Designing an Evidence-Based Intervention Plan for Upper Elementary Emerging Readers

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The supervisory committee met with the candidate for a final evaluation in which all aspects of the candidate's program were reviewed. The committee's assessment and recommendations are:

Recommendations:

- ✓ Degree should be awarded

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- ✓ Exit Requirement has been approved

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I am a fourth-grade literacy teacher currently enrolled in the Curriculum and Instruction Master's Program with a focus on literacy at Western Oregon University. I teach at an elementary school serving a diverse student population with a variety of academic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In my current role as a literacy teacher, I work daily with students who bring a wide range of unique literacy abilities to the classroom. While some students demonstrate advanced reading abilities or are performing at grade level, a significant number of my students continue to struggle with foundational skills, including decoding, phonics knowledge, and fluency. Many of these students demonstrate strong oral language and critical thinking skills; however, their struggle with foundational reading skills limits their ability to access the grade-level curriculum.

Through my classroom experiences and graduate coursework, I have recognized an important pattern. Upper elementary students who cannot yet read proficiently are often labeled as "behind." In reality, many of these students have unmet literacy needs, including gaps in phonemic awareness, decoding, phonics knowledge, fluency, and automatic word recognition, that were not fully addressed in earlier grades. These unmet needs result in gaps in phonics knowledge, decoding ability, and reading confidence. Some students fall between the cracks during the early elementary years. As a result, they enter upper elementary grades with limited foundational reading skills and low confidence in their reading ability. At this stage, classroom instruction often shifts away from foundational skills toward comprehension of increasingly complex texts. Students who still require explicit instruction in phonics and decoding may no longer receive it. Consequently, struggling readers often experience frustration, disengagement, and academic vulnerability. If these instructional gaps remain unaddressed, the gap between

students' skill levels and grade-level expectations will widen over time.

This intervention was conceived during my work with fourth-grade students who read at or below a kindergarten or first-grade level, yet were expected to access grade-level content. Current research-based literacy interventions frequently demonstrate drawbacks associated with accessibility, instructional flexibility, and sustainability in classroom settings. Some programs are inconsistent, others are developmentally inappropriate for older students, and many are fragmented across resources. Research on interventions for older struggling readers has found that outcomes are often modest and vary considerably across implementation settings, highlighting challenges in maintaining effective, long-term support systems (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013). Additionally, Vaughn et al. (2013) noted that students with persistent reading difficulties frequently require ongoing, intensive intervention that many schools struggle to sustain due to limitations in staffing, training, and instructional resources. As a result, teachers frequently adapt materials independently with little structural guidance. They are frequently expected to address significant reading deficits without access to structured materials designed for older struggling readers.

As a classroom teacher, I am responsible for delivering grade-level instruction while simultaneously differentiating for students who require intensive foundational literacy support. The students impacted by this project are upper elementary students - specifically those in grades three through five - who demonstrate significant reading difficulties and have not yet responded to traditional literacy instruction or intervention. This project focuses on designing a targeted literacy intervention for upper elementary students who struggle with foundational reading skills. Specifically, it addresses gaps in phonemic awareness, decoding, phonics, and fluency that limit students' ability to access grade-level texts. Grounded in research-based

practices and the Science of Reading, the intervention provides explicit, systematic instruction alongside structured opportunities for practice and application (Moats, 2020; National Reading Panel, 2000). The goal of this project is to improve students' reading proficiency, build their confidence as readers, and support their ability to engage meaningfully with academic content across subject areas.

Project Rationale

The rationale for this project is rooted in educational equity. Literacy is foundational to every area of learning, and students who cannot read proficiently by the upper elementary grades often face increasing academic and social barriers. Without targeted intervention, these students become more vulnerable to academic failure, school disengagement, and diminished self-efficacy. Ensuring that every student receives effective literacy instruction is essential for closing opportunity gaps and improving long-term educational outcomes. This issue is also deeply personal. As a fourth-grade teacher, I work with students who are expected to read complex texts while still struggling with foundational skills such as decoding, phonics, and fluency. These students often experience repeated frustration and low confidence as readers. Over time, this pattern can reinforce cycles of academic difficulty.

