based on a picture book. The picture book emphasizes the author's earliest memories. This lesson was adapted from <i>Picture Books: An Annotated Bibliography with Activities for Teaching Writing</i> published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.	Writing Workshop: Participants draft a "piece" on an early literacy memory. They share drafts with a partner and, if they are willing, with a small group. Emphasis is placed on voice.
2	On a weekly basis, groups assign the following roles: recorder, materials manager, online discussion forum moderator, and in-class discussion time-keeper. Ten minutes of each meeting is set aside for sharing classroom highs and lows from the past week. The remainder of the hour is spent discussing readings and preparing for the presentation.	Before and During Reading Strategies: Mini-lesson (guided reading) using <u>Freak the Mighty</u> by Rodman Philbrick, our class novel for the course.	Writing Workshop: Participants work in the computer lab drafting Chapter One of their teaching autobiographies. I circulate around and hold informal conferences.
3	Learning community work continues	Vocabulary Strategies: Mini-lesson (vocabulary self-selection) demonstrating how to have students create a word journal using vocabulary from <u>Freak the Mighty</u> .	Literature Circle: <u>Freak the Mighty</u> discussion using literature circle techniques
4	Learning community work continues	Word Recognition Strategies: Mini-lesson (making words and word sorts) based on Patricia Cunningham's <i>Making Words Their Way</i> and Donald Bear's <i>Words Their Way</i>	Literature Circle: <u>Freak the Mighty</u> discussion using literature circle techniques
5	Learning community work	After Reading/Assessment	Writing Workshop: Participants work in

	continues	Strategies: Mini-lesson (retelling/summarizing) using content from Kyrene Beers' text, <i>When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do</i>	the computer lab drafting Chapter Two of their teaching autobiographies. I circulate around and hold informal conferences.
6	Field Trip to Children/Young Adult Bookstore: The bookstore owner discusses titles appropriate for struggling adolescent readers and provides a brief overview of each title and a rationale for selecting it. After the one hour presentation, participants have time to browse and buy.		
7	Learning community work continues	Writing: Mini-lesson (demand writing) focused on ways to help students cope with constructed responses on state tests using Ardith Cole's <i>Better Answers</i> formula	Writing Workshop: Participants work in the computer lab drafting Chapter Three of their teaching autobiographies. I circulate around and hold informal conferences.
8	Learning community work continues	Writing: Mini-lesson (grammar) using the concept of mentor sentences from Jeff Anderson's <i>Mechanically Inclined</i>	Reading/Writing Workshop: Participants have an opportunity to continue to work on their teaching autobiographies. I circulate and hold individual reading conferences about their independent reading selections documented in their reading logs.
9	Group Presentations	Writing: Mini-lesson (five types of writing) based on the <i>Collins Writing Program</i>	Writing Workshop: Participants volunteer to sit in the "author's chair," share their teaching autobiographies and get feedback from peers.
10	Group Presentations	Writing: Mini-lesson (editing) using "express lane editing" from <i>Mechanically Inclined</i>	Writing Workshop: Participants volunteer to sit in the "author's chair," share their teaching autobiographies and get feedback from peers.

6. EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

- The overall level of student engagement

Reactions to Specific Instructional Activities Online Course Evaluation Administered at the End of the Course

Class Activities

	Rating				
	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Marginal	Poor
Mini-lessons	14 60.87%	4 17.39%	5 21.74%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Freak the Mighty Book Study and Lit Circles	17 73.91%	5 21.74%	1 4.35%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Online Course Web Site with Shared Resources	11 47.83%	9 39.13%	3 13.04%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Discussion Forums Online	6 26.09%	8 34.78%	7 30.43%	1 4.35%	1 4.35%
In-Class Learning Community	7 30.43%	8 34.78%	6 26.09%	1 4.35%	1 4.35%

Bookstore Visit	17 73.91%	4 17.39%	2 8.70%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Reading/Writing Workshop	6 26.09%	8 34.78%	8 34.78%	1 4.35%	0 0.00%

- The KINDS of learning achieved

Application of Course Material
Online Course Evaluation at the End of the Course

Check each of the materials, methods, or strategies that we covered in class that you have had an opportunity to try out with your students across the last ten weeks.

Materials/Methods/Literacy Strategies	Response Count	Percentage
word sorts	7	31.82 %
making words lesson	10	45.45 %
literature circles	6	27.27 %
read aloud	18	81.82 %
individual reading conferences	5	22.73 %
Collins Type 1,2,3, or 4 writing	10	45.45 %
focus correction areas	11	50.00 %
Freak the Mighty (class novel)	11	50.00 %
guided reading lesson	13	59.09 %
personal dictionaries or vocabulary	10	45.45 %
mentor sentences (<u>Grammatically Inclined approach</u>)	6	27.27 %

- The proportion of the class (23 students) that achieved high levels of learning
 - 22 teachers felt that the course was challenging;
 - 19 believed that they had been required to think independently and creatively;
 - And 20 concluded that they had learned a great deal.
- **Attitude Shift:** The online post- survey, administered separately from the standard course evaluation, revealed that there had been a shift from the largely neutral (10 participants) or negative (7 participants) attitudes expressed on the pre-survey.
 - Students at the end of the course were either extremely positive (9 participants), positive (10 participants), or neutral (4 participants) about the course.

7. MOST EXCITING ASPECT OF THE RE-DESIGNED COURSE FOR YOU

Using Fink's integrated approach to course design freed me up to grow professionally.

The physical and virtual conversations gave me a view into twenty-three classrooms. I was one teacher among many, and together we were learning how to enhance the literacy skills of special needs adolescents. Since most of the heavy lifting was done before the course began, I just had to fine tune based on my own reflections and participant feedback. Students now had a significant voice, and I was in a position to listen to and act on what they were telling me.

8. YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION

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