RHODES UNIVERSITY COURSE

An Evaluation of the Reading for Meaning Course

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CONTENTS

REVIEW OF RHODES COURSE: TEACHING READING FOR MEANING

INTRODUCTION

In late 2019 we were asked to undertake an external review of the Rhodes Course in Early Literacy. Recognizing the potential of a course like this to greatly enhance reading outcomes among South African children, we were happy to contribute to ensuring its accuracy and usability. Further more a quick look at the materials revealed many intriguing features -- a flexible design that could be used for synchronous groups or for asynchronous independent learning, lively videos, and alignment with evidence-based principles for early literacy learning. We also saw the possibility that the Rhodes Course, if implemented in conjunction with coaching and guidance in the Funda Wande randomized controlled trial being carried out in the Eastern Cape, could have a large and direct positive impact on teacher knowledge and thus ultimately child progress.

Nonetheless, we were cognizant of the scope of the course and of the time it would take to engage in a careful review of all six available modules. We thus recruited 12 Harvard University master's students with expertise in language and literacy, curriculum design, and international education to collaborate with us on the review, so we could access a broader range of input while providing a practice-embedded learning experience for them. Several of the students had experience in sub-Saharan Africa, as teachers or working with community organizations, so they also had personal knowledge of conditions (school resources, teacher preparation levels, family circumstances) relevant to evaluating the feasibility of the design and goals of the course.

The individual modules became the responsibility of small teams of reviewers, who wrote initial impressions about their assigned modules. We then convened as a group to decide on the analytic dimensions we would all adopt, to promote comparability across the module reviews. These were:
- Content
- Videos
- Assessments
- Design
- User experience
- Alignment with Nell Duke's literacy essentials (https://literacyessentials.org/)

After each team revised its report to address these topics systematically, teams exchanged module assignments, and reviewed each other's reports, leading to further revisions. Subsequently, four teams of three students each wrote general comments about the entire sequence of modules, focusing on general themes and on the coherence of the modules across the six topics. We append the six module reports to this general overview, which synthesizes the recurrent themes in those reports and our own reactions to the modules. We organize our comments in a two-by-two matrix: focusing on content versus user experience, and distinguishing the elements judged to be excellent from those where we identify possibilities for improvement.

REVIEW OF RHODES COURSE: TEACHING READING FOR MEANING

STRENGTHS AND AFFORDANCES

The Rhodes Course Review teams participated, as noted above, in an iterative process, examining the contents of their respective modules, revisiting their module reviews using the common categories, peer reviewing another team's work, and finally, preparing their final module review. The six modules exhibited many strengths in each of the categories we distinguished, i.e., content, videos, assessments, design, and user experience. In addition, many of the modules aligned with the Literacy Essentials (literacyessentials.org) proposed by Nell Duke. This section will present the overall strengths of the modules in the areas of the content and the user experience.

STRENGTHS IN THE CONTENT

RESEARCH-BASED CONTENT

Overall, the modules covered the most important research-based aspects of early literacy instruction, in alignment with the National Reading Panel findings. The NRP (2000) identified five elements of effective reading instruction after reviewing a robust body of research. These elements were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Granted this research was US and English-based, and the Rhodes course modules were designed to support first African language learning in isiXhosa and now Sepedi. However, the Rhodes course app incorporated information from this largely Anglo-American research, as appropriate, with relevance to the structure (phonological, syntactic, and semantic) of isiXhosa and was well organized for the users through downloadable documents. The overviews for each module provided the participants with clear learning goals and with the content and structure for the module. Throughout each module the arc of learning provided for the gradual release of responsibility model of engagement.

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VIDEOS

The videos were engaging, modeled best instructional practices, and connected directly to the teaching techniques being recommended. The demonstration teachers motivated their students to be active learners in acquiring early literacy skills, foundational to skilled reading and writing and modeled checking for understanding by asking students whether their responses were correct or incorrect. They met the challenge of space and class size well, so that the course participants could see themselves accomplishing similar outcomes with their students by implementing these teaching moves.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Within each module participants were provided additional resources to be used in their teaching, as they deemed appropriate. These resources were directly connected to the student learning goals, so that the participants could use them to teach, reteach, and/or review the module's content. Having downloadable worksheets as resources allowed the teachers to focus on their learning goals and their students' progress rather than on developing similar worksheets. These resources and downloadables also provided the opportunity for teachers in a school to share how they used these resources to address student literacy progress outside of the Rhodes course, creating a community of practice. The extra resources and pdf downloads provided the participants with numerous, ready to use, teaching resources, which they could use with their students.

ASSESSMENTS

The inclusion of regular assessments effectively encouraged the active engagement of the participants (rather than letting them "just click through") and reinforced the important learnings in each module. As is said, "You inspect what you expect." The multiple choice and true/false selected response assessment items explicitly highlighted the most important learning goals for each module.

STRENGTHS IN THE USER EXPERIENCE

Designing a robust and well-conceived app to support professional learning on the part of foundation phase teachers is the first aspect of a successful learning tool. Having the foundation phase teachers use the app to change their instructional practice is the important second aspect of this endeavor. Therefore, design elements were essential considerations. The Rhodes course module reviews highlighted several design strengths to support the user's experience in using the app effectively.

PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION

Throughout each module the important learning goals were reinforced in engaging ways, so that they were clearly identified for the teachers. This was accomplished through varied modes of presentation, designed to keep the teachers engaged in their learning. In addition, the use of graphics and tables served to reduce the text density of the app as well as to highlight and synthesize the important learning goals in each module.

VIDEOS

The videos provided highly interactive models of effective teaching by peer practitioners. The instructional moves presented in the videos were appropriate to the cultural norms and the physical realities experienced by the teachers, such as classroom space and class size. The students in the videos were from schools similar to those of the teacher participants, adding to their authenticity and providing the teachers with realistic instructional modeling.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The additional resources provided for the teachers expanded their instructional repertoire and were designed to be accessible despite constraints on the time and resources required to implement the activities recommended. These resources could be cycled directly into classrooms to support effective teaching and/or reteaching activities.

ASSESSMENTS - CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

The assessments were strategically placed at important junctures within each module and provided frequent checks for understanding. They required the teachers to attend to the important learning goals for the module and highlighted the content aligned with those learning goals. The assessments were presented in the form of selected responses to multiple choice and true/false items, so that they did not add significantly to the length of time to complete each module, while checking for understanding.

REVIEW OF RHODES COURSE: TEACHING READING FOR MEANING

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Despite the many strengths of the Rhodes Course modules, review teams also noted areas in which improvements could be introduced. Some of these were relatively minor technical fixes or improvements; some were topics or domains left out (that may well be addressed in subsequent modules); and some were slightly more substantive pedagogical orientations or commitments.

POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE CONTENT: INTEGRATE THE CAPS MODULE WITH THE SUBSEQUENT MODULES MORE EXPLICITLY

The CAPS module touches on many of the topics covered in greater depth in other modules, but if it were made explicit how the information in the CAPS module connects to the later topics, coherence of the entire course would be enhanced. We judged the 'arc of learning' within most modules to be clear, but the arc of learning of the entire sequence could be made clearer, possibly even with guideposts for learners who will sample them in varied orders, if CAPS were designated as the kick-off module and provided with a more explicit meta-module role.

INCLUDE ADDITIONAL TOPICS

We noted a number of topics that were not covered in the six modules reviewed, which we mention here while noting that we realize there are plans to extend the course with additional topics/modules. Even with that expansion, though, it may be useful to bring up these issues as they relate specifically to the literacy domains covered in these six initial modules.

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HOME LANGUAGE SUPPORT.