This professional project represents a commitment to addressing these challenges through instruction that is both developmentally appropriate and grounded in research. It also reflects my professional responsibility to advocate for instructional practices aligned with how students actually learn to read. Students who struggle with reading in upper elementary grades often internalize their difficulties. Many begin to avoid reading tasks or describe themselves as "bad at reading." These beliefs can influence their academic identity across multiple subject areas. For this reason, addressing literacy gaps at this stage is not only an instructional necessity but also a

matter of student confidence and identity development. Effective interventions at this level may help disrupt negative academic identities and restore students' belief in their ability to succeed. Beyond the classroom, literacy development influences access to opportunity and long-term outcomes. Students who leave upper elementary school without strong reading skills often face ongoing challenges throughout middle school, high school, and beyond (Scammacca et al., 2015). By focusing on evidence-based literacy intervention, this project contributes to broader efforts to promote educational equity and improve literacy outcomes for all students.

From a broader educational perspective, this project also addresses a notable gap in literacy instruction. Early literacy interventions are common in kindergarten through second grade. However, developmentally appropriate materials for older students who still require foundational reading instruction remain limited. Many existing programs are designed either for much younger children or for students who already possess basic decoding skills. This mismatch leaves upper-elementary struggling readers without instruction that meets their developmental and academic needs. This professional project contributes to the educational environment by proposing a targeted literacy intervention curriculum for upper-elementary struggling readers. The curriculum emphasizes explicit instruction while also considering students' age, cognitive abilities, and need for autonomy in learning. By balancing structured literacy instruction with engaging materials, the proposed curriculum aims to support both academic growth and student motivation. The intervention is designed to take place over eight weeks, with daily 30-45 minute sessions focused on explicit, systematic instruction in foundational literacy skills. As a result of this project, more teachers may gain access to a structured instructional framework rather than relying on improvised interventions. Schools may also benefit from a consistent approach to literacy intervention across grade levels. Ultimately, addressing instructional gaps in this area

may contribute to more equitable literacy outcomes for vulnerable learners.

Connection with Literacy Instruction Theories

This project draws upon several key ideas in contemporary literacy education, including the Science of Reading, educational equity, and structured literacy instruction. A strong empirical consensus exists that skilled reading development requires explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. A central framework informing this project is the Science of Reading, an interdisciplinary framework that explains how individuals learn to read and which instructional practices most effectively support reading development. One influential branch within this research is the Reading Rope framework (Scarborough, 2001), which illustrates how skilled reading emerges through the integration of language comprehension and word recognition processes over time. Neuroscience research has also contributed important insights into the reading process. Dehaene (2015) has shown that reading is not a naturally occurring process. Instead, it requires the development of specialized neural pathways that support decoding, automaticity, and meaning-making. More recently, the Science of Reading has gained more public attention through reporting by Emily Hanford (2018). Her investigative journalism highlighted the disconnect between decades of research and some classroom practices that relied heavily on implicit reading instruction. Together, this body of research reinforces the importance of explicit and systematic literacy instruction, particularly for students who struggle to read beyond the early elementary grades.

