Office of Accountability
Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment

A Qualitative Analysis of the 2014-2015 Elementary Year Long Reading Course

Technical Report

Reem Abdelrazek
Data Analyst
Knox County Schools
Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment

February 2016

Overview

Students' ability to read has long been tied with academic success. Reading is considered a stepping stone to other content areas. Educational research has shown that children who read significantly below grade level by third grade are at high-risk of academic failure and dropping out later. As such, students' ability to read has also long been a concern across the nation, and especially in Tennessee. Reading and literacy proficiency rates for the state have been a continuing challenge despite recent gains as noted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress report card. In an effort to improve reading proficiency, the Tennessee Department of Education invited literacy educators to a year-long reading (YLR) course to help improve foundational reading skills.

During school year 2013-14 (SY1314), Knox County Schools (KCS) sent four literacy coaches to the state training, which was comprised of seven individual classes throughout the school year. Secondary and elementary literacy coaches attended to learn more about decoding and language, English/Language Arts (ELA) standards, and engaging methods to improve student comprehension and writing. As a result of the state YLR course, the KCS ELA department adapted the materials and created its own YLR courses for SY1415 with the goal of teaching higher-level reading instruction to KCS educators. The YLR course was offered by both the secondary and elementary ELA departments. This program falls under the first goal and objective, Focus on Every Student: Guarantee Excellence in the Classroom, and the second goal, Invest in Our People: Built & Support Our Community of Learners, of the KCS Strategic Plan, *Excellence for Every Child*.

This report is an overview and program evaluation of the elementary YLR course in KCS. The scope was limited to elementary due to the heightened interest in foundational reading skills and ensuring students read on grade level in entering secondary grades. The program evaluation was developed in concert with the program leaders and through course observation and survey data. Perception data indicates the program was successful in its goal of improving reading skills and knowledge. An overwhelming majority of educators who responded to the survey somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that their content knowledge increased.

Methodology

Most program evaluations are based on a program description, key research questions, quantitative and qualitative findings, and recommendations. In the process of the program evaluation, it became clear that there was not a single testing metric that is fully aligned with the stated goals of the program. For example, foundational reading skills are most critical in grades K-2, grades in which there is no standardized state assessment.

Results from the STAR Early Literacy assessment were deemed inadequate due to their lack generalizability. While that assessment is administered to grades K-2, in a review of the sub-skillsets, the program leaders (and content specialists) were able to identify only *two* of 57 sub-skillsets that could possibly capture decoding and fluency—and that was after much

debate. As such, STAR Early Literacy data was not used as a quantitative metric to measure program effectiveness. In grades 3-5, state assessments and STAR Reading data were also excluded, as they do not strictly capture reading fluency. Achievement and value-added data would also be inappropriate measures for the same reason. It should be noted that Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) probes do appropriately gauge reading fluency but are not administered to most Tier 1 and Tier 2 students. Based on the dearth of appropriate quantitative metrics, this program evaluation relied on qualitative data and analysis.

The methodology used in this report was based on the responsive evaluation framework as developed by author and evaluator Robert Stake. In particular, it focused on the

- program description,
- background and context of the participants,
- process activities, and intended outcomes as compared to actual outcomes.

The program description was developed in concert with program leaders and direct observation of process activities. Process activities were captured through program leader interviews, review of course materials, and direct observation. The program evaluator codified intended outcomes based on program leader interviews and course materials. Perception data was collected via survey of program participants. Finally, an analysis was conducted of intended outcomes and perceived outcomes as based on participant profiles, interviews and survey data.

Program Description
In order to comprehensively record and report an accurate description of the YLR course, the program evaluation involved: a thorough review of the materials provided by the state to the literacy coaches and the materials provided to KCS educators in the YLR course; observation of the course; a participant survey; and regular interviews and conversations with the program leaders. Therefore, the program description is not based just on objectives in a book or hand out, but also actual feedback and process activities as recorded by the program evaluator.
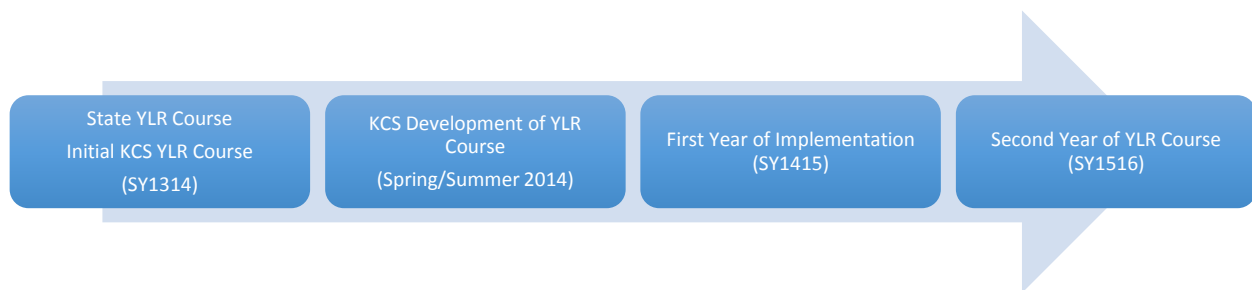
Inception: State Program
The state YLR course was embedded professional development comprised of modules based on the science of reading. The goal of the course was to build teacher content knowledge. The K-3 course centered on foundations of reading acquisition, improving instruction, and was comprised a series of core modules. Each module, a self-contained component of a larger unit, focused on a specific topic used in the training and came with reference materials available for later access. In particular, the state course used the LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) series of modules. LETRS is professional development for educators in K-12 instruction of reading, writing, and spelling.

The modules are intended to enable participants to understand the following:

1. How children learn to read and why some children have difficulty with this aspect of literacy
2. What must be taught during reading and spelling lessons and how to teach most effectively
3. Why all components of reading instruction are necessary and how they are related
4. How to interpret individual differences in student achievement
5. How to explain the form and structure of English

In turn, the KCS ELA department took the LETRS program and combined it with an existing KCS program, CARE (Children Achieving Reading Excellence), a current decoding program used in KCS for K-2 reading instruction created by district reading supervisors.

State YLR Course
Initial KCS YLR Course
(SY1314)

KCS Development of YLR Course
(Spring/Summer 2014)

First Year of Implementation
(SY1415)

Second Year of YLR Course
(SY1516)

The four literacy coaches continued their regular duties within the district while also traveling back and forth to Nashville to attend courses. The elementary ELA supervisor also provided supplemental training that focused on the science of reading. Additionally, during the SY1314 and while attending the state courses, the YLR coaches led three cohorts through seven full-day sessions to disseminate the information they learned and also developed the course layout for the SY1415 school year.

Intended Outcomes
While the state course had specific objects, the KCS YLR course was an adaptation with its own goals. Over a series of several meetings and conversations with the program leaders, a clear vision of the intended outcomes of the elementary course emerged.

"The bottom line is: we want children to read."

The number one goal of the YLR course is for KCS teachers to learn how to teach strong reading skills that will enable students to read well and on grade-level. Predicated upon that goal, the primary outcome of the YLR course is to **increase teacher content knowledge**. Based on that goal, there are several secondary intended outcomes to the YLR course. These intents were developed by the program leaders and codified by the program evaluator.