Given the sociolinguistic pressures toward English in South Africa, it is understandable that teachers want to move toward literacy instruction in English as quickly as possible, and of course the students' academic success will ultimately depend on their mastery of English. Nonetheless, introducing English prematurely is inefficient in several of the domains dealt with in these modules: a) emergent literacy activities in the home language are more successful in building a deep understanding of the nature and affordances of literacy; b) when learning to decode in the home language learners can access meaning to support phoneme-grapheme mapping, whereas decoding in a largely unknown language may engender the idea that good reading is good pronunciation of words rather than understanding the message; c) fluency is, not just reading quickly and automatically, but reading with appropriate phrasing, which requires understanding the structure of the sentence--an easier task in the home language; d) writing is best taught as an opportunity to communicate, which means that students should have the freedom to use their home language or even a mix of home language and English in free writing tasks; d) though African languages have no typological relationship to English, there are many loan words used in the African languages of South Africa that could be exploited as a resource for both vocabulary building and decoding in teaching English--but only if the home language is seen as a resource rather than as an obstacle. Including a message about how teachers can build on their students' home language skills in specific domains of literacy development would be a useful addition to several of the modules.

The modules would benefit if there were more attention to the opportunities teachers have to engage in authentic assessment in the context of daily instruction. Hearing students read even a sentence or two out loud, listening in to students reading to one another in small groups, students' spelling and their free writing all constitute fodder for authentically assessing their progress if observations can be recorded systematically over the course of a school year. Such data can also be used to identify students ready to engage in independent reading while the teacher works with small groups to (re)teach skills that need strengthening.

SCHOOL-HOME CONNECTION.

Recognizing the complexities of family engagement in the South African context, nonetheless we feel the modules could include some suggestions for involving families in their children's literacy learning. A particular advantage of family involvement is that it offers further endorsement and strengthening of home language skills. Suggestions might include: a) asking children to elicit stories from a parent or grandparent that could be shared orally in class, and then written down; b) sending home student work so parents could annotate it -- e.g., a drawing of the family to which parents could help by adding in names of grandparents and other more distant family members; c) filling out a classroom map of where the families came from with information elicited by children from their parents. Obviously these particular examples may not all be appropriate for the South African context -- but ways to ensure that parents recognize and can contribute to their children's learning can be linked to several of the literacy goals of the Rhodes Course.

THE NEED FOR MORE READING MATERIALS.

We recognize and acknowledge the paucity of attractive and appropriate reading materials appropriate for beginning readers in the South African home languages. While this will remain a challenge, it should not be ignored as an issue. Children develop automaticity, fluency, vocabulary, and world knowledge from reading widely, and the role of wide reading in the development of literacy should at least be mentioned in several of the modules, even if the solution is not immediately at hand. At the same time it might be useful to some teachers or teacher teams to recommend on-line resources that offer stories for reproduction and translation, e.g. https://africanstorybook.org/#, notwithstanding the recognized challenges, especially for the smaller home languages (Edwards & Ngwaru, 2011).

NEED FOR A BROADER RESEARCH BASE

The vast majority of rigorous research studies on early literacy development, instruction, and intervention have focused on English. This means that we have an insufficient basis for teaching decoding or vocabulary in isiXhosa (or many other African home languages), and even less research on how to use decoding or vocabulary skills in isiXhosa as a basis for transfer to English. While this is not an immediately remediable challenge, attracting more African language specialists into the field of literacy development and ensuring literacy specialists understand the particular morphological and orthographic structures of African languages in a way that is inspired but not overly influenced by the work on English decoding could generate important gains in instructional design. In the meantime, teachers could be alerted to the most likely sources of difficulty in moving from a morphologically complex language with a transparent orthography to a morphologically much less complex language with a deep orthography.

A MORE PREDICTABLE STRUCTURE WITHIN EACH MODULE

Of course, the six modules reviewed cover topics of varying size and complexity, thus it is not surprising that they are somewhat varied in length and in organizational structure. Nonetheless, from the point of view of the user immersed in a digital experience, it can be very reassuring if there is some predictable structure, e.g., 6 subunits per module, that enables one to calibrate one's progress.

NEED FOR OVERALL GUIDANCE ON HOW THE VARIOUS TOPICS RELATE

One of the negative effects of the 'five pillars' approach to reading instruction has been the unintended implication that those five pillars are independent and unconnected with one another, and even worse, that they all merit equal time and attention in the classroom. (Many U.S. reading programs reflect this misconception, ticking the five boxes rather than integrating those skills in ways that are sensitive to development and to task demands.) A brief reminder in each module of how the topic treated there connects to and should be integrated with the other topics covered would help participants resist the natural tendency to treat them as separate domains and thus independent pedagogical challenges.

REVIEW OF RHODES COURSE: TEACHING READING FOR MEANING

POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVEMENT IN USER EXPERIENCE

REDUCE AMOUNT OF TEXT AND BLOCKS OF TEXT

There are places where text sequences are lengthy and where blocks of text extend too long. It would be desirable to break up longer blocks of text with some activity that required active processing -- a brief assessment, a brief video, or at least a picture with some associated guidance about what to look for.

SHORTEN THE VIDEOS (SEGMENT THEM AND ADD GUIDING QUESTIONS, E.G., WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN THE TEACHER'S PRACTICE?)

Like blocks of text, video segments that last longer than 4-5 min can be hard to process. Furthermore, given our vast experience with television, we tend quickly to become passive observers, rather than active learners, when watching videos. The wonderfully produced and excellently edited videos could offer greater pedagogical value if each came accompanied with a guiding question or two before viewing (Which consonant sounds does Zaza introduce together? What does she do to ensure the children are attending before she starts?) and then perhaps a reprise question at the end (why do you think these particular consonant sounds were taught together?).

EASE USABILITY AND USER ACCESS

There are a number of largely technical tweaks that could facilitate user access to the valuable information provided in the modules.
 An index with hot links to videos and other resources. After going through a module, one often wants to go back and check out a particular video, or a downloadable for a particular activity. Searching for the desired resource can be frustrating. Having a quick index of videos (numbered sequentially but also supplied with informative brief titles) and of downloadable and other resources would ease access and increase use.

MORE ACCESSIBLE GLOSSARY, HOT LINKS ON TECHNICAL WORDS TO ACCESS DEFINITION.

Having a single glossary per module is excellent, but it would also be very helpful if the glossed words were hot linked to their definitions throughout the text.

ANNOTATION AND BOOKMARKING OPTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS.

Participants would benefit from having some way to take marginal notes and to note places in the modules they want to come back to. An annotation and bookmarking option would raise the level of active engagement with the material.

BULK DOWNLOAD OPTION.

The many very useful downloadable and classroom resources included in the modules would be easier to access if there were an option to download them all at once, rather than having to do separate downloads per item.

TIME ESTIMATE WITH PROGRESS BAR.

As noted above, it is useful for participants to know where they are in a module, how much progress they have made, and how much time the next activity will take. Supplying each module, and ideally each substantive section or activity within a module, with a time estimate builds participant agency. Including a progress bar at the top of the screen can also be a useful motivator/monitoring instrument.

SEQUENTIAL NUMBERING OF VIDEOS AND DESCRIPTIVE TITLES.

The videos are numbered, but not always sequentially, and even with sequential numbers it can be hard to locate a particular video for viewing again. Making sure that videos are sequentially numbered within modules and supplying each with a descriptive title would facilitate finding them for re-watching or deeper study.