This project also aligns with the frameworks of Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). These models emphasize early identification of learning needs and the provision of targeted interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). While these frameworks are often implemented in early elementary grades, older

students may receive less structured support as they progress through school. This project aligns with Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions that address persistent skill deficits. In addition, this project draws on theories of self-efficacy and motivation. Students' engagement and persistence in academic tasks are strongly shaped by their beliefs about their own abilities (Bandura, 1997). Upper-elementary students who struggle with reading often face repeated academic setbacks. Over time, these experiences may reduce motivation and increase avoidance. By incorporating age-appropriate texts, clear instructional routines, and opportunities for success, this curriculum aims to support literacy development and student confidence. Finally, this project acknowledges the role of educational equity in literacy outcomes. Factors such as inconsistent instruction, limited access to early intervention, and unequal educational resources can contribute to gaps in foundational literacy skills (Stanovich, 1986). Early literacy outcomes are strongly influenced by access to evidence-based instruction and timely intervention, particularly for students identified as at risk for reading difficulties (Kilpatrick, 2015; Moats, 2020). Addressing these gaps represents an important step toward reducing long-term educational disparities.

Alignment with Program Requirements

This professional project aligns directly with the learning outcomes of the Master of Science in Education program. Through the design of a targeted literacy intervention, the project demonstrates the application of advanced content knowledge, data-informed instruction, educational technology, and professional leadership. First, the project applies research-based literacy principles to the design of a curriculum that synthesizes explicit instruction in foundational reading skills with tools for progress monitoring and instructional planning. Technology also plays a supporting role in organizing instructional materials, tracking student progress, and increasing accessibility for diverse learners. In addition, the proposed curriculum

integrates findings from literacy research, cognitive science, and motivational theory. Instructional design decisions, therefore, consider both the cognitive processes involved in reading and the developmental needs of upper elementary students.

This project also emphasizes the importance of data-informed decision-making. Assessment tools such as diagnostic screening, fluency measures, and formative observations can help educators identify student needs and monitor progress over time. These data sources provide evidence that may guide instructional adjustments and improve the effectiveness of literacy intervention. Finally, this project reflects professional growth and leadership within the field of education. By identifying a gap in literacy instruction and designing a research-informed intervention framework, the project demonstrates reflective practice and a commitment to improving educational outcomes for struggling readers.

Project Explanation and Intervention Overview

This professional project proposes designing a targeted literacy intervention curriculum for upper-elementary students who are significantly below grade-level expectations in reading. The curriculum is designed for small-group instruction and focuses on foundational reading skills, including phonics, decoding, and reading fluency. Rather than implementing the intervention, this project presents a structured instructional framework that educators can use to support struggling readers. The proposed curriculum outlines a six- to eight-week instructional sequence. Lessons are scheduled three times per week, with sessions lasting approximately 30 minutes. Each lesson follows a consistent structure that includes explicit instruction, guided practice, and opportunities for independent application. Instructional materials are selected to ensure that content remains engaging and developmentally appropriate for upper-elementary students. The intervention plan also includes recommended tools for educators to monitor student

progress, such as decoding measures, fluency assessments, and ongoing observational data. Success within the proposed framework would be measured by student growth in foundational reading skills, improved engagement in literacy tasks, and teacher reflection on the effectiveness of instructional strategies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Despite the increased attention over the past decade to the Science of Reading and early literacy instruction, some students who reach upper-elementary grades are unable to perform basic decoding tasks. This means they have not yet developed the foundational decoding skills required to read connected text independently. These students demonstrate critical needs in foundational literacy skills, including an inability to decode consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) words, reflecting breakdowns in the decoding component necessary for reading development (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). When these literacy difficulties carry into the upper-elementary grades, students face severe academic challenges as instructional demands shift from learning to read to reading to learn. In the early grades, students are taught foundational literacy skills such as phonemic awareness, decoding, and basic word recognition. However, by upper-elementary school, reading is expected to function as a tool for learning new information in subjects such as science, social studies, and mathematics. Students are required to independently access complex texts, analyze information, and apply comprehension strategies to learn new content. When they have not yet developed automatic decoding and word recognition skills, this instructional shift creates a significant barrier, as they struggle with basic reading processes while trying to comprehend increasingly complex academic material (Castles et al., 2018).