The primary goals of the YLR is:

- Increase teacher reading content knowledge

Secondary goals include:

- Increase teacher ability to teach reading foundational skills, especially in grades K-2
- Increase student knowledge (ability to decode since it is related to ability to read)
- Higher quality reading instruction in Tier 1 to reduce the number of students in intervention over time
- Eventually, it is hoped that year-over-year gaps between students' ability and grade level expectations decrease
- Increase efficiency in lesson planning and how planning time is spent through modeling and lesson plans
- Increase in teacher knowledge of student placement and need (diagnose why students are not reading or meeting benchmarks)
- Applying the foundational reading skills learned in other content areas, such as social studies, math and science
- Empower teachers
- Engender a desire for further training

The following goals were outlined for YLR course participants:

- Become a reading brain expert
- Be diagnostic, then prescriptive when planning and implementing reading instruction
- Meet the requirements of RTI2 with confidence
- Easily differentiate Tier 1 instruction
- Be smarter than your program
- Align research-based instruction with the TEAM/TAP rubrics
- Integrate content area literacy and writing
- Reach and teach struggling readers
- Leave with instructional lessons and materials for teaching reading in the comprehensive literacy block

Building reading skills is also tied to the recently updated Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI^2) framework that was implemented by the state at the elementary level across the state. RTI^2 focuses on differentiated instruction and intervention services to meet students' needs. The ability of teachers to not only understand the science of reading, but to also diagnose student placement and learning needs is part of the RTI^2 mission. As such, the goals of the YLR course overlap and support the overarching district goal of excellence for every child.

Process

The actual course process included a participant selection process, the courses, and consequent follow-up, including classroom visits and lesson modeling. What follows is a description of each activity process and data gathered from interviews and course observation.

Participant Selection

The intent was to enroll participants based on ELA scores. In practice, there were a few different methods by which participants were selected to participate, including:

- If the school had an ELA growth score of Level 1
- If principals requested participation, even if the school value-added scores did not qualify
- If literacy coaches recommended that teachers participate
- If teachers independently sought professional development

Roughly 70 percent of participants surveyed reported that they attended due to a decision by a school leader (principal, supervisor, or literacy coach).

There were roughly 90 participants in the K-3 cohort and 70 in the 4-5 cohort during SY1415. It should be noted that the cohort numbers include coaches and supervisors, who may have attended different sessions with different teachers, but were only counted. Similarly, some administrators attended sessions but did not attend all sessions. The breakdown of participants was as follows:

Teachers	Coach/Facilitator	Administrators
117	36	8

In the current year (SY1516), several schools joined not because they met the criteria, but as a source of professional development for their teachers and to help further differentiate Tier 1 instruction.

Course & Modeling

Each class was three hours long and met once a month, for a total of 10 classes in the K-3 cohort; the 4-5 cohort met eight times. Each class combined modules of Tier 1 and intervention instruction. Classes consisted of:

- instruction of core knowledge,
- debrief of what was learned in the previous session,
- discussion of how previous lessons were implemented in the classroom,
- planning time, time for questions
- bridge-to-practice

The bridge-to-practice component is a lesson planning and modeling tool. The YLR coaches also visited classrooms to observe teachers. Classroom visits also provided opportunities for the coaches to lead or support instruction if the teacher asked for that. Participants were also given assignments between class meetings.

Based on interviews with the YLR coaches, they sought to be very intentional in presenting information so as not to confuse teachers with too many reading skills or instructional practices. As such, the YLR coaches relied on classroom modeling to implement the lessons taught in the sessions, as opposed to modeling excessively in the sessions. Additionally, the YLR coaches work with the school-based coaches to help expand the reach of their work. As noted previously, the school-based literacy coaches attended the YLR classes and also assisted with planning components in their schools.

Direct Observation

The program evaluator observed the fourth class meeting of one cohort. Participants sat in smaller groups at tables. There were norms posted near the front of the classroom. There was also an easel for poster board display that was used to display course material. The session began with course objectives, which included analysis of actual student writing samples, reflection on implementation in the classroom since the last class meeting, and an opportunity for lesson planning. Participants also received handouts to be added to a larger notebook with notes from previous class meetings. After the objective overview, the coaches called on participants to review content from the previous three classes. The content was related to the following: how students learn to read; phonemic awareness; and what decoding and the principles of orthography.

As the coaches covered course material both via poster boards and handouts, they would integrate into the lesson ways of presenting the information to students. Participants were asked to share their reflections and encouraged to ask questions as needed. There were several on-topic conversations occurring at many of the tables during the presentation. Additionally, the majority of course attendees were engaged for the duration of the session. At any given time during the course, at least six of the nine tables were engaged in the lesson. Their engagement was determined by their note-taking, asking questions, sharing personal examples, and on-topic peer-to-peer conversations. While there was independent work periods, the course instructors moved from table to table, participating in the dialog or answering questions during the student writing sample analysis. Instructors demonstrated instructional techniques (sounding tools) and modeled actual lesson components.

Changes from SY1415

Since data was gathered during SY1516, we were able to note changes from the last school year that are worth noting.

- The YLR coaches reported they are conducting more in-depth follow-throughs with teachers this year through increased school visits.

- The YLR coaches also attempt to attend grade-level planning meetings to support implementation of the YLR skills in schools.
- The focus in the K-2 sessions this year is on better quality, not quantity of sessions, to deepen teacher content knowledge—that is, sessions are focused on skills and less content. Survey participants reported receiving a large amount of information in a short amount of time, so that modification to the program seems wise and worthy.
- Program leaders also modified the 3-5 sessions to focus more on instructional challenges as opposed to decoding in an effort to provide the support teachers in those grades need. Responses to the participant survey recommended grade-specific information, so this also seems to be a worthwhile modification.
- Program leaders are using a literacy observation tool during classroom visits to monitor fidelity of implementation. Use of an observation tool will provide useful data in any future evaluations of the YLR program.

Results
Findings were classified based on the source, either feedback from the program leaders collected via interviews and e-mails, underscored by direct observation by the program evaluator, and participant survey data.

Results: Program Leader Feedback
Over a series of interviews and e-mails, the program leaders shared their reflections about the first full year of the YLR course. Much of the feedback recorded aligned with the perception data collected via survey. For example, the YLR coaches believed that there was more buy-in from the early elementary teachers who participated in the course. However, the YLR coaches noted that in the current year (SY1516), there is notable interest in the 3-5 teachers due to the new state assessment, TNReady.

In addition to increased buy-in across the all elementary grades, the YLR coaches reported that more teachers are requesting their help this school year. They believe this may be due to professional development sessions at district-wide in-service presentations led by SY1415 YLR attendees, which generated positive perception about the course. The program leaders also reported that professional culture at schools matters. If the school administration saw the value of the course and encouraged teachers to attend, the teachers in turn responded well to the course. While the cause of buy-in is not easily discernible, perception data (in the Participant Survey section below) reinforces the notion of buy-in from participants. Almost 80 percent of respondents agreed that the YLR course was valuable training.

