Changing Literacy Outcomes for Middle School Students

Middle School Literacy Initiative
The Middle School Literacy Crisis
One of the greatest challenges facing middle schools is ensuring students have the strategies needed to read the increasingly complex texts they encounter across the disciplines.

Generation Ready’s Middle School Literacy Initiative (MSLI) addresses the issue of struggling adolescent students through a comprehensive districtwide approach to raising literacy outcomes. Our goal is to have students enter high school with the literacy skills necessary to succeed.

About Generation Ready
Generation Ready’s roots are in literacy instruction and many of our consultants have been trained in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada where literacy instruction is considered some of the most effective in the world. Over 20 years ago, we got our start by partnering with the New York City Department of Education to improve literacy instruction in some of the most challenged schools in the nation. Since then, we have provided professional development workshops and job-embedded consultancy support for thousands of school leaders, teachers, and district staff across the country.
Middle School Literacy Initiative

Generation Ready education consultants work with school teams on six schoolwide practices that are identified as essential to improving literacy outcomes for all students. There are three key elements to Generation Ready’s Middle School Literacy Initiative:

1. A whole-school focus
   In order to ensure a successful Middle School Literacy Initiative, all teachers and administrators must be engaged in the effort. An MSLI implementation includes the following:
   • Principals and leadership teams
   • ELA teachers
   • Interdisciplinary teams
   • Job-embedded consultancy across the curriculum in ELA, science, and social studies

2. Evidenced-based research focused on the factors impacting student literacy
   We begin by ensuring that all teachers have a shared understanding of literacy learning globally and adolescent literacy specifically. This sets the groundwork for improved literacy instruction across the curriculum.

3. A focus on teaching practice
   It’s not just theoretical. We work side-by-side with educators, modeling and observing to ensure that teacher learning is translated into instructional practice.

“Performance on complex texts is the clearest differentiator in reading between students who are more likely to be ready for college and those who are less likely to be ready.”

– ACT, 2006
Effective literacy instruction across ELA and content areas

Teachers provide direct, explicit instruction in comprehension and use a common language to describe strategies. Teachers use rubrics to assess students’ use of comprehension strategies.

One of the challenges facing middle schools is the gap between the students’ need for differentiated instruction and the skills of the teacher. We address the explicit teaching and monitoring of comprehension strategies through:
• Explicit modeling of how the strategies work
• Guided or scaffolded practice with increasingly complex text
• Developing students’ metacognition of their use of strategies
• Creating opportunities for students to practice independently

Small group text-based discussions around increasingly complex texts

Reciprocal reading is introduced in ELA and used in social studies and science classes.

The increased rigor of the Common Core State Standards and other state standards requires students to cite textual evidence and engage in discussions that stay deeply connected to the text.

We support literacy teaching in whole-class and small groups specifically by:
• Applying a scaffolded approach to student learning that includes reciprocal teaching and comprehension strategies
• Facilitating a collaborative process between teachers and students in constructing meaning through the strategies of predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarizing
• Introducing the approach in ELA first, then applying it to other content area classrooms

Academic vocabulary introduced across disciplines

Word Generation is used to introduce academic vocabulary across disciplines.

Adolescent students often struggle with comprehension because they lack the vocabulary to understand increasingly complex academic texts.

Teachers may ignore academic vocabulary words and pay more attention to the technical words unique to one discipline.

We support ELA and content area teachers in the effective teaching of academic and domain-specific vocabulary by:
• Ensuring students have multiple exposures to academic vocabulary across content areas
• Working with teachers to actively engage students and use academic vocabulary in the context of meaningful discussions
• Reinforcing the notion that the context of a word’s use in a given instance is often more important than the entire spectrum of its history, meaning, usage, and features

A tiered assessment strategy

Both summative and formative assessments are used to track student progress, check for understanding, and identify students in need of explicit intervention.
Middle school assessment data rarely provides information on students’ reading. We support schools in implementing an assessment strategy that:

- Tracks student growth in reading and identifies individual strengths and learning needs
- Identifies students for strategic secondary diagnostic assessment and targeted intervention
- Monitors the impact of the interventions

**Teams of teachers collaborating around student data**

Unlike elementary school, middle school students move from teacher to teacher, each with a different area of expertise. This often results in a fragmented curriculum.

We help school leaders establish a school schedule that allows time for teams to work and collaborate across disciplines to:

- Talk about aligning their practice
- Plan together to create consistency of instruction across subject areas
- Collaborate around student work

**Generation Ready’s Six Essential Practices for Improving Literacy Outcomes**

1. Effective literacy instruction across ELA and content areas
2. Small group text-based discussions around increasingly complex texts
3. Academic vocabulary introduced across disciplines
4. A tiered assessment strategy
5. Teams of teachers collaborating around student data
6. Job-embedded PD for teachers to support the implementation

**Job-embedded PD for teachers to support the implementation**

Generation Ready consultants work with teachers to model and support effective Tier One literacy instruction across ELA, science and social studies.