PROVIDE MORE VARIED ASSESSMENT TYPES WITH BETTER FEEDBACK

The brief and regularly spaced assessments/checks for understanding included in the modules are useful in ensuring the participants pause to think. Very often, though, the required answers are almost adjacent to the assessment item, and these true/false or multiple choice items rarely require deep thinking. The challenge is to present somewhat more thought-provoking items that don't require human intervention to grade or provide feedback. One approach might be to design somewhat more open (but still limited-choice) questions, and then link each answer option to informative feedback. We provide here an illustrative example for English:

In teaching consonant sounds to nonreaders, which of the following would you choose for the first lesson? */c/, /m/, /p/, /t/?*

If participants select /c/, the feedback could be *'/c/ occurs frequently and needs to be learned early in grade 1, but it is not a good choice for starting because it represents two different sounds ([k] and [s]), and thus can cause confusion if introduced too early.*

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If participants select /t/, feedback might be '*/t/ offers a few complexities that might make it a less optimal place to start. For example, it is pronounced [d] in some contexts, and it occurs very frequently in the /th/ sequence, which is not pronounced as [t]. Furthermore, it is hard to model the pronunciation of [t] without including a following schwa, thus potentially raising confusion between phonemes and syllables.'*

If participants select /p/, feedback might be *'/p/ is a good starting place in that it is almost always pronounced as [p]. However, it is hard to model the pronunciation of [p] without including a following schwa, thus potentially raising confusion between phonemes and syllables.'*

If participants select /m/, the feedback might be *'Yes, /m/ is a great place to start because it is pronounced the same in all contexts, and because it is a consonant sound that can actually be pronounced without a vowel, thus reducing the potential for confusion between phoneme and syllable.'*

ORIENT PARTICIPANTS TO LEARNING GOALS MORE REGULARLY

In the process of working one's way through a course or a course sequence, it can be easy to start focusing on the local goals (the next check for understanding, watching this video, finishing this unit) and forget what the overarching goal is. Regular reminders of how the currently focused-on text of information fits into a larger picture can support building a richer conceptual structure. Furthermore, while it may be obvious to the designer how the pieces fit together, and what the learner is meant to accomplish at each step, letting the learners into those secrets requires regular orientation to the learning goals (e.g., "this video shows how to minimize transition time and disruption between lessons" or "this piece of text explains why it is necessary that readers achieve automaticity in word reading").

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COURSE 1

RHODES UNIVERSITY SHORT COURSES

CAPS READING ACTIVITIES

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CONTENT OF TEXT

The content of the CAPS module is a solid introduction for the following modules of the Rhodes course. The text is clearly written and easy to follow. The organization of content throughout the module is particularly effective in familiarizing teachers with the Gradual Release model of teaching and guiding them through how the various reading activities relate to it with a clear introduction and consistent references to the model.

There is room for increased clarity on how the content of this module and the reading activities it introduces relate to the content of the following modules, if they are not meant to serve as standalone units. References to later modules within the text would be helpful for teacher as they begin the Rhodes course to know what to expect later in the course and where they might find more information if they have questions about a certain topic (i.e., "You'll learn more about assessing a student's reading fluency in Module 3").

There is also room for increased clarity in some of the specific guidance offered to teachers within the text. In some cases, the suggestions and advice feel too generable or incomplete to be actionable for teachers. For example, Lesson 2 in Unit 6 states, "It doesn't matter if children have already read the book in Group Guided Reading, as long as they aren't bored from reading the same book over and over" but does not specify how many times might be too many times for a book to be re-read. In Lesson 5 of the same unit, there is also advice for how to pair weak-strong reading pairs but none for strong-strong or weak-weak, which are both suggested as possible pairs as well. Finally, while generally well-written, there are a number of minor spelling and punctuation mistakes throughout the module, particularly in the video subtitles.

VIDEOS

The videos are high-quality, dynamic and interesting to watch. They do a great job at demonstrating actual students and classrooms and teacher practices in action. The teachers featured in the videos are energetic and do a great job at demonstrating the key concepts. The teachers in the video are great models for the audience. In some cases, they did a great job demonstrating what students shouldn't do and asking them if that was correct/ incorrect. They also addressed teacher challenges well throughout the video components.

The videos would be even more effective if they stayed consistent with the major components highlighted in the text. For example, in module 1.5, one of the objectives was for teachers to learn how to complete a baseline assessment. In the video, however, the baseline assessment is not actually completed. The instructor simply goes over how to get the classroom and students ready for the assessment - meaning that teachers watching only see the leadup to the assessment. One way this could be improved is to have a structure where a new concept is introduced, include a video modeling that particular concept, then have teachers do an interactive activity reflecting on their own practice around that concept. It would also be beneficial to have a text box next to some of the videos within the section for teachers to take notes on the content of the video in response to prompts in the text.

ASSESSMENTS

The frequency of assessments within this module and others serve well as quick checks for understanding. In some cases, however, this frequency is inconsistent. One specific instance of this is in Unit 4 (Shared Reading) which notably does not include any activity questions for teachers to answer throughout all 8 lessons of the unit, in contrast to other units in which each lesson includes an assessment. There are also some instances in which the number of assessment questions is misaligned with the content of the lesson; at times several distinct concepts are introduced within a lesson but there will only be a question related to one of them.

As discussed in the Executive Summary, the assessments for the most part rely heavily on multiple choice and other formats which do not assess a very deep level of understanding. This is true across the CAPS module, and we see several possibilities for more authentic assessment that would better mirror the practices teachers are being asked to utilize. Some potential activities might be:

- **Unit 3, Lesson 2:** Have teachers "flip through" digital versions of several books in order to correctly identify which would be best for a teacher read aloud based on the criteria described in the section
- **Unit 3, Lesson 5:** Similarly, have teachers flip through a digital book and make a list of questions that could be asked after reading the book in a lesson. They could then self-assess to compare their questions with those asked in the video for that particular book.
- **Unit 3, Lesson 6:** Ask teachers to drag and drop different components of the Read Aloud assessment tool to correctly match teacher actions to specific student actions.
- **Unit 4, Lesson 4:** A multiple choice question activity could be added to ask teachers to select all of the strategies/teacher actions they noticed in the video of Zaza doing shared reading, rather than providing those in a list.

DESIGN

In terms of design, some of the visuals were nicely organized and provided a helpful summary of the activities. The overall design could be improved, however, with attention made to certain elements of the modules. The program allows teachers to download stock photos but there is no demonstrated need for this function. It would be more useful to allow teachers to have downloadable material on the relevant concepts they are learning. In some cases, some of the PDFs did not load correctly. Additionally, some of the PDFs are provided without any instruction or guidance on how they are related to the text. In these instances, teachers are expected to make a mental leap as to how to make use of the PDFs. On other aspects of the module design, it was unclear what the purpose of "Review Unit" button at bottom of each page is. In the future, this could be used as a way to test understanding for key concepts. It would also be helpful to have the progress tracker on left sidebar when viewing on a computer. This would be great to have this on mobile view as well.

USER EXPERIENCE

Most of the reviewers found issues with the "Continue" button after completing the assessments. The "Continue" button at bottom of page then does not work if you have closed the pop-up to view feedback. It seems that the button only worked on the pop-up window, which does not allow teachers to see if their answers were right/wrong after completing an activity. In some cases, a couple of videos did not load correctly on the first try (though it is unclear if this might have been due to internet connectivity issues).
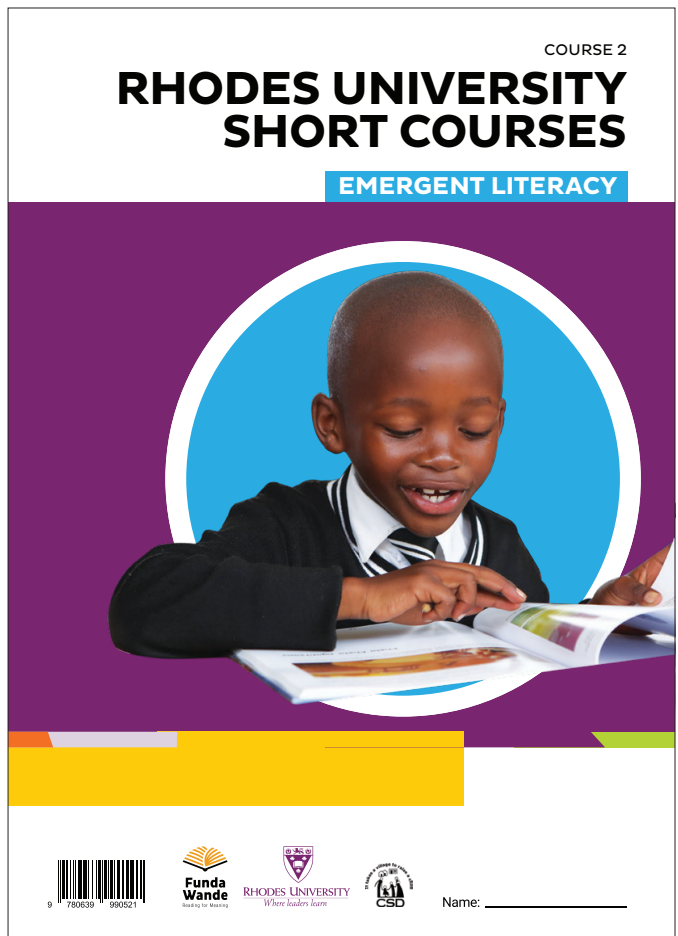
Additionally, some graphics could only be saved as a JPG image when it seems like PDF would be a more appropriate format (though this may only be the case for computer rather than mobile usage). In general, there were some minor typos throughout video subtitles and in the overall text (including apostrophe errors, misspellings, etc.). There are also a few spots in the subtitles with somewhat unclear/unnatural wording, but this may only be true from American English speaker perspective and not for the target audience or in the isiXhosa wording. Lastly, when the video player controls are up, they make it hard to read the English subtitles and there is not a way to way to choose to hide controls. There should be a way to minimize these after a certain period of time.