Results: Participant Survey
A nine-question survey was emailed to the educators who were enrolled for the SY1415 elementary YLR courses via the Randa Tower Professional Development Management system, a total of 164 e-mail addresses were collected. Almost 70 percent (112) of those e-mailed responded to the survey. Seven questions asked participants to show their level of

agreement to certain statements. The eighth question sought to determine how participants came to enroll in the course and the final question was a solicitation for comments.

Although responses were completely anonymous, the survey tool tracked which e-mail address completed the survey. Using e-mail addresses, a profile of survey respondents was built based on years of service, classroom observation score, and individual growth (TVAAS) scores.

Table 1. Profile of Survey Respondents

Years of Service		Individual TVAAS		Observation Scores	
New to 4	24	Level 1	3	0 - 2.9	8
5 to 10	30	Level 2	6	3.0 - 3.5	28
11 to 15	15	Level 3	5	3.51 - 4	36
16 to 20	22	Level 4	6	4.01 - 4.5	33
20 or more	17	Level 5	3	4.51 - 5.0	4
N/A	4	N/A	88	N/A	13

Based on this profile, it appears that teachers with zero to ten years of service made up almost half of the survey respondents, while another third had 11-15 years and the final two-thirds of respondents had 16 or more years of service. Almost 80 percent of respondents did not generate an individual TVAAS score, which most likely means they taught K-3 or were non-classroom teachers. Additionally, the observation scores for most respondents (regardless of the years of service) are "at expectation" since the overwhelming majority of scores are 3.0 or higher. Therefore, we cannot say that new teachers preferred the course to more senior or veteran teachers. This information, coupled with perception data, suggests that a broad spectrum of participants appreciated the course.

Individual Responses
The overwhelming responses to the first seven questions were favorable responses. A breakdown of results can be seen below. The order of questions displayed in the charts does not match the order in which the questions were asked; this was done simply to display the results tied to program goals.

Goal: Increase Teacher Content Knowledge

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: As a result of the YLR course, I feel that my reading content knowledge (phonemic awareness, decoding, etc.) has increased.

- Strongly Agree — 46.4%
- Somewhat Agree — 34.8%
- Neutral — 11.6%
- Somewhat Disagree — 4.5%
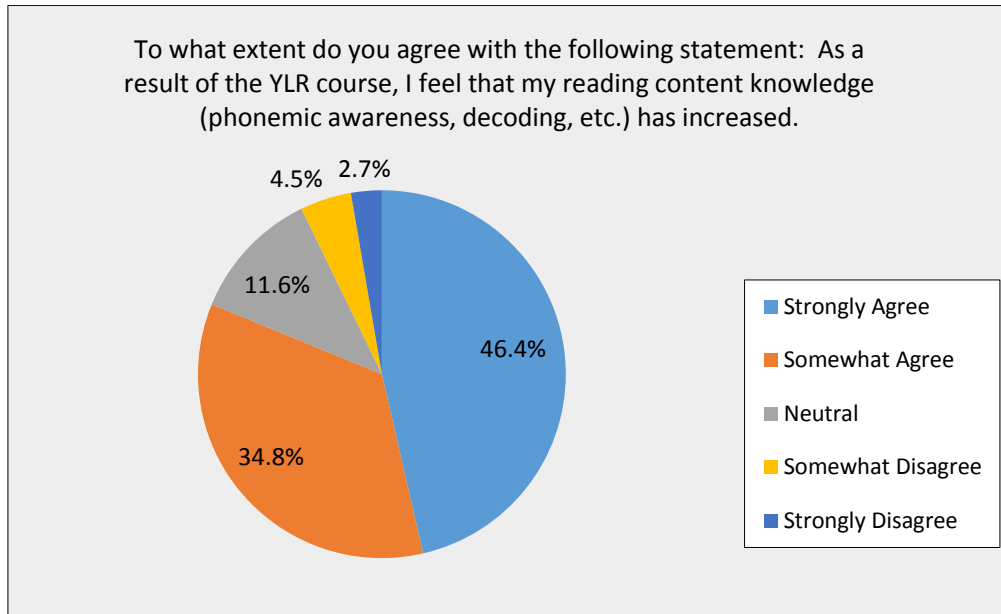- Strongly Disagree — 2.7%

Figure 1. Survey Responses

Over 80 percent of the educators who responded somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that their content knowledge increased as a result of the YLR class. The purpose of this question was to gauge whether the primary goal of increasing teacher content knowledge was met. The overwhelmingly positive perception may indicate that the primary goal was met.
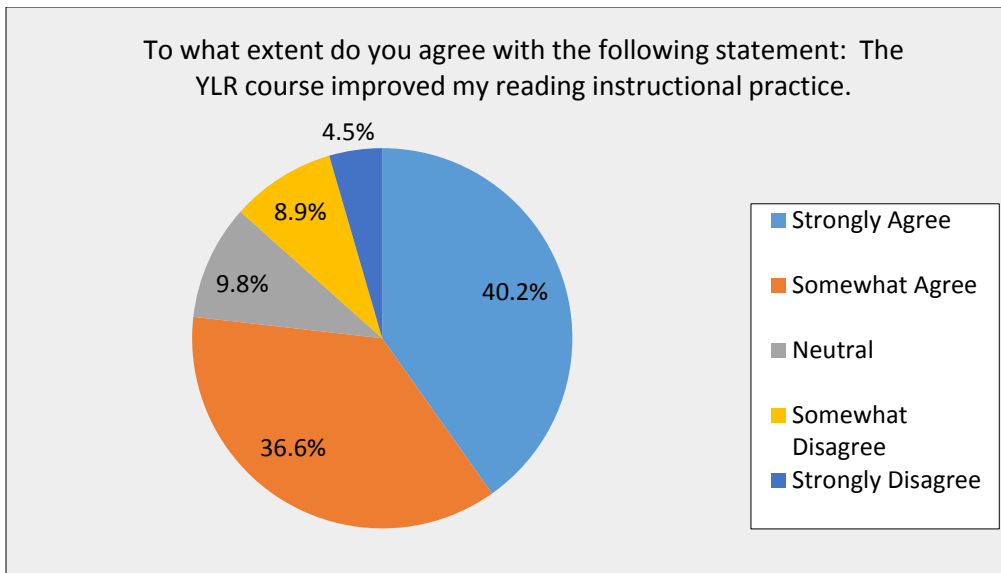

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The YLR course improved my reading instructional practice.

