



Session Descriptions

Thursday, January 15, 2026

Thursday Opening Session for all educators, 5:30 – 7:00 PM

Lester Laminack “Why Story Matters”

Lester Laminack is a Professor Emeritus, Western Carolina University and is the author of over 25 books for teachers and children. Join him for a super fun evening to explore the power of story in our lives, in our work, and in our culture.

Friday, January 16, 2025

8:45 – 10:00 AM Keynote: Heidi Anne Mesmer “Research in K-5 Literacy Instruction: Advances, Refinements, and Reversals”

In the current Science of Reading era, accurate and pragmatic translations of research for K-5 literacy instruction are needed. This keynote will address key findings and how they impact K-5 literacy practices from very recent work. The presentation will address findings in areas such as Set for Variability, “sound first” alphabet instruction, and text supports beyond decodability.

Session #1

10:15 – 11:30

Jeff Williams (Interventionists) “Critical to Acceleration: Composing Messages”

Clay wrote, “children who have learned to be storytellers...have an advantage”. This session discusses the importance of composing, showcases ideas to foster composing, and explores ways to scaffold and expand language use in intervention settings.

Lester Laminack (General) “Digging into Details”

We often hear ourselves suggesting to young writers, “add some details”. That suggestion may lead to a loss of focus or confusion. We will reflect on our practices and explore suggestions for leading student writers toward a deeper understanding of the power of specificity in all writing.

Katie Hilden (General) *“Leveraging Content Area Trade Books to Build Students’ Comprehension of Informational Texts and Academic Vocabulary”*

We will use award-winning trade books in science (NSTA) and social studies (NCSS) to explore instructional routines for building elementary students’ academic vocabulary and comprehension of informational texts. These texts will also serve as mentor texts for informational writing in the content areas.

Session #2

11:45 AM – 1:00 PM

Maryann McBride (Interventionists) *“Why and when to use decodable text in intervention”*

As an interventionist, it is our charge to return children to classroom not only reading and writing at average levels but also able to benefit from classroom instruction no matter what that instruction consists of. To make that transition the use of classroom materials including decodable text will need to occur. When to do this is the focus of this session.

Katie Kelly (General) *“Engaging and Empowering Critical Readers and Change Makers”*

Reading is a powerful tool for deepening understanding and inspiring change. This session explores how to move students from passive reading to critical comprehension, helping them question assumptions, engage diverse perspectives, build empathy, and foster change—key skills for fostering equity and justice.

Jeff Williams (General) *“Notice and Note: Enhancing Comprehension for K-4 Students”*

Though originally intended for upper elementary students, this session shows how the work of Beers and Probst’s *Notice and Note* lessons also benefits young children greatly to develop and deepen comprehension.

Session #3

1:45 – 3:00 PM

Maryann McBride (Interventionists) *“Teaching children to monitor, search for, and use visual information in text”*

This session will explore the vital role that monitoring plays in early reading and writing. We will also examine what children must already know to search for and use letters, sound, letter combination and other phonetic elements. We need to keep track of what they know and what they need to know to be successful readers and writers.

Katie Hilden (General) *“Research-based Recommendations for Language-comprehension related Teacher Questions”*

In this interactive session, teachers will collaboratively “adapt, apply, and connect” research-based recommendations from the book, *There’s Research for That: Your K-5 Literacy Instruction Questions Answered* to their fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction.

Katie Kelly (General) *“Purposeful Read Alouds to Build Language Comprehension”*

This session will guide participants in using purposeful read-alouds to build students’ language comprehension by deepening background knowledge, strengthening vocabulary, and developing essential comprehension skills. A multiple-read framework will be shared to support deeper exploration of texts. Practical examples using specific books will be provided to illustrate effective strategies.