EMERGENT LITERACY MODULE REVIEW

COURSE 2

RHODES UNIVERSITY SHORT COURSES

EMERGENT LITERACY

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Funda Wande
Reading for Meaning

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

CSD

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CONTENT OF TEXT

It was particularly helpful when concepts that were introduced in the first unit of the module were repeatedly and consistently used throughout the module for reinforcement. Some content, such as including book knowledge as a component of emergent literacy, would not have necessarily come up in other contexts, and the teachers would appreciate that the content was thoughtfully adapted for their context.

While this module was easy to follow for someone with a background in children's language and literacy development, it could benefit from more clarity for participants with less experience with children and literacy, in general. For example, within responses in Unit 1, it is great that reading success and motivation are discussed as positive responses observed in children. Having a teacher as a good model to encourage learners is also included as a positive response, but it is in fact a criterion for eliciting positive responses from students. Participants could benefit from a distinction between actions that promote positive responses and observations that indicate positive responses from reading. Similarly, the sample of rubrics that are provided in this module have the potential to be very useful in classrooms; however, participants would benefit more if they have examples of which types of situations the labels and ratings in the rubrics correspond to. More examples could also be added to expand on the variety of learners and how to support them. The section which demonstrates one child struggling with the direction of writing on page 4 of Unit 2 was helpful, but more examples of children struggling with different aspects of emergent reading and writing could have been included.

The units in this module are generally light on words and lists, which made it easy to follow and comprehend. There are five pages where there is room for improvement on the presentation of the content. They are page 3 of Unit 1, page 3 of Unit 2, page 3 of Unit 3, page 4 of Unit 3, and page 1 of Unit 4. These pages were dense with information and sometimes relatively long compared to the other pages in this module, and

they could be broken up into 2 – 3 pages instead. An alternative would be presenting them in infographics instead of long lists or dense texts.

VIDEOS

Zaza was animated and engaging throughout her presentations, and it was a joy to learn from her. It was notable that the videos were not just of Zaza talking, but they also included videos of children demonstrating emergent reading and writing in actual classrooms and how teachers can appropriately support these children.

Based on the subtitles, there were instances when the content of the videos left room for interpretation. For example, in the video on page 2 of Unit 1, the video implied that a student who is talkative has a large vocabulary, while a shy student does not. Although that was not explicitly mentioned in the subtitles, it was possible for a participant to jump to their own conclusions based on what was mentioned in the video. There was also room for interpretation in the video on page 3 of Unit 1. The video posits an underlying assumption that children's motivation to read and write is heavily influenced by exposure to reading in home environments; however, that is not necessarily the case as children can find reading unattractive for a number of reasons, including having difficulty in learning to reading.

ASSESSMENTS

The assessments were a great way to check for understanding. In this module, there was some variety in the assessment types. Nonetheless, the participants would benefit from more variety in the assessment types. Instead of frequently using true/false or multiple-choice questions, drag and drop, matching, and fill-in-the-blanks assessment types could be employed. These types of activities not only provide variety for the participants, but they also give ideas to the participants on how to design interactive in-class assessments.

Overall, regardless of the type of assessment, participants would benefit from explanations of why their answer was right or wrong. Some of the multiple-choice and true/false questions had explanations. However, explanations were not always consistently provided, especially when the correct answer was selected. There was one instance in which the explanation was inconsistent with the content presented. On page 1 of Unit 2, one true/false question was "Learning to read begins at school. True or False?" The answer was false because "The process of learning to read begins informally soon after birth, as children are exposed to language and to print."

The review on page 6 of Unit 2 used an interesting assessment type, where participants must check boxes based on behaviors we have seen in a child we know well. It was an effective reflective activity; however, no combinations of checks tried gave a pass in the assignment. This assessment should be kept in this module, because of the reflection it requires the participants to reflect on their practice, but this assessment should not be graded correct/incorrect. Furthermore, explanations on why each child is unique and may not meet the same requirements should be provided, so that participants are clear on the main takeaway from this activity.

DESIGN

The diagrams and overall layout of this module were visually appealing. The cluster of components for emergent literacy and phonological/phonemic awareness, for example, were well-presented with almost no room for confusion. Some pages had downloadable materials, which is an effort to save participants' time in lieu of note-taking. Some of those pages had too many downloadable materials, links, and PDFs, particularly in the *Find Out More* sections at the end of each unit. A zip file with all downloadable materials and a link to a playlist of videos may be better instead of providing individual links to download or open.

> The cluster of components for emergent literacy and phonological/phonemic awareness, for example, were well-presented with almost no room for confusion

USER EXPERIENCE

The user experience went smoothly on the first round. However, during a second round in the module, some of the keys were problematic. The "Continue" button frequently did not work, and the playback feature on videos were sometimes non-functional as well.

Some of the important links in this module did not function. On page 3 of Unit 4, it says "Click to see to examples of Phonemic Awareness activities in English and in isiXhosa" but the link did not bring up the activities. This activity is especially important since most of the examples provided in the videos and the PDFs are in isiXhosa, but not in English. Furthermore, phonemic awareness is a key component of emergent literacy. Separating activities for phonemic awareness by classroom, small group, and individual levels would have supported the teachers, because these activities can take very different forms and elicit different types of responses depending on the characteristics of the learners.

DECODING MODULE REVIEW

COURSE 3

RHODES UNIVERSITY SHORT COURSES

DECODING

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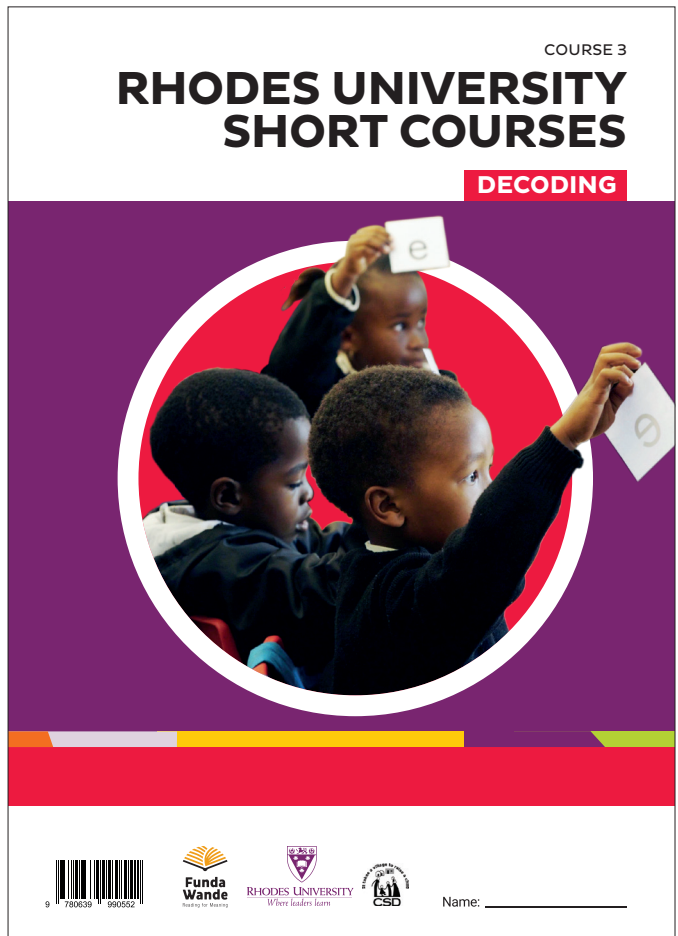
INTRODUCTION

The Decoding Module offers a strong foundation for understanding decoding and effective pedagogical approaches for teachers. The videos in this module are high-quality and deliver information about decoding and pedagogical strategies for teaching it in an engaging manner. The module presents many appealing games and activities for teachers to use in order to motivate students to practice decoding. Additionally, the module includes information on guided reading, a critical activity for developing decoding skills. Below we offer feedback on the content, videos, assessments, user experience, and design to further build upon the Decoding Module.