- Strongly Agree — 40.2%
- Somewhat Agree — 36.6%
- Neutral — 9.8%
- Somewhat Disagree — 8.9%
- Strongly Disagree — 4.5%

Figure 2. Survey Responses

Over 76 percent of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that the course improved their reading instructional practice. The positive responses indicate program success given that one of the intended outcomes of the coaches was to have a positive impact on reading instruction.
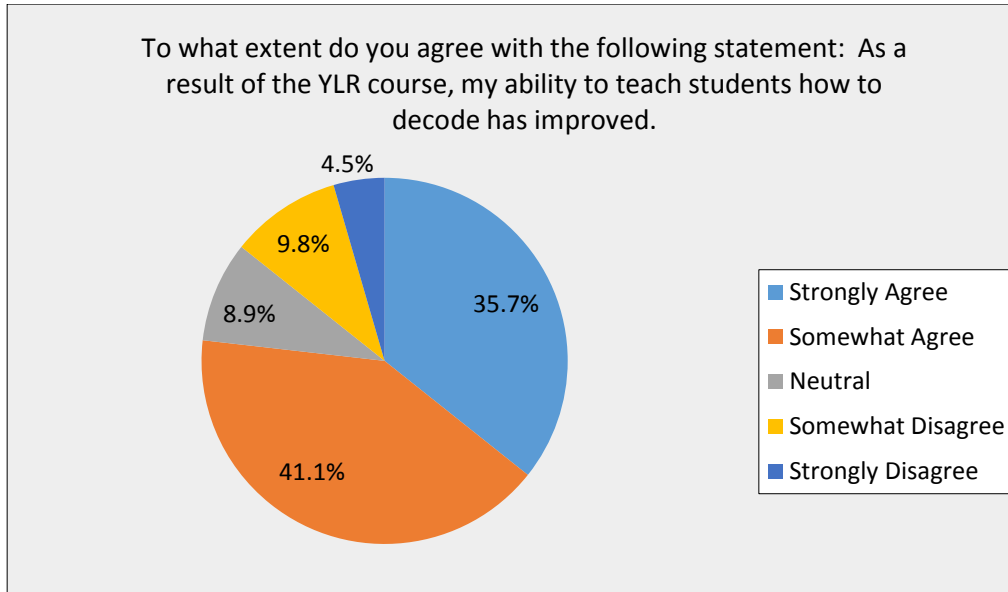

Figure 3. Survey Responses

One of the key components of the YLR course is knowledge of decoding. Almost 77 percent of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed their ability to teach students how to decode has improved as a result of the YLR course. Almost two-thirds of the elementary participants of the course responded to this survey, and with such a high amount of favorable responses, there is a clear perception of success.

Goal: Provide and model useful lessons and plans

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The "bridge to practice" component of the YLR course was helpful to my instruction.

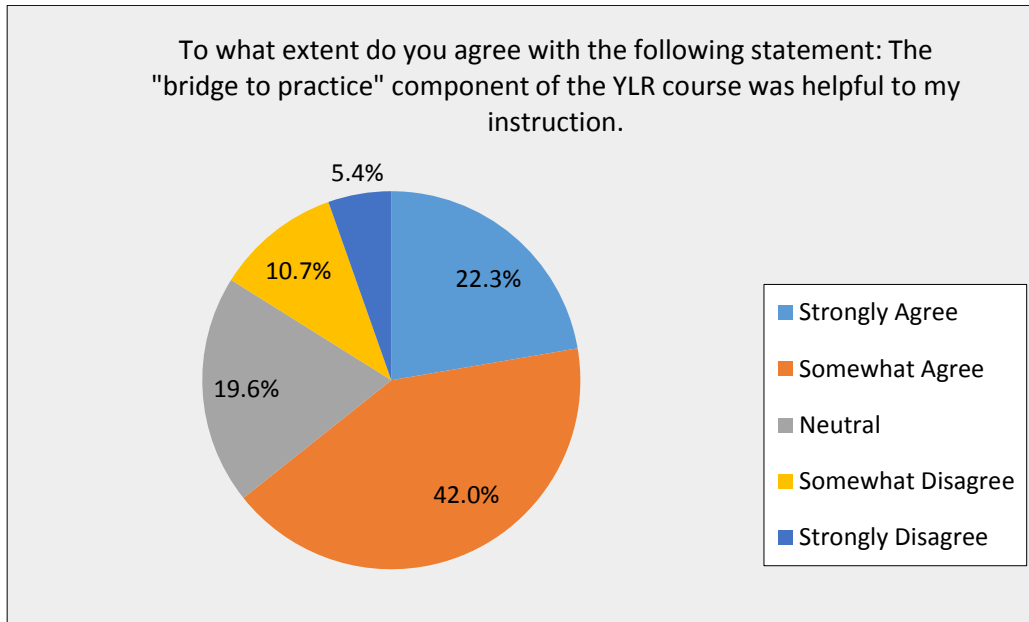|	
■	Strongly Agree
■	Somewhat Agree
■	Neutral
■	Somewhat Disagree
■	Strongly Disagree

Figure 4. Survey Responses

Almost 65 percent of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that the bridge-to-practice component of the course was useful for them. Interestingly, open-ended comments mentioned the bridge-to-practice component both negatively and positively. It appears that for classroom teachers, this component was useful for their instructional practice. However, for personnel who work across multiple grade levels, this practice was not reported to be as useful. Tailoring this component of the YLR course to the audience may be worth considering.

Goal: Increase efficiency in lesson planning and how planning time is spent

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The YLR course helped me become more efficient in my reading instructional planning?

- Strongly Agree — 33.9%
- Somewhat Agree — 32.1%
- Neutral — 14.3%
- Somewhat Disagree — 9.8%
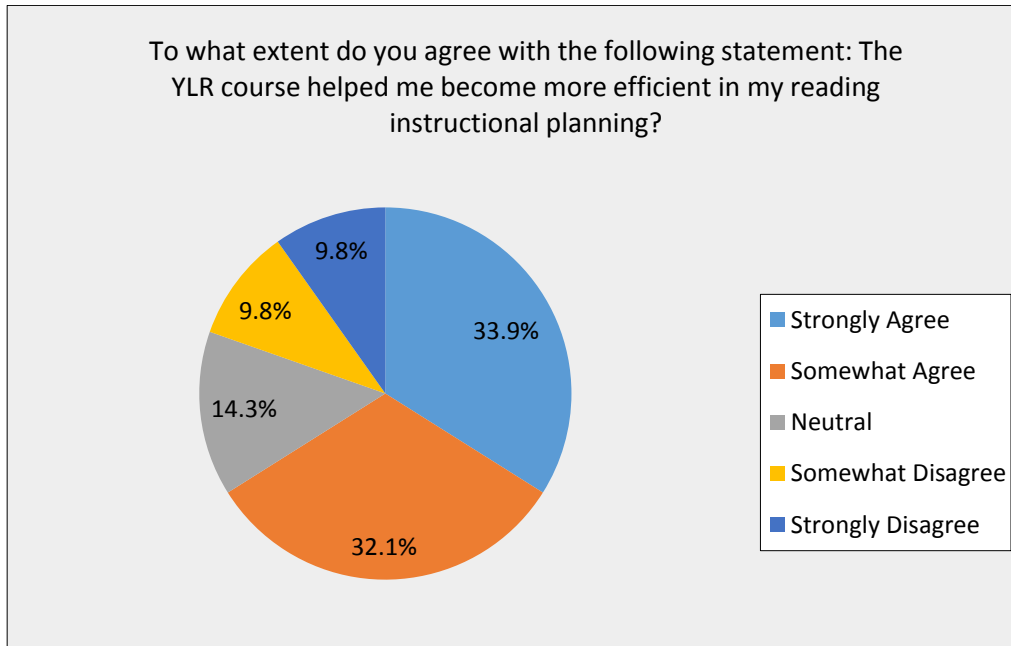- Strongly Disagree — 9.8%

Figure 5. Survey Responses

While slightly less positive than the questions related to the primary goal, over 66 percent of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that they became more efficient in reading instructional planning. It is clear that the intentionality of the coaches to hone in how to efficiently lesson plan was effective.