Upper-elementary non-readers are at heightened risk for long-term academic difficulties, diminished self-efficacy, and reduced access to grade-level curriculum because reading is the primary pathway through which students engage with academic content across subjects (Scarborough, 2001; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013). Literacy interventions for older struggling readers must differ substantially from early intervention approaches and instead emphasize explicit, systematic, and intensive instruction that responds to persistent decoding and word recognition difficulties (Scammacca, 2015; Wanzek, 2010). Thus, this literature review synthesizes research on targeted literacy interventions for upper elementary students who cannot decode CVC words. Specifically, it examines models of reading development, characteristics of upper-elementary struggling readers, instructional components shown to be effective for students with severe decoding deficits, and implications for designing a targeted literacy intervention for this population. This literature review serves as the foundation for my evidence-based intervention plan for upper-elementary struggling readers.

Search Process and Selection Criteria

A structured literature search was conducted to identify peer-reviewed research relevant to targeted literacy interventions for upper-elementary readers with severe decoding difficulties. Searches were conducted using multiple academic databases, including ERIC, PubMed, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and Education Source. Additional sources were identified by reviewing the reference lists of key syntheses and meta-analyses, as well as studies that cited seminal works in the field, such as *Simple View of Reading* (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) and *Reading Rope* (Scarborough, 2001). Primary search terms included combinations of 1) upper elementary, grades 4-5, older struggling readers; 2) non-reader, severe reading difficulty; 3) decoding, phonics, CVC, multisyllabic word reading; 4) reading intervention, literacy intervention, intensive intervention,

and 5) fluency, reading comprehension, and morphology. The search also prioritized studies published between 2000 and 2024 to reflect contemporary research and instructional practices, while including earlier theoretical frameworks given their continued relevance and frequent citation in current research.

Inclusion Criteria

Sources were included in the literature review if they met the following criteria:

Relevance of Age Group:	**Relevance of Topics:**	**Type & Quality of Sources:**
Focused on students in upper elementary grades (grades 4-5) or broader grades that included upper elementary students (grades 4–12). Included participants described as struggling readers, students with reading disabilities, or students with significant reading difficulties. Were applicable to students with severe decoding deficits.	Addressed reading intervention effectiveness. Examined instructional components relevant to non-readers. Included research on intervention intensity, dosage, and implementation.	Peer-reviewed studies. Systematic reviews or meta-analyses. Practice guides grounded in research. Experimental or synthesis studies with clearly described methods and outcomes. Theoretical frameworks widely cited and supported by empirical literature.

Exclusion Criteria

Sources were excluded if they met any of the following conditions:

- Focused solely on early elementary students (K–2)
- Examined reading interventions without explicit attention to word reading or decoding
- Was an opinion piece, blog, or non-peer-reviewed instructional material.
- Focused primarily on the acquisition of a second language or general literacy instruction for English learners without a specific focus on severe decoding difficulty.

Final Selection and Scope

The final corpus consists of 20 sources, including:

- Systematic reviews and meta-analyses to establish the strength and scope of the evidence base for upper elementary reading interventions.
- Controlled trials and replication studies that examined reading interventions for students with significant reading and decoding difficulties.
- Theoretical frameworks to ground the intervention design in established models of reading development.
- Practice guidance to inform the translation of research findings into instructional design decisions.

Together, these sources provide a comprehensive and methodologically defensible foundation for designing and evaluating a targeted literacy intervention for upper-elementary struggling readers who cannot yet decode CVC words.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Simple View of Reading (SVR) conceptualizes reading comprehension as the product of two essential components: decoding and language comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986).

Within this framework, successful reading requires both the ability to recognize written words accurately and to understand spoken language. When either component is weak, reading comprehension is compromised. Specifically, students with extremely weak decoding skills may demonstrate relatively strong oral language abilities yet still struggle to access written text because inefficient word recognition prevents them from allocating cognitive resources to comprehension processes (Castles et al., 2018). Scarborough's (2001) Reading Rope further illustrates this relationship by showing that word recognition processes, including phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition, must become increasingly automatic to support higher-level language comprehension during reading.