CONTENT

Overall, the content of the module was well-researched, and we will highlight areas of the module that could make the module more effective. There are several concepts that could be explained more clearly. For example, the module should emphasize that letter sounds are taught differently in English than in isiXhosa and include an example lesson plan for teaching the English phonics. The module should also lay out an explicit research-based progression for teaching English and isiXhosa letters and letter-sound correspondences. There could also be a lesson on teaching phonetically regular and irregular words in English, since many high-frequency words in English do not conform to common phonics patterns and must be memorized. Additionally, the module could provide more specific information on what giving reading homework means—is that simply reading at home, or is there more specific decoding homework that teachers should give for students to strengthen their decoding skills outside of school? More examples could be included of South African-specific texts; for example, when discussing alliteration, the module could suggest examples of isiXhosa children's books that feature alliteration. Providing more South African-specific texts may ensure that the content remains relevant and engaging to the participants.

It was excellent that the relationship between fluency and comprehension is addressed in this module, but it should be stressed earlier in the module. Videos of running records should include comprehension questions to demonstrate that reading quickly and fluently does not mean that students comprehend what they read. Showing videos of students at varying levels of comprehension and fluency (e.g., a student who reads quickly but cannot answer questions about the text, or a student who reads haltingly but understands the content) may be helpful to emphasize this point.

The Decoding Module provides many engaging games and activities for teaching decoding. To further improve, the module could include even more activities for teaching letters and letter sounds (i.e., an alphabet chart with pictures for each letter hung in the room to be reviewed each day). These charts could also be provided as downloadable PDFs so that teachers can access them easily when not using the application. We include more details on this in the Design section of this document. Guided reading activities should also be addressed more explicitly—the examples given in the video were more typical of round robin reading (students take turns reading a page out loud while all other students follow along on that same page) than guided reading (students read silently; each student may be on a different page and does not have to follow along with the student reading out loud).

Finally, to ensure the greatest clarity in communicating content to participants, the module should be reviewed for typos, overly technical jargon, and volume of text. Typos may distract or confuse participants, and while including technical jargon is acceptable, the program should scaffold the participant's understanding of the technical jargon by providing further explanation of the terms. By reducing the volume and density of the text in certain parts of the module, the content may appear less intimidating and more accessible and therefore encourage participants to continually engage with the material.

VIDEOS

The videos in the Decoding module were well-produced, dynamic, and engaging. The teachers in videos did a wonderful job of breaking down complex pedagogical concepts, like phonological awareness, and modeling teaching strategies and techniques in real classrooms with real students. To further emphasize these concepts and strategies before participants watch the video, there should be specific learning objectives for watching each video that directly tie to activities that the participant must complete during or after viewing the video. It may also be helpful to indicate when in the video certain techniques are being used, either through a voice over or through text and graphics flashing on the screen. This will help participants identify the technique in a realistic context.

Additionally, the videos could be made even better if the content of the videos were double-checked for accuracy. For example, in one video, Zaza asks how many sounds there are in a word, and the children clap the syllables and say, "Four." She says this is correct; however, there are actually four syllables and seven sounds. This will confuse participants since the difference between sounds and syllables was emphasized in an earlier lesson. There are some videos that are missing subtitles, captions, and titles, or some that are incorrectly captioned or subtitled, as well as some videos that do not demonstrate the skill that they claim to demonstrate (i.e., 3.3.4, 3.4.1). Finally, the module could be strengthened by adding even more videos, such as videos of teachers correcting students in order to give participants examples of how these techniques can best be implemented in a classroom.

> The videos in the Decoding module were well-produced, dynamic, and engaging. The teachers in videos did a wonderful job of breaking down complex pedagogical concepts, like phonological awareness, and modeling teaching strategies and techniques in real classrooms with real students.

ASSESSMENTS

The regularity of assessments within the module and the clarity of questions were useful. These assessments would be even better if they included more feedback, both when participants answer correctly and incorrectly. Additionally, asking more complex questions that require higher level thinking and synthesis of material in the module may elevate the students' understanding of the material. Complex questions could include asking participants to watch a video then diagnose a child's difficulty in decoding or other more interactive activities, like the matching activity in 2.2. Assessments should also appear on their own pages in the module rather than within the text. By having assessments on pages separate from the presented material, participants must recall the material without simply scrolling up to find the answer. Not only will participants engage more deeply with the material, but separating these pages may also improve navigation through the module as participants may wish to go directly to the assessments to review their understanding of the concepts. Another improvement could be to provide additional resources to participants when they struggle with an assessment. For example, when providing feedback on the participant's performance on the assessment, if the participant struggled, also provide additional resources to the participant or direct the participant to the section of the module that may help clarify their confusion. Lastly, it may also be helpful to the participants to include a progress bar for the module to show their progress and how well they grasp the concepts. This addition will give

participants a tangible goal and motivation to continue to completion.

USER EXPERIENCE

The user experience has the greatest potential for improvement. Certain navigation buttons malfunctioned throughout the unit which would be a simple yet important improvement to the user experience of the module. Similarly, after assessments, the app says to click a reset button to retake the assessment, but no reset button exists. It is important to ensure this consistency throughout the module to keep participants engaged and minimize unnecessary distraction with navigation. Another feature that could be added to improve the user experience is having tooltips or hyperlinks to definitions as vocabulary words and key concepts appear throughout the module. Because this module is in the middle of the program, participants may need prompting to recall concepts that were introduced earlier in the course. Including hyperlinks or tooltips in the text allows a simple way for participants to access reminders of the concepts.

DESIGN

The overall structure and organization of the module is clear and consistent with the other modules in the program. The design of the module could be further improved by carefully considering how certain information is presented to the participant. For example, the learning timelines presented in unit 1.5 might be clearer if presented in a Gantt chart rather than a table. By presenting the timeline in a Gantt chart, participants can more clearly see when students should learn and master certain skills and how these timelines might overlap with more basic and more advanced skills.

Another example of improving how information is presented is by carefully choosing when to incorporate downloadable PDFs. Throughout the module, certain images, charts, and additional resources are presented as PDFs. In the context of the application and module, PDFs mean that participants must take another step to access the information since they must click to view the contents of the PDF. The PDFs are no doubt a valuable resource for participants if they need to print information for reference, but when participants are navigating through the application, more information should be presented as images, text, and video embedded in the application. PDFs should be reserved for any information that could be referenced, such as charts, activity instructions, lesson templates, and worksheet examples.

> The overall structure and organization of the module is clear and consistent with the other modules in the program. The design of the module could be further improved by carefully considering how certain information is presented to the participant

Another way in which the module could further hone the design is through standardizing how resources are presented. For example, unit 2.5 lists several activities and details their steps. The way it is presented in the application is excellent and could be further improved if all activities were listed and described using a standard format and indexed in an activity repository outside of module 3. Participants could then easily reference these activities without having to remember where they encountered them in the module. The activity repository would not necessarily be exclusively for module 3, and it could include any activity presented throughout the course, organized by module or skill. Similarly, in unit 2.3 when listing examples of books, rather than listing the books as PDFs, a database could be created with books that emphasize specific skills in reading. Again, participants could easily reference these resources even after completing the course.