Goal: Apply the foundational reading skills learned in other content areas
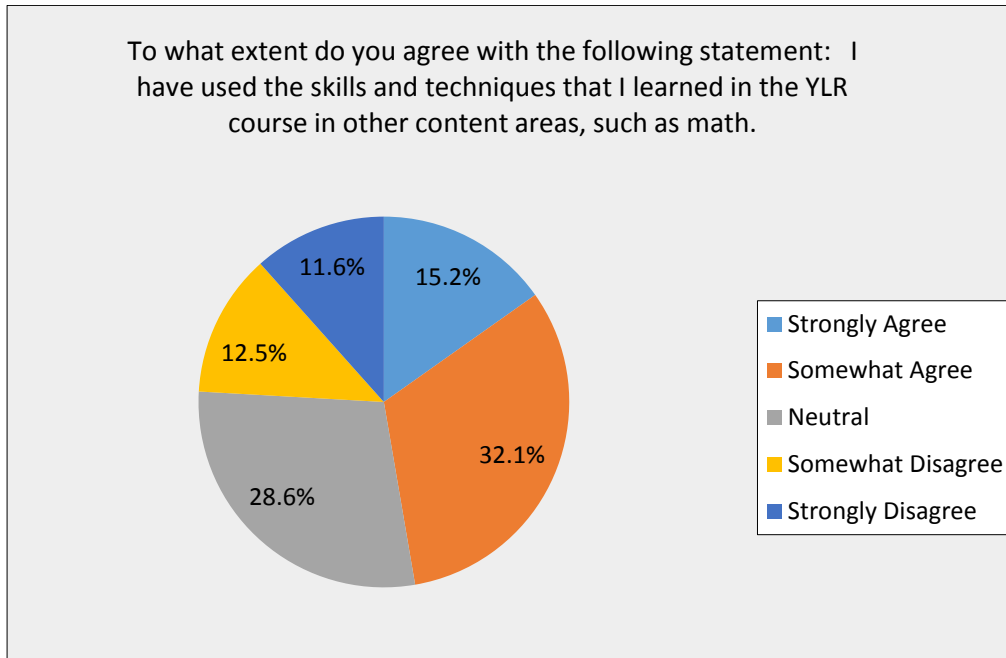
To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I have used the skills and techniques that I learned in the YLR course in other content areas, such as math.

11.6%   15.2%

12.5%

32.1%

28.6%

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neutral
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Figure 6. Survey Responses

The question related to use of skills learned being useful for teaching other content areas garnered 60 percent favorable responses – the lowest of all the "agree" statements but still favorable overall. The course may not have made clear connections of how to apply the learned skills in other content areas. This may be an area for further discussion among program leaders: is applying the skills learned in the YLR course in other content areas part of the strategic plan? If so, this is an opportunity for improvement by the program leaders. If not, remove it as a goal.

Goal: Empower teachers and engender a desire for further training

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The year long reading (YLR) course was a valuable use of my time.

- Strongly Agree — 45.5%
- Somewhat Agree — 32.1%
- Neutral — 3.6%
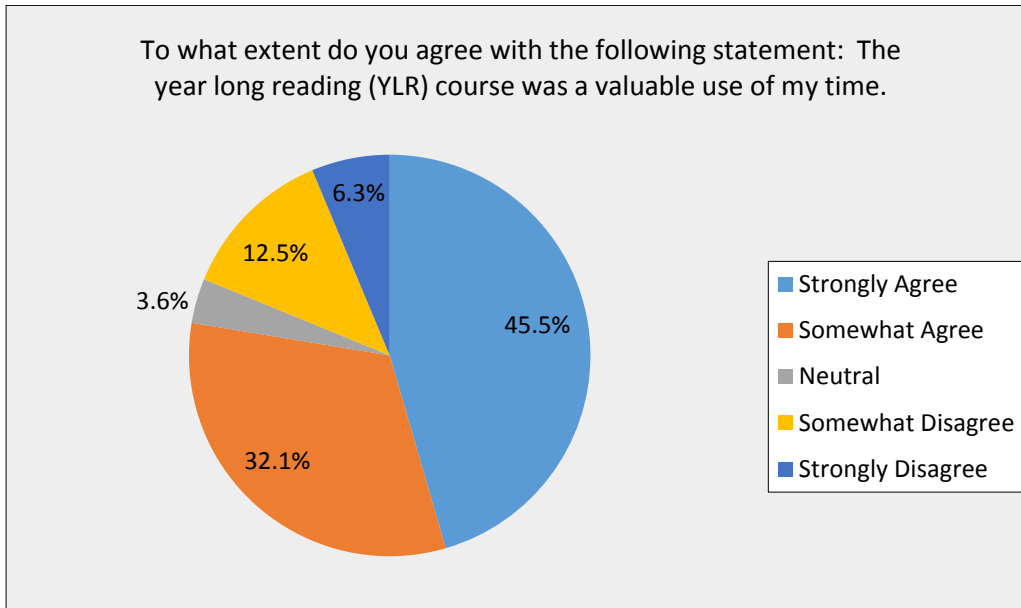- Somewhat Disagree — 12.5%
- Strongly Disagree — 6.3%

Figure 7. Survey Responses

Almost 78 percent of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that the YLR course was a valuable use of time. While this questions is not directly related to the primary goal of the program, the overwhelming positive response demonstrates a high level of "buy-in" by those who participated in the program. Previous research suggests that the level of "buy-in" by participants is directly proportional to participant perception and ultimate outcomes. Additionally, the participants who found the course to be useful are more likely to attend future training than those who reported it was not a valuable use of time.

The penultimate question was asked to determine if self-selection versus principal recommendation had an impact on outcomes and perception.
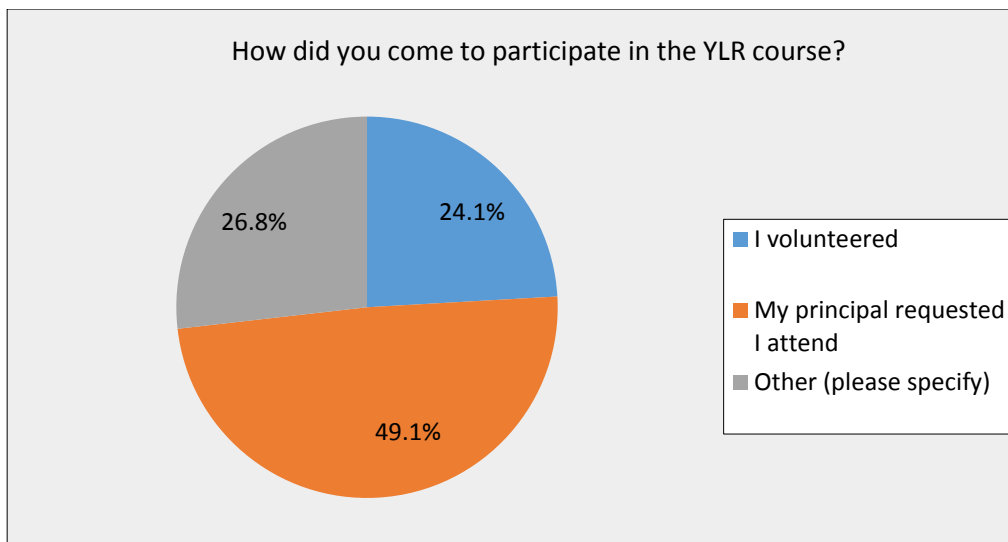
Figure 8. Survey Responses

Almost half the respondents (49.1 percent) indicated they came to participate in the YLR course via principal recommendation. However, the majority of those who selected "Other" actually came by way of principal (per their written comment). Of the 30 respondents who selected "Other" as the response to this question, 19 indicated they went because their school was asked to participate or their principal requested it. Therefore, it may be more accurate to say that roughly 70 percent of those who participated were asked to attend the YLR course based on a decision by the principal/school team/supervisor. It appears that required attendance did not have an effect on participant perception.