Gaps between the needs of students and the expertise of most middle school teachers are too great to be addressed by more rigorous standards and new curricula alone.

Teachers also need a deeper understanding of the reading process and effective literacy practices across content.

A true commitment to a whole-school focus on literacy means that typical one or two-day workshops are not enough. Rather, professional development must be comprehensive, ongoing, intensive, and designed to improve teacher and principal effectiveness in raising literacy achievement.
"Group work exceeded my expectations. The students were highly engaged and produced outstanding results."

– Donna, 7th grade teacher

## Working with Generation Ready

Our approach is designed to build capacity over time. A typical implementation is illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1 6th Grade</th>
<th>Year 2 6th and 7th Grade</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principals and Leadership Teams</strong></td>
<td><strong>ELA Teachers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interdisciplinary Teams</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Full Day Workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Year 1 6th Grade</strong></td>
<td>6th grade ELA teachers learn how to implement a rigorous literacy program that addresses the needs of adolescents. Teachers become familiar with explicit teaching strategies for comprehension, small group work, and academic vocabulary.</td>
<td>6th grade content area teachers learn strategies to integrate literacy and content in their subject areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Year 2 6th and 7th Grade</strong></td>
<td>6th grade teachers deepen small group work and support for student collaboration around increasingly complex texts.</td>
<td>6th grade content area teachers build on the small group strategies introduced in ELA classrooms in their content area.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Year 3</strong></td>
<td>7th grade ELA teachers learn how to implement a rigorous literacy program that addresses the needs of adolescents. Teachers become familiar with explicit teaching strategies for comprehension, small group work, and academic vocabulary.</td>
<td>7th grade content area teachers learn strategies to integrate literacy and content in their subject areas. Teachers learn how to develop the discipline-specific skills needed to read texts in the content areas.</td>
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### Job-embedded Consultancy for ELA, Science, and Social Studies Teachers (30-35 Days)

Job-embedded professional development supports ELA and content teachers as they implement practices introduced in workshops. The intended outcomes are the following:

- Direct, explicit comprehension instruction in ELA classrooms with teachers using a common language to describe strategies
- Small group text-based collaborative learning, with students interacting with one another around a variety of texts
- Ongoing formative and summative assessment of students that includes rubric-based information gathering on students’ use of comprehension strategies
- Academic vocabulary introduced across ELA and content areas
- Targeted interventions for students at risk in reading (years 2 and 3 only)

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6th grade content area teachers build on the small group strategies introduced in ELA classrooms in their content area.
Results
Generation Ready’s Middle School Literacy Initiative has been proven to significantly improve literacy proficiency. In New York City during the 2011-2012 school year, 11 of the top 13 schools who made the most significant growth were schools where Generation Ready education consultants provided job-embedded professional development.

Situation
This small New York City middle school serves 290 students, of which nearly three quarters qualify for reduced or free lunches. The school’s principal introduced significant structural changes to nurture a commitment to student learning and took advantage of the New York Department of Education-funded Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI) designed to improve literacy.

Solution
Using MSQI funding, the school engaged with Generation Ready to implement an extended literacy block along with tiered literacy interventions and targeted professional development.

Our literacy consultant provided job-embedded professional development to all of the school’s 6th and 7th grade teachers utilizing our Middle School Literacy Initiative model and growth was seen in every sub-population.

Growth of MSQI students compared to the national average

6th Grade: 2,571 students
7th Grade: 2,163 students

These results are for students from October 2012-February 2013.

Middle school in Bronx, NY
Percentage of 6th grade students at or above grade level.
Total population: 196 students

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>September 2012</th>
<th>January 2013</th>
<th>June 2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At or above grade level</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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Percentage of 7th grade students at or above grade level.
Total population: 305 students

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At or above grade level</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>53%</td>
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These results are for students from September 2012-June 2013. Student progress is tracked through the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), a nationally normed Cloze comprehension assessment.
About Generation Ready
We are the nation’s leading partner for educators with roots that go back 20 years, working with superintendents, principals, and teachers to elevate student achievement through professional learning services and targeted school and district solutions.

Generation Ready offers a unique system of job-embedded consultancy, best practices and embedded technology that has helped build teacher skills and capacity at thousands of schools. It’s professional development with a difference – evidence-based and proven to deliver results.

Learn more about the Generation Ready difference
Let us show you how a Generation Ready partnership can move you toward the outcome that matters most: ensuring student success. Contact your Generation Ready representative today.

Give us a call at (866) 792-5879 or visit us at: generationready.com

“Reciprocal reading has helped me understand - we ask questions and I learn from other students.”

– Eason, 7th grade student