TEN ESSENTIAL PRACTICES OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION

The Decoding module covered some of the essential literacy practices (literacyessentials.org), including developing phonological awareness and instruction in the code. The videos showed students practicing blending and segmenting of spoken sounds and promoted systematic instruction in the code with many opportunities to apply the knowledge and reinforcement of these skills with coaching. The module also touched on small and individualized instruction as well as some discussion of assessment. The Decoding module could be made even stronger by including more rhymes, songs, and picture sorts to teach phonemic awareness. The phonics instruction could also be differentiated according to children's levels; not all children in the class may need the same type of phonics instruction at the same time, so this would be an opportunity for using same-ability-level or homogeneous grouping. The module could also be improved by addressing motivation more explicitly and by answering how collaboration and student choice can be used to increase student engagement.

The module could also speak more to small-group instruction, including more information on guided reading and why this model of small group work is effective for improving decoding (via instruction in word identification, fluency, prompting, etc.). The module could also address how assessment can

be used to group students for small-group instruction and make phonics instruction more engaging for students at different ability levels. Additionally, the module should describe how teachers are utilizing decodable or predictable texts—which leveling system is being used, and how can teachers determine which texts are right for which types of students?

Finally, the module can use knowledge of the local South African context to discuss how collaboration between the classroom teacher and families can be increased. Whether that involves sending leveled books home for fluency practice or asking families to help their children find items around the house that begin with different letter sounds, teachers should include families in decoding instruction so that significant adults feel connected to their children's school experiences and know how to support their literacy learning at home. When instructing teachers to include families, it would also be critical to emphasize that parental involvement may need to be adapted based on the literacy skills of parents, the availability of resources at home, and the family's schedule.

CONCLUSION

The Decoding module provides teachers with a strong overview of instruction in the code as well as phonemic awareness and phonics activities to be implemented in the classroom and an explanation of the relationship between decoding and fluency. The suggestions above would only enhance an already powerful pedagogical tool for improving the literacy instruction of primary teachers in South Africa.
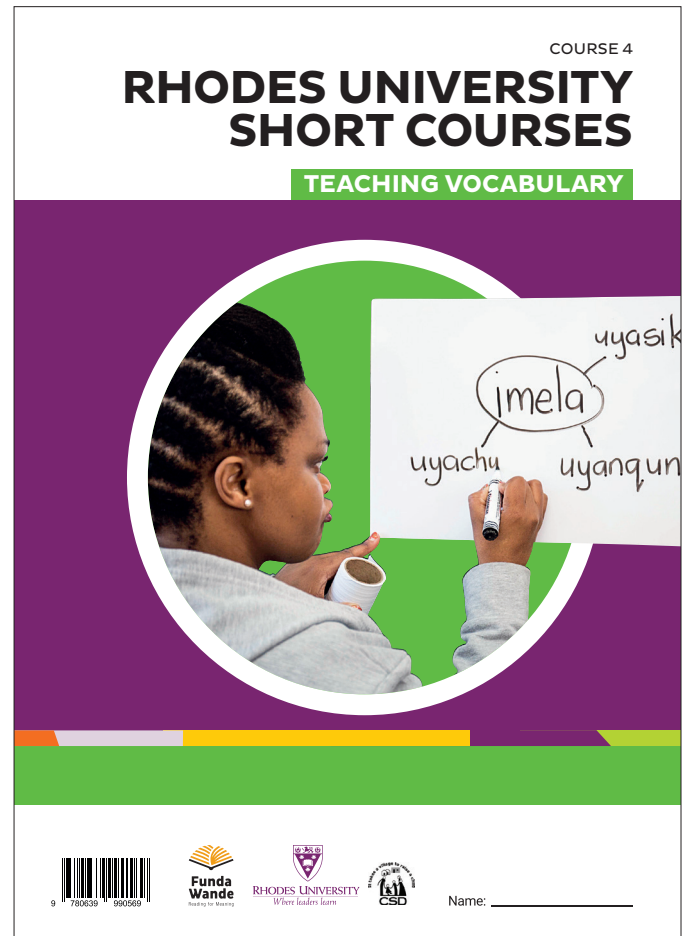
VOCABULARY MODULE REVIEW

COURSE 4

RHODES UNIVERSITY SHORT COURSES

TEACHING VOCABULARY

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CONTENT OF TEXT

The reviewers found that the vocabulary module was well developed, and it was generally well supported by literacy research. The module had a clear arc of learning that included the following sections: introduction and key concepts, vocabulary development, teaching vocabulary incidentally, teaching vocabulary explicitly, strategies for independent vocab learning, and assessing vocabulary. In other words, the module gives teachers a toolkit for how to teach vocabulary directly and casually. The level of rigor is probably sufficient for teachers who are new to or who would benefit from coaching around vocabulary development, and teachers' skills are reinforced as they progress through the unit, because later sections make mention of earlier ones. Another highlight of the module are the activities such as Activity 4.23 that ask teachers to reflect on their own classroom experiences, and the table in section 4.5 that helps teachers decide which words to teach explicitly is very helpful. In addition, the reviewers would suggest the following changes to the module: including information on how to promote translanguaging (or how to use one language to help students learn another language), expanding the section on teaching vocabulary explicitly since it is so important, including more references to the other modules (i.e., how vocabulary development can be used to aid reading comprehension), expanding the "Strategies for Independent Vocab Learning" section since that seemed to be least complete, and possibly including ways that teachers can include families in the development of students' vocabularies. Other more minor points you may wish to tweak include: adding flexibility on when assessments occur (i.e., vocabulary assessments do not have to happen on Fridays), including more of a culminating experience at the end of the module (currently, it just sort of ends without any opportunities for reflection), breaking up 4.5 - "How do I do it?" - into two separate pages because there are a lot of words on the page, and including more ways to intrinsically motivate students to learn vocabulary.

VIDEOS

The reviewers found that the videos in the vocabulary module were lively and effective. The teachers and students were authentically enthusiastic in them. Generally, the videos in the module matched the text on the page associated with the video, and the subtitles in the videos seemed to convey the messages effectively. Some of the videos do incorporate aspects of vocabulary development that are beyond the scope of the page in which the video is embedded, but this is not necessarily a problem, because the videos spiral information found in other areas of the module. However, it might be better if some of the longer videos were shortened (e.g., the first minute of the "What is Incidental Vocab Teaching?" video in 3.6 can be cut out). Further, the module would be improved if guiding questions and goals for understanding for all of the videos were written above the videos.

ASSESSMENTS

Assessments occur throughout the Rhodes course, and they are a useful way to check the understanding of their users. However, there are aspects that could be built upon, added, or altered in order to enhance the overall assessment experience. Though there are a number of types of assessments (drag and drop, true or false, etc.), sometimes these activities can appear confusing or do not work. Many of the quizzes are somewhat basic, asking for answers that are given in the text right above it. Though this is not necessarily a negative experience, there could be ways to make the quizzes more engaging for their users. This could be done by continuing to add different types of assessments and making them accessible.

The reflective prompts for open response assessments are beneficial and a constructive way to help teachers reflect upon their own classroom and how the knowledge they have gained will improve their teaching. Similarly, when teachers complete assessments, we hope that they could receive feedback to help them understand why an answer was right or wrong.

> The reflective prompts for open response assessments are beneficial and a constructive way to help teachers reflect upon their own classroom and how the knowledge they have gained will improve their teaching.

DESIGN

The vibrant life of South Africa can be experienced in the Rhodes course. The videos carry deep and meaningful energy that embodies a beautiful community, as well as the overall course itself. An increase in color vibrancy may be a beneficial inclusion. Nevertheless, lessons lean toward being rather text-heavy. This can somewhat take away from the vibrancy mentioned earlier. One solution would be to add more videos, charts, and graphs to each page to provide a diversity of media to users. This may reduce the amount of text and expand the types of knowledge included.

The inclusion of some sort of progress bar may be helpful for users as they work through the module. This way they can see how much they have left to finish or where they are in the process of completion.