Comments

The final survey question asked participants to include any comments about the YLR course in SY1415. Almost half (57) of the survey respondents entered comments. What follows is a summary of those responses.

- Sharing ideas, the bridge-to-practice component, and increased content knowledge were reported to be useful.
- Approximately seven percent of respondents reported they would like to take the course again.
- Over 40 percent of those who entered comments reported that the course was very beneficial and/or among the most valuable professional development in which they have participated.
- Less than ten percent of participants wrote that the content was a repeat of information they already covered or did not find the training to be very useful.
- Roughly ten percent of participants, both those who said the course was and was not useful, lamented loss of classroom time as a result of the course occurring during the school day.

- A few respondents said that a lot of information was presented in a short amount of time and it was difficult to internalize all of it.

The full comments can be found in appendix A. Survey data was shared with program leaders, who were eager to use it to modify their practice.

Survey Conclusions

Overall, the perception data indicates positive trends. Those who participated overwhelmingly agreed the course was valuable and it improved their foundational reading skills. While there were disapproving responses and comments, the high response rate, coupled with the significantly favorable responses, suggests program success among a certain group of teachers. Based on the profile of respondents, it may be suggested that early elementary teachers with less than ten years of experience report the most utility from the course.

While the majority of responses to the multiple choice questions and the free-response question were positive, we took a closer look at the unfavorable responses. In particular, of the five free-response comments that clearly reported no utility in the course, all five of those respondents selected Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, or Strongly Disagree to all of the multiple choice questions. We also created a crosstab of unfavorable responses by question. We wanted to know if those who responded unfavorably (somewhat or strongly disagree) to one question responded unfavorably to all other questions. For example, in the crosstab below, it shows that of the 21 respondents who selected somewhat or strongly disagree on question 1, 14 of them also selected somewhat or strongly disagree on question 2.

Table 2. Crosstab of Unfavorable Responses

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Q1	21	14	13	7	16	17	19
Q2	14	15	12	5	13	14	14
Q3	13	12	16	6	11	15	14
Q4	7	5	6	8	6	8	8
Q5	16	13	11	6	18	16	15
Q6	17	14	15	8	16	22	20
Q7	19	14	14	8	15	20	27

The text of the questions is provided here for easy reference.

Question 1: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The year long reading (YLR) course was a valuable use of my time.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The YLR course improved my reading instructional practice.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: As a result of the YLR course, my ability to teach students how to decode has improved.

Question 4: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: As a result of the YLR course, I feel that my reading content knowledge (phonemic awareness, decoding, etc.) has increased.

Question 5: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The "bridge to practice" component of the YLR course was helpful to my instruction.

Question 6: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The YLR course helped me become more efficient in my reading instructional planning.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I have used the skills and techniques that I learned in the YLR course in other content areas, such as math.

Question 8: How did you come to participate in the YLR course?

Question 9: Please include any comments here about the YLR course you participated in during the 2014-15 school year.

It appears that those respondents who responded unfavorably did so across the board except for the fourth question, which was related to reading content knowledge. This indicates that despite having a negative overall perception, the majority of respondents who responded unfavorably still reported an increase in reading knowledge. Another repeated trend, among both those who responded favorably and unfavorably, the application of the skills learned did not translate to other content areas (like math and science), as seen by the high rate of unfavorable responses to question 7.

Conclusion and Considerations

It is clear the perception surrounding the elementary YLR course is positive by those who participated in the survey, which is almost two-thirds of the participants. Nonetheless, there is room for improvement. The program leaders have developed their own feedback tools (including a pre and post-test for teachers and internal surveys), but there are additional recommendations based on data needs and feedback from the participant survey. It should be noted that since this report was completed during the SY1516, there have been several changes to the YLR course since SY1415 that were briefly discussed earlier in this report. Additionally, the program leaders have sought continual feedback from participants and have welcomed the recommendations from this report.

Recommendations: Data Opportunities

Pre and post-testing

In lieu of state assessment achievement and value-added data, which may not best capture teacher knowledge and implementation, a pre and post-test should be administered to participants. This was not strictly done in SY1415 but has been implemented for SY1516. Such a robust test developed by content specialists can be used to determine baseline teacher knowledge and any consequent growth as a result of course participation.

Classroom observations

During the current (SY1516) school year, the YLR coaches are using a literacy observation tool, based on several literacy tools combined by the elementary reading supervisor to observe and evaluate teachers in the classroom. Expanded and uniform use of this observation tool would be a good tool to track implementation of the coursework and pinpointing areas in need of reinforcement and refinement. Furthermore, based on these evaluations, it would be useful to determine if teachers who properly implemented the YLR skills had an impact on movements between tiers and reducing the number of students in intervention. Using the same evaluation standard, tracking year-over-year changes in students reading at grade-level would also be a valuable exercise. Tracking trends would be made easier with centralized, uniform observation data.

CBM as a good measure of progress

A student assessment that is better aligned with what is focused on in the YLR course should be used. CBM assessments appropriately gauge reading fluency but are not administered to most Tier 1 and Tier 2 students. Program leaders may wish to seek a more broad use of CBM in targeted areas, especially in early grades, as a screener and to monitor progress. While this is likely not feasible at the district level, it may be something to consider in specific schools based on need.

Other Assessments

The program leaders believe the global skills that are assessed in TNReady may also provide an adequate proxy for measuring reading and decoding skills.

Survey Questions

The next iteration of the YLR survey should include more identifying information in order to draw clearer conclusions about who perceived the course to be effective. This information could be captured by adding questions related to the grade level taught or grade cluster (K-2, 3-5) and educator type (teacher, coach, or supervisor).

Recommendations: Process and Goal Changes

"We received so much information so fast…"

Several of the open-ended responses indicated that participants needed more time to internalize the information learned. Time is a valuable but scarce resource, so it is understandable that the program leaders are working within their limited confines. The YLR coaches intended to present a limited amount of information in each class session, with lesson planning and modeling used to bridge the gap between information and instruction. However, given the perception data, the program leaders may seek to revamp the schedule to reduce the number of topics covered per course or use the course time in such a way that participants can organize their thoughts and decompress. Based on feedback from program leaders, modifications have been made in SY1516 to address this very issue.

"This course would have been more valuable if it was more grade specific."