This distinction is incredibly important for upper-elementary struggling readers. When students reach the intermediate grades without the ability to decode simple CVC words, it indicates that the decoding component of reading is not merely inefficient but fundamentally underdeveloped. At this stage, students are expected to use reading as a tool for learning across academic subjects; however, their limited word recognition skills prevent them from accessing grade-level texts. Research on older struggling readers consistently demonstrates that persistent decoding deficits significantly constrain reading comprehension and academic progress, even when students possess adequate oral language abilities (Scammacca et al., 2015). Interventions for upper-elementary struggling readers must address these foundational decoding weaknesses while simultaneously supporting the development of broader literacy skills (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013).

Contemporary syntheses addressing debates about reading instruction increasingly emphasize the importance of explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle and systematic word-reading development. This is particularly crucial for students who have not yet acquired

foundational decoding skills through typical classroom instruction. Large-scale reviews of reading research have concluded that effective reading development requires explicit and systematic instruction in the relationships between phonemes and graphemes, enabling students to decode printed words accurately and efficiently (Castles, 2018). This principle is especially important for struggling readers because automatic word recognition forms the foundation of fluent reading and comprehension (Scarborough, 2001). When students fail to develop these foundational decoding skills in the early grades, they often continue to struggle with reading accuracy and fluency later on, which significantly limits their ability to access academic content (Wanzek et al., 2010).

Research on interventions for students with persistent reading difficulties consistently supports explicit, structured, and intensive instruction targeting decoding and word recognition, rather than relying on compensatory strategies such as guessing at words from context or pictures. Studies of upper-elementary struggling readers demonstrate that interventions focused on systematic word-reading instruction, including phonics, word analysis, and multisyllabic decoding strategies, produce measurable improvements in reading outcomes (Vaughn et al., 2016; Vaughn et al., 2019). Similarly, meta-analyses of reading interventions indicate that approaches emphasizing direct instruction in word-level skills are more effective than strategies that rely primarily on contextual cues when encountering unfamiliar words (Hall, 2023; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013).

This body of research highlights an important implication for upper-elementary struggling readers. When decoding deficits are severe, instructional approaches must prioritize developing accurate, automatic word recognition rather than attempting to compensate for missing foundational skills. Explicit, systematic instruction targeting the alphabetic principle and word reading processes is therefore a critical component of effective intervention for students who have

not yet acquired basic decoding proficiency (Castles et al., 2018; Institute of Education Sciences, 2022).

Understanding Struggling Readers

Upper elementary struggling readers are a diverse group, but their severe decoding deficits reflect patterns consistent with dyslexia and/or a significant reading disability. Carroll (2025) emphasized that dyslexia is characterized by persistent difficulties in reading and spelling, with reading fluency and spelling serving as key markers across both ages and languages. Dyslexia is widely characterized by persistent difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition, poor decoding, and unexpected weaknesses in spelling relative to other cognitive abilities and adequate instruction (Adlof & Hogan, 2018; Carroll, 2025). Since these difficulties primarily affect the word-recognition component of reading, instructional responses should emphasize direct observation of students' reading performance and targeted instruction to strengthen foundational literacy skills. Measures of decoding accuracy, oral reading fluency, and spelling patterns provide important indicators of how well students are developing the underlying processes required for efficient word recognition (Scarborough, 2001).

Research on reading intervention consistently shows that students with significant decoding deficits benefit from explicit, systematic, and intensive instruction targeting word-level reading skills, including phonics, word analysis, and opportunities for repeated practice with connected text (Wanzek, 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013). These instructional approaches allow teachers to directly address the observable manifestations of dyslexia in reading behavior while providing structured opportunities for students to build accuracy and automaticity in word recognition. As a result, focusing on measurable reading behaviors not only helps educators identify specific areas of difficulty but also provides a clear framework for designing targeted

interventions that align with current research on effective literacy instruction for struggling readers (Castles et al., 2018; Hall, 2023).