USER EXPERIENCE

In terms of user experience, the Rhodes course is practical. The only challenges that occur with the user experience usually occur within the quizzes. Occasionally, the buttons do not work in a quiz or will not allow users to finish a quiz and move on. This seems like a simple fix that will make the module an effective learning experience. The program itself is simple to use and could be used by users with varying technology experience.
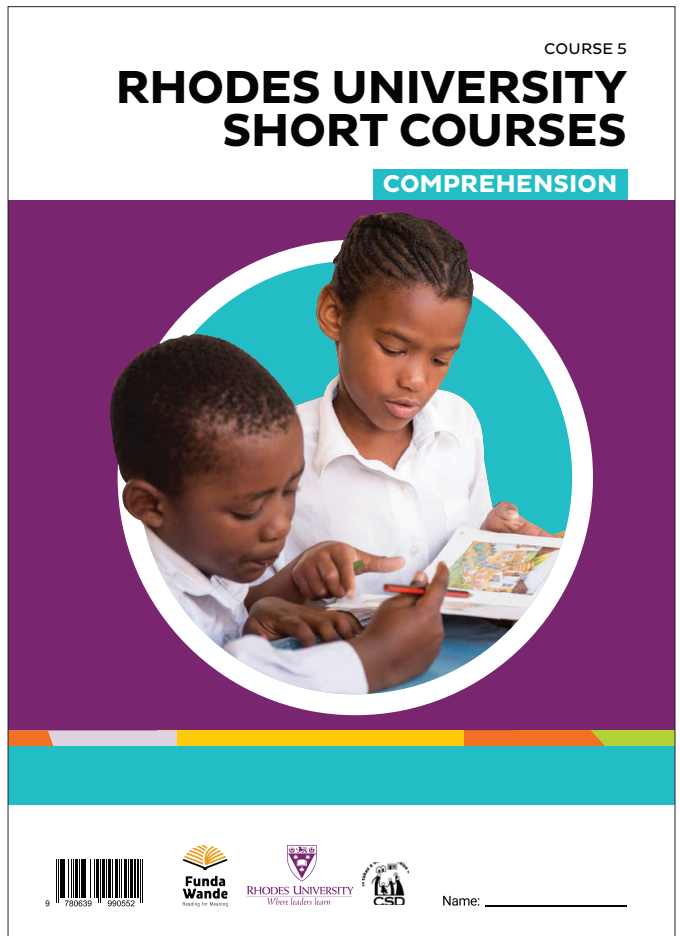
COMPREHENSION MODULE REVIEW

COURSE 5

RHODES UNIVERSITY SHORT COURSES

COMPREHENSION

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CONTENT OF TEXT

The content of the text overall is fitting for the topic. The units flow nicely into one another. Some of the tables (such as in unit 5.1) are not the most useful and can be taken out. The introduction unit is slightly rushed, it would be beneficial to explain that each topic will be delved into in the remaining units and explain which units cover which topics. Unit 5.2 downloadables have a lot of potential as a model for the other units in this comprehension module. There is a good overview of the four text types in 5.1 and excellent resources and timing in 5.2. This format can be expanded for the entire module. Unit 5.4 has clear and easily digestible visuals that should be used as an exemplar. Unit 5.5 has excellent summary questions including aspects of comprehension, formatively, when to use, summatively, type of question/task to assess. More can be done on post-assessment analysis.

VIDEOS

The videos are well designed and model the teaching strategies well. It would be helpful to include some video footage of teachers supporting individual students. The first video of a teacher teaching a class live is an excellent way to start the unit. All videos could use some guiding questions, so teachers know on what to focus while watching the video. We would suggest adding more and shorter videos throughout the units.

ASSESSMENTS

Overall, there needs to be more built in practice and application tasks for teachers throughout the unit. True and false questions only are not the most effective way to check for understanding and mastery of content. For unit 5.3, can teachers generate their own questions? Although unit 5.3 does have teachers record their own lesson and make a list of questions, this could then be further extended by receiving feedback from an online coach or

Whatsapp peer group. For the quizzes with text examples, it is helpful to have more than two texts as examples in the quiz. For unit 5.4, the assessment needs to ask beyond the type of text to questions such as: What can students learn from this type of text? What is the purpose of this type of text? The reflection in unit 4.8 is weak. This unit needs a more concrete activity and specific questions to answer. For unit 5.5, teachers need practice writing their own assessment questions. They also need much more practice analyzing student questions and results. One idea is to give the teachers a test accompanied by student data and ask them to practice analyzing it and determining the question time. In general, the assessment format needs to be revamped to include deeper (not surface level) questions and more practical hands-on practice.

DESIGN

The design of the Comprehension module was overall very clear. Some units started with a video that modeled the skills being taught, which set the stage for teachers' learning expectations for the unit and lesson. For example, in Unit 5.3 "Using Questions to Build Comprehension," there was a very clear layout, detailing how to use questions effectively and what does it look like in the classroom. Some units also have helpful tables that explain and differentiate different comprehension skills and when to use them, making the design of the module easy to follow. To further improve the design of the Comprehension module, we suggest exchanging some of the downloadable pictures for diagrams or layouts of concepts that would further the teachers' learning and be helpful tools for them to refer.

The design of the Comprehension module was overall very clear. Some units started with a video that modeled the skills being taught, which set the stage for teachers' learning expectations for the unit and lesson.

USER EXPERIENCE

Overall, the Comprehension module user experience was fine, but some key changes could strengthen the overall usability of the module. There were some technical difficulties with the links and buttons in the module. For example, in the Teaching Comprehension unit, the link in the first lesson for the picture chart does not work. Moreover, throughout the module, the Continue button often did not function well. Additionally, some pictures and tables should be revamped in order to increase the effectiveness of the content. This could be done through interspersing more pictures into some text-heavy modules, but also being more intentional about what concepts are highlighted in the pictures so that they further learning from the module. Through checking some of the technical aspects of the module and including more intentional balance between text and visuals, the Comprehension module would greatly improve the teachers' learning experience.

IDEAS FOR THE COMPREHENSION MODULE

The Teaching Comprehension module has great potential and provides multiple learning opportunities for teachers to build their reading comprehension teaching capacities. To further improve the module and extend learning, we would like to suggest some ideas for consideration:

TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN TEACHERS AND THE MODULE

- **Include opportunities for teachers to submit a lesson plan document** or videos of themselves teaching and receive feedback from an online coach.
- **If no online coach is available, teachers can create and submit a sample lesson plan** incorporating concepts from the module as an assignment to show understanding of concepts and skills. Additionally, if possible, teachers could create a video of themselves teaching and submit as an assignment.

TO INCREASE COLLABORATION BETWEEN TEACHERS

- **Create a discussion board linked to each module.** Teachers could leave comments, questions and add ideas or reflections about ways to in corporate new knowledge into their learning. This could inspire a community of learning, so teachers do not feel isolated while completing the course, but instead they are part of a community of teachers all working to improve their teaching abilities.
- **Create a Teachers' Group,** perhaps through preexisting messaging apps like WhatsApp, that can increase communication and collaboration among teachers going through the module. Even though the learning happens online, person-to-person interaction is still vital to the learning process.

TO ENCOURAGE MULTILINGUALISM AND HONOR DIVERSITY

- **Consider how to further celebrate multilingualism** and draw connections between different words of different languages. For example, how

can the course and course materials, such as videos, visuals, and text, be made accessible to the other language communities within South Africa?

■ **Create an online database in the Rhodes Course** that teachers can save, bookmark, or add important lessons, visuals, videos, or reflections that they feel are particularly useful while completing the course. This would allow teachers to have a personalized collection of resources to which they can easily refer.

■ To draw connections between different modules, consider adding in a Journal of Learning, in which teachers can write reflections or ideas at the end of each unit, as well as some questions to encourage teachers to actively consider how to incorporate different lessons into their practice.

WHAT WENT WELL

Units that had a clear explanation of the topic (such as unit 5.4 with a clear explanation of the four types of non-fiction texts) and accompanying meaningful visual graphics were beneficial for teachers. Units that had a description and clearly stated timing for using the skills in the lesson were also more useful for teachers. Some units that started with a video modeling the skills being taught were very effective. Unit 5.3 had a clear layout: what is it and what does it look like? This can be used for all units to make them more structured. Some of the units had helpful tables to explain and differentiate different comprehension skills and timing to use them.