Although the courses were grouped by early (K-3) and upper elementary (4-5) groups, it may be of benefit to group cohorts by grade in order to provide grade-specific information as related to standards, classroom work, and typical challenges. An updated survey instrument with questions about grade level could also pinpoint which teachers (by grade) felt the course was most impactful. The program leaders have divided cohorts into K-2 and 3-5 for SY1516 to better support the needs of teachers based on early versus upper elementary.

"As someone who is not in a classroom setting, I was not able to complete some of the bridge to practice activities."

A few survey respondents indicated that the bridge-to-practice component of the YLR course either did not have adequate time to be impactful or it was not as useful as the program leaders had anticipated. This may have been due to lack of time or because the participant was not in a classroom setting (such as a coach). The program leaders may wish to focus the bridge-to-practice component strictly for classroom teachers, change the structure of that the bridge-to-practice component so it is more grade-specific, or prioritize follow-up classroom visits to model lessons and guide implementation in the classroom instead of the bridge-to-practice. Additionally, developing a class or components just for instructional coaches may better support the goals of the YLR program.

Reading skills in other subjects

The program leaders indicated one goal of the program is to apply the reading skills learned to other content areas. It seemed that perception data surrounding the utility of the YLR

course skills did not necessarily extend to other content areas. They should create more intentional connections between the reading skills in the course and how to apply them in other content area lessons. This can be done both in the course work and in classroom visits and lesson modeling.

Classroom visits and observations
While the YLR coaches have been more intentional in the current school year to schedule follow-up visits with participating teachers, they may wish to make classroom visits and observations an essential component of the course. This would provide the YLR coaches with an opportunity to not only observe teachers and evaluate them based on a rubric, but would also provide valuable time for feedback and modeling with teachers. Time may not permit such practice, but it may be worth consideration in the future. Collecting observation data by way of a centralized, electronic database could make program reflection and evaluation easier in the future.

Lost classroom time
Participants who responded both negatively and positively to the survey lamented loss of classroom time; that was not a surprising finding given that limited time is a constraint of most programs. The feasibility of a summer course or a series of after school courses may be worthy of investigation. Additionally, program leaders may wish to use pre- and post-test and survey data to determine which type of teachers are best suited for the YLR course. That way, the program may be tailored to specific educators (for example, K-3 teachers only, literacy coaches, teachers with 0-4 years of experience, etc.) and will reduce the time needed to cycle those teachers through the program and also time lost from the classroom. Roughly 200 educators can go through the course each year, which would take ten cycles (years) to cover elementary educators, given no changes to staffing or program capacity. Program leaders should consider the time commitment required.

Appendix A: Open-Ended Survey Responses

I really enjoyed the instructors and their vast knowledge of the area. I liked sharing ideas with other educators.
I would love to take the yearlong course again as I have changed grade levels - I'm not teaching primary grades. This would be a course I'd recommend to any teacher ready to grow in understanding of ELA practices and research.
I thought the course was fantastic and I learned many skills and strategies for teaching reading. Karen does a wonderful job teaching the course.
The YLC was very beneficial to my teaching! kRista and Danielle were very knowledgeable,helpful and awesome! Loved it!
I think this is an extremely powerful PD for teachers of all grade levels. I learned new things both times that I attended.
Most beneficial professional development ever!
I don't mind attending required in services. This was something I felt pulled me away from my class (of Kindergarteners!) and caused me to write literally hours of sub plans. Yes it takes hours to write K sub plans. Had this course been a 2 or 3 day training in the summer, I feel it would have benefited me better. Oh and the timing of the course was not convenient for a K teacher because every time it fell during my lunch and I had to eat lunch in the car rushing on the way back to school. I already barely have 15 minutes on a daily basis. So I felt that K teachers got the short end of the stick. Better planning in the future would fix this issue.
This course would have been more valuable if it was more grade specific. The session included teacher K-5th focusing mostly on 3-5 grades. The session's bridge to practice were not grade appropriate many times.
The instructors were very knowledgeable and made the lessons interesting and engaging.
After 3 years of Reading First training the majority of the content was review.
Honestly, I think the year-long course is a great thing. It is always beneficial for teachers to learn/ review techniques about what we practice - educating children. However, the way that it was presented to the teachers at my school and the difficulties with scheduling and rushing and missing out on so many reading instructional days with my students negatively influenced my experience. So perhaps my opinions on your survey are not as helpful as I wish they could be.
Our school departmentalizes, and I teach math. I am a veteran teacher (30+years) and my time could have been better spent in my classroom teaching math. I have taught grades K-3, and much of the info, I already knew (either through PDs, research, or experience). I do think it was beneficial to new teachers. Just as teachers are required to differentiate instruction, KCS should be required to differentiate PDs for staff. If it's not appropriate for that staff member, he or she should not be required to attend. The presenters were knowledgable, but it was not helpful to me.
The ladies did an outstanding job presenting the materials and presenting teaching strategies to enhance reading content knowledge.
It was a valuable learning experience.
The course is excellent, content-rich, and a valuable use of time! I wish I had more time to implement the strategies I learned in the course.
I was only a participant in the crash course at the end of last year. There was no bridge to practice and I didn't have a chance to implement the strategies until the next school year. Even though I am very thankful to have had the chance to attend the crash course, I would very much like to be a part of the whole YLC with some of my teachers. I KNOW it will be helpful.

The YLC is the most valuable PD I have ever participated in. It has had tremendous impact on my small group reading instruction and my understanding of how the brain learns to read. I now have a small group framework I use systematically with my children instead of just fitting in " bits and pieces " of what was considered good practice. It has also benefited me in understanding why a child might be struggling and what tools I can use in determining where the "gaps" are for individual students.

Fabulous! Every teacher should have the opportunity to participate in this course.

Danielle & Krista were very informative and personable. They even came to my classroom to model a lesson when I asked them to do one.

Krista and Danielle were absolutely wonderful. They were so engaging and so interested in the content that it flowed over into my spirit. I truly looked forward to coming to these courses. My small group instruction has dramatically changed, which has also impacted my whole group. My students are becoming aware of syllables and how to decode words they don't know. This course expanded my content knowledge, and I feel better and more confident in my daily instruction.

I would have appreciated a concentration on morphemes at the high school level.

This was the BEST, most beneficial PD I have ever attended. All teachers should have to take the course.

It needed more emphasis on comprehension as I teach upper elementary.

I felt that the content needed to be adapted drastically to be beneficial for high school teachers. We do need to understand the levels of reading ability--from decoding to context, but the strategies we learned for how to teach the lower level skills were too elementary to use for our students and be taken seriously. Even if the skills are basic, the way we bridge those deficiencies needs to be age-appropriate.   Secondly, the pacing of the course was highly inefficient, in my opinion. We could have covered the same amount of material 5 half days, rather than full days. I missed 5 instructional days and I did not at all feel that that time was spent wisely. We followed along with a PowerPoint that was painfully tedious, and I did not feel that it suited its audience: intelligent professionals who can catch on quickly and be engaged in thoughtful discussion. Along the same lines, the presenters could have moved things along and been more engaging. The presenter was not condescending, but I did feel like she underestimated our abilities and moved us through the presentation way too slowly. Then again, she was given an excessive number of days over which to stretch out the course.   I learned valuable information, but I would rather have learned it from a more engaging presenter in half of the time. Lastly, the age-appropriateness of the strategies presented needs to be adjusted for future reading courses.