Additionally, decoding difficulties frequently co-occur with broader language vulnerabilities, including weaknesses in vocabulary, morphology, and syntactic processing, which are often associated with developmental language disorders (Adlof & Hogan, 2018). This overlap highlights the complex relationship between word recognition and language comprehension in reading development. This is especially important for upper-elementary students because grade-level reading increasingly requires understanding of complex vocabulary, sentence structures, and academic language, even as decoding skills improve (Scarborough, 2001). Accordingly, interventions for non-readers should not treat decoding as isolated from language; rather, they should incorporate language supports in developmentally appropriate ways while prioritizing rapid growth in foundational word reading.

Evidence-Based Upper-Elementary Reading Intervention

Research focused specifically on upper elementary students has found that intervention shows strong potential to improve across reading domains, but outcomes may vary by focus and measurement type. This underscores the importance of targeting instruction to the student's primary need. Donegan and Wanzek (2021) added that intervention effects are moderated by the instructional focus, including whether the program targets foundational skills, comprehension, or uses a multicomponent approach, as well as by intensity features such as total instructional hours and group size. These findings highlight the importance of carefully aligning intervention design with the specific needs of struggling readers. For students functioning at a CVC decoding level in grades four and five, interventions that emphasize foundational word-reading skills with sufficient

instructional intensity are more likely to produce meaningful improvements than approaches that focus primarily on comprehension strategies (Wanzek, 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013).

Meta-analytic evidence across grades four through twelve supports a similar conclusion: reading interventions can improve outcomes for older struggling readers, though the effects are generally moderate (Edmonds, 2009; Scammacca, 2015). However, stronger effects are consistently observed when instruction directly targets word reading and decoding and is delivered through explicit, systematic methods (Hall, 2023; Castles et al., 2018). These findings reinforce an important practical implication for upper-elementary struggling readers: students with severe decoding deficits often require interventions that are more intensive and carefully structured than those typically provided to peers with less significant reading delays.

Targeted Intervention for CVC-Level Struggling Readers in Grades 4-5

The most actionable guidance for intervention design comes from the What Works Clearinghouse practice guide for grades 4–9 (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2022), which emphasizes explicit instruction in the following areas: (1) decoding and multisyllabic word reading, (2) fluent reading through supported practice, (3) comprehension and vocabulary supports, and (4) careful scheduling and monitoring of progress. This framework aligns well with upper-elementary struggling readers because it supports "meeting students where they are" (Institute of Education Sciences, 2022) while building toward the demands of rigorous upper-grade texts. When students struggle to decode even simple words, their cognitive effort is largely consumed by word-level processing, leaving little capacity to construct meaning from text. For students who have not yet developed foundational decoding skills, instruction must begin by addressing the underlying word recognition processes that support fluent reading.

Theme 1: Returning to Foundational Decoding

For students who struggle to decode CVC words, intervention must explicitly teach or reteach the alphabetic principle, blending, and high-utility phonics patterns in a coherent, systematic progression. Foundational word-reading instruction that focuses on accurate decoding and phoneme–grapheme relationships is critical for developing efficient word recognition skills (Castles et al., 2018). While this approach may seem counterintuitive in upper elementary grades, research on struggling readers consistently finds that foundational reading deficits do not resolve through exposure to text alone and instead require explicit, systematic instruction (Wanzek, 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013). Studies of upper-elementary intervention further demonstrate that targeted instruction in word reading and decoding can produce measurable improvements in reading outcomes for students with persistent reading difficulties (Hall, 2023; Vaughn, 2016).