EVEN BETTER IF

The units could use more practice and practical application of knowledge and tasks for teachers to complete. The units could be improved if they had more built in activities throughout the units and more case based/problem-solving activities for teachers. It would also be helpful to add in more review of skills and learning throughout the unit, rather than just at the end. Meaningful visual explanations can enhance learning more than text-heavy bullet points. Some of the units are currently a passive transfer of knowledge, they need more interaction with the teachers. The assessment section of each unit needs to be completely revamped to include more deeper learning checks for understanding (T/F and multiple choice are not the best way to assess learning). The "find out more" sections are useful but need to be better signposted.

TEACHING WRITING AND HANDWRITING MODULE REVIEW

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COURSE 6

RHODES UNIVERSITY SHORT COURSES

WRITING AND HANDWRITING

Funda Wande — Reading for Meaning

RHODES UNIVERSITY — *Where leaders learn*

CSD

Name: _____

INTRODUCTION

The module effectively reviews the entire process of teaching students handwriting and writing. The strategies within this lesson are helpful, relevant, and easily applicable for teachers to implement in the classroom. This summary will highlight the most successful aspects of this module by explaining what about the lessons work well, while also describing ways in which the module can be revised to better serve teachers and students. Overall, this is an informative module that truly serves to guide users in teaching students the handwriting and writing process, step-by-step.

CONTENT OF TEXT

In general, the content of the Teaching Writing and Handwriting is relevant and well-structured. It is evident in many parts of the module that the content is informed by research as well as classroom pedagogy. The use of pictures within the module (e.g., regarding the correct and incorrect way to grip a pencil) is certainly effective to cement the text. Perhaps, adding more pictures is worth considering in order to reduce the amount of text and make it more aesthetically appealing as well as more meaningful, clear, and concise. For example, when discussing types of paper, it would be useful to show pictures (unlined paper, lined paper, and laminated blank/lined pages). Lastly, a learning objective section at the beginning of the module, as well as a concluding section bringing together the main takeaways of the module, would be beneficial to include.

VIDEOS

The videos are an extremely effective component of this module, overall. They add a certain illustrative component to the lessons and help break the monotony of just reading text. Extremely positive and engaging student-teacher interactions and practices in the classroom are also illustrated

throughout the module.

The teachers within the videos—especially Permie and Zaza—infuse energy and joy into their lessons and positively represent the potential for engagement. In Video 195, for example, Permie models reflecting on one's writing to see if all story elements have been included and ends the lesson by leading her students in the following chant: "Well done, keep it up, and shine!" Such a seemingly simple practice in the video is profoundly powerful—especially to teachers preparing to enter a classroom and set up their own routines to energize and motivate students. Teachers can also gain ideas in section 6.6, Video 190. This compilation of clips includes many activities to stimulate creative writing—outdoor chants, songs, games, etc.—and is sure to get the teachers' creative juices flowing.

> The teachers within the videos—especially Permie and Zaza—infuse energy and joy into their lessons and positively represent the potential for engagement.

While the videos are overwhelmingly successful, there were a few areas of potential growth and refinement in this component of the module. The number labeling system for the videos, for example, becomes confusing when videos jump from the 170s to the 190s back down to the 150s. With no clear logic to the labeling system, it is difficult to keep track of the videos and locate them later. The videos would benefit from clearer titles that identify the core focus of each individual video. In addition, it might be beneficial to create a separate "video library" of all course videos (in a new section) so that viewers can quickly browse and locate the one they are searching for, instead of clicking and scrolling through every section.

Finally, while most videos match their descriptions, once in a while, the video content does not appear clearly linked to the video description or information presented in the accompanying section text. In 6.3, Video 193, for example, the description outlines that the video will show "two schoolchildren in very different writing states" and asks viewers to note differences between the two. However, it does not seem to show any such thing; viewers are unable to even clearly make out what the children are working on, much less compare and contrast writing states. Besides cleaning up some text and descriptions which accompany videos, adding a voiceover commentary to the videos could also be useful and help to emphasize the connection between text and video. In 6.4, Video 153, the description says it will introduce five big ideas about teaching writing, but during the 13-minute video full of different class clips, it is difficult to locate and differentiate the ideas. A voiceover here could be valuable in drawing the viewer's attention to important ideas and practices that would otherwise get lost or overlooked.

ASSESSMENTS

The focus on assessments as displayed by the frequency and array of quizzes is certainly commendable. In the module, assessments provide the opportunity for the user to pause and reflect on the learnings, a vitally important practice in any course. Therefore, in order to make the assessments more meaningful, below are some suggestions for strengthening this important component of the module .

Firstly, the assessments can be made more challenging—especially with regards to the true and false questions. To ensure learning, teachers should be provided with the rationale behind the answer regardless of whether they answered correctly. Moreover, it may be more effective to include written prompts or guided activities, such as designing a lesson plan that users could respond to so they may sit with their understanding of a certain subsection, or even of the entire module. Sample answers to prompts can be provided in a resources section that can be accessed at any point in time.

Additionally, the usability of the drag-and-drop assessments is hindered by the online formatting. This provides an opportunity for revising certain assessments so that they check for understanding in such a manner that extends beyond simply selecting the correct singular answer. As suggested, coming up with responses based on predetermined prompts would be an ideal fit. These responses could later be compared to an already available sample response or be a part of discussions via in-person or virtual sessions.

DESIGN

In terms of the design throughout Teaching Writing and Handwriting, it is effective but there are certainly opportunities to sharpen it up. Overall, in the design layout of the programming, the sheer number of lists can feel tedious. The instances of inconsistent formatting, in terms of spacing, bulleting, and bolding of phrases, can also be distracting. Simple things, such as intermittent bolding and uses of "and" sometimes and "&" other times (6.3) can become unnecessary distractors. Setting and sticking with a clear formatting design will not only strengthen the visual appeal of the presentation of information but will also add to the module's ease of use.

In addition, the download button tends to obscure the text of some downloadables, making users unable to clearly make out the information in the image until they actually download it (e.g., chart at the top of 6.1.3). It might make more sense to bring the download button down—right below the

image and to the right of a short description that could outline to the user what the downloadable above is and how it can be used.

Finally, the pictures of the teachers and students add vitality to the lessons and, along with certain color-coordinated charts, are aesthetically pleasing. There are a few additional moments where upping the aesthetic appeal of the information—through images, colors, or a different presentation, would be powerful. Specifically, the 6.3 Roleplay Writing section could be amped up and reworked so that its presentation matches a bit more with the creativity of the subject—and relies less on lists and long text.

USER EXPERIENCE

From a users' perspective, this module provides an excellent learning experience. One of the most effective features for users is the downloadables throughout the lessons that serve to highlight or exemplify the material in an engaging way. In the "Introduction to Teaching Handwriting" section of the module, the second lesson (6.1.2) offers a page of exemplary, detailed tables that clarify and enhance concepts for the user. However, it is notable that because there are so many downloadables throughout this module, not all of them contribute positively to the user's experience. It would be helpful if every downloadable, whether it is a table or image, could positively contribute to or enhance the users' learning.

The website itself is very approachable. The bright colors, large fonts, and lively images all work to contribute to a positive experience for the user. To make this experience even stronger, it would be helpful if all fonts and font sizes were consistent, as mentioned previously, to not distract the user away from the incredible content. To promote even more engagement with the content in this module, it would also be beneficial to have a way to bookmark and annotate pages and save this work to review in the future. Also, the implementation of a clearer progress tracking feature and a search bar to make all desired material more easily accessible would further enhance the user experience in not just this module, but the entire course.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this module provides users with an excellent learning experience that will support them through effectively instructing handwriting and writing processes in the classroom. Although some suggestions for improvements were made, it is notable that the work this module is doing is admirable and its foundation is solid. The users' teaching will greatly benefit from this content.