As someone who is not in a classroom setting, I was not able to complete some of the bridge to practice activities. However, the content of the course was very valuable to me in my role and was helpful in supporting teachers. I learned something new every session. I think this is a very meaningful and much needed resource to improve reading instruction in Tier 1 and in intervention groups.

I took away one new strategy from the YLR course--cohesive ties. The rest was repeated information that I did not find that I could practically apply, given all of the other requirements on our time.

The YLR course had a lot of impactful learning and content that was helpful to me, but I feel like some of the content may need to be rolled out in smaller chunks. Especially the technical part about the processors of the brain. Another idea might be to differentiate the learning groups, such as give a short quiz about content knowledge and then divide the learning up to focus on areas of need for each group, that way some groups can delve more deeply into content and others can learn about what their need might be (such as application).

The only thing I have against it was that we had to be absent from school during math instruction once or twice a month to attend the YLR. This would have been more beneficial to have as a year-long inservice-credited event. This could have been held after school hours or in the summer. The students of our classes would have not missed valuable instruction, the school system would not have had to pay for substitutes, and substitutes would not have been in short supply because they would not have been stretched to cover these classes. The course was intense and was very well-taught by both ladies. It was like a college course and should be taught to college students who want to teach. I took several courses like it when working on my masters and EdS. degrees. The course is too full of information to do over a few days, but it would have been more beneficial to do the classes within a shorter time span. Waiting a month to continue with the lessons resulted in a disjointedness and probably less retention of what was learned.

Krista and Danielle were excellent presenters for the   YLR course.

The instruction was solid. The content was unlike anything I had every professionally been apart of in my 15 years of teaching. I learned more than I ever thought I could and I would love to go through the course again just to absorb all the information. It was truly unbelievable what I did not know about teaching children how to read that I implemented and applied through planning and instruction.

The year long reading course has been the best thing I have done to step up my reading instruction. My small groups are more meaningful and I am seeing huge amounts of growth in my students reading fluency and phonics skills. I feel this course needs to be pushed out to as many teachers as possible. I would also like to attend the 3-5th reading course. Although, I teach in the K-2 grade band, I would love to see what techniques and activities that are taught in the 3-5th YLR training that I can implement with my higher students. Krista and Danielle did a phenomenal job with this course.

I feel as though the course was beneficial to my position in the classroom and as an instructional leader in the building. My greatest struggle was that I was the only one from my school, so I didn't have anyone in the building to work through the process with me. Additionally, I was able to make changes in my class and in my PLC, but other English classes that feed into my class did not embrace the ideas and suggestions that came as a direct result of the training. I STRONGLY feel all Literacy Coaches should have to attend this training.

I found this to be a terrible detriment to my teaching. Frequently missing the majority of my day was very disruptive to my teaching and the tiny bit of new information that I could apply in my room was hardly worth it. I did not volunteer for this course and I did not get to choose the time of day I attended. It was very frustrating and impacted my attitude negatively.

This training was, by far, the best training by Knox County I have attended. The content reinforced training I received from Reading First years ago and improved upon my knowledge with regards to how we learn to read. The instructors were not just knowledgable, but experts, and were able to explain in depth the material they were presenting. If I could attend the course again, I would.

I can see that the information would have been valuable to a new teachers, however as a veteran teacher who has been through graduate level reading instruction pre-service training (my area of specialization) and many revisions of the CARE program, this information was new to me and did not seem to be the best use of my time.

I would have liked to have this as a summer course or more than just one day once a month; it was too overwhelming and too much in too big of a chunk to have just once a month and some months I did not get to go as my school did not have a sub for me to go. As a lower grade teacher I loved hearing how to help my struggling readers but I felt I just got a skim over.

The information was good, but I received a lot of the same information during the summer state trainings and then again during inservice at the beginning of the school year. I feel the course would have been better (for me) if I could have seen more concrete examples of lessons modeled for different level of students. I believe it is beneficial for most teachers to actually see how these methods are applied in a real classroom setting. Our school asked one of the facilitators to visit our school to show us and we were told she didn't have the time. I would like to see less research and more activities that help my students with common problems like letter reversal. I appreciate all the hard work the reading department does on a regular basis to support teachers, but can't help to feel that there is a bit of disconnect. Thank you for your interest in my feedback.
It has impacted my instruction more than any other PD that I have attended in the last 3 years in Knox County!
I am teaching math and social studies this year, and knowing about how kids learn and how they aquire their reading knowledge has really helped me plan lessons - pre-teaching vocabulary, small group activities, turn and talk before writing, etc.
I thought 5% of it was helpful. It was a waste of time and taxpayers money. Not much "hands on" info to use in class. It was mostly learning definitions or terms.
The presenters were very knowledgeable! I learned so much! :)
I feel that the YLC was very valuable to my teaching repritoire and would love for grades 4-5 to have a course to increase teacher content knowledge.
I got a good overview of the ideas, but it felt rushed and it was hard to focus knowing you had to return to a class that has been with a sub all day.
It was very helpful, although it was hard having to plan lessons for a sub, and to come back to the class room that day.
It was a great need. I hope all teachers can get this opportunity.
This is hands down the best training I have attended in 15 years.
This course is simply amazing. Having always been an intermediate grade teacher, learning these strategies has helped me with my instruction with my struggling readers in the primary grades. My lesson planning is more cohesive and I am able to see growth with my students.
The course helped me understand how we learn to read so that I could apply that knowledge and strengthen my instruction. This is what college reading courses should emphasize.
The course was excellent and provided a great deal of content in a small amount of time.
I think the course was WONDERFUL! My only complaint was that we received so much information so fast, I feel like if i took it again I would get more out that I probably missed the first time! I also think that some summer inservice would be helpful even if it were the same thing just at at time you aren't trying to juggle something new as well as plan and keep a routine.
I enjoyed the training. I hate how much classroom time was lost.
I enjoyed the YLC but it required a lot of time away from my students.
I appreciated the resources and help along the way.

I have loved learning from the YLR course. There is so much knowledge to be gained. I wish there was more time spent on the actual science of learning instead of this over bearing pressure to teach the integrated lesson format. We have started using the integrated lessons in small groups and I do think it is a beneficial part of teaching reading in small groups. I do, however, think it is an unrealistic goal to tell teachers that they need to be using integrated lessons in both small group and whole group, because that would be planning for more hours than there even are in a day. It has been pushed by our coach at the school and we have requested to slowly include portions of the integrated lesson into our whole group. I just wish there was less time spent on this new "idea" and more time spent on how our students learn and if it is in fact all about the integrated lesson plan I wish the class was ONLY about the integrated lesson. This may just be a miscommunication between the YLR course and our coach, but that has predominantly been what has been taken away for us to work on.

YLC offers valuable content knowledge I wish was taught during my college experience. The course helps teachers to improve their instructional practices by providing strategies that target the needs of students.

Danielle and Krista do a phenomenal job explaining the reading brain and how we can help children learn to read.

I would love refresher courses. There was so much information, I could not internalize it all.