Simultaneously, upper-elementary texts consist of a rapid shift toward multisyllabic words. As a result, interventions must have a clear plan and pathway from CVC mastery to more complex decoding. Studies of multisyllabic word-reading interventions in the upper-elementary grades demonstrate that explicit instruction in decoding longer words through flexible chunking, syllable patterns, and strategic decoding routines can improve word-reading outcomes. For CVC-level struggling readers, multisyllabic instruction should be introduced only after students demonstrate reliable accuracy with short-vowel patterns and basic blending. Otherwise, it would pose the risk of overwhelming learners and reducing instructional efficiency.

Theme 2: Fluency is a Bridge from Accurate Decoding to Usable Reading

When students begin decoding accurately, limited automaticity can still interfere with successful reading. Reading fluency refers to the ability to read words quickly, accurately, and with appropriate expression, and it plays a critical role in connecting word recognition to

comprehension (Scarborough, 2001). If word recognition remains slow and effortful, cognitive resources are consumed by decoding processes, leaving fewer resources available for constructing meaning from text (Castles et al., 2018). As a result, students who decode accurately but lack fluency often struggle with comprehension and may experience reduced reading stamina, perseverance, and engagement with text.

Research examining fluency interventions supports the importance of developing automaticity in reading. A synthesis of fluency interventions for elementary students with learning disabilities found that structured fluency practices can improve both reading fluency and reading comprehension outcomes when implemented systematically and paired with appropriately leveled texts (Stevens et al., 2017). These interventions often include repeated reading, guided oral reading, and structured practice that helps students build accuracy and speed while maintaining comprehension.

For upper-elementary struggling readers, fluency practice must align with students' current decoding abilities. Instruction should begin with decodable texts based on the phonics patterns students have been taught, allowing students to practice reading accurately rather than repeatedly encountering words they cannot decode. Practicing with text that is too difficult can reinforce errors and hinder the development of automatic word recognition. As students develop greater accuracy and confidence in decoding, instruction can gradually incorporate more complex texts to support the transition toward fluent reading of grade-level material (Institute of Education Sciences, 2022; Stevens, 2017).

Theme 3: Language, Vocabulary, and Comprehension Supports

Decoding is an essential skill for independent reading, and it may seem logical to postpone comprehension instruction until word reading improves or "catches up" to a student's language

comprehension skills. However, research on older struggling readers suggests that delaying comprehension instruction can limit students' access to meaning-making and engagement with text. Instead, effective interventions often integrate vocabulary and comprehension support alongside word-reading instruction so that students continue developing broader literacy skills while foundational decoding is strengthened (Wanzek, 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013). This integrated approach reflects the understanding that reading comprehension depends not only on accurate decoding but also on the development of language knowledge and background understanding necessary for constructing meaning from text (Scarborough, 2001).

Meta-analytic evidence further supports the value of direct comprehension instruction for struggling readers. In a synthesis of approximately 40 studies encompassing students in grades three through twelve, Filderman (2022) found significant positive effects on reading comprehension outcomes when instruction included explicit strategy instruction and structured opportunities for text engagement. These findings suggest that comprehension skills can be improved through targeted instruction even when decoding remains a challenge, reinforcing the importance of providing balanced interventions that address both word recognition and meaning-making processes for struggling readers. For CVC-level struggling readers, the practical implication would be to embed comprehension and vocabulary instruction in ways that reduce decoding load. This will preserve meaning-making as the primary purpose of reading while simultaneously keeping the primary instruction focused on foundational word recognition.

Theme 4: Morphology Is an Accelerator Once Basic Decoding Stabilizes

Upper-elementary literacy increasingly depends on morphological knowledge, including understanding prefixes, suffixes, and roots, which support decoding, spelling, and vocabulary development. As students encounter more complex, multisyllabic words in upper-elementary

texts, morphological awareness becomes an important component of reading development, helping readers analyze word structure and meaning (Castles et al., 2018). A systematic review of morphological instruction reported positive effects on literacy outcomes, including improvements in vocabulary knowledge, word reading, and spelling (Bowers et al., 2010). These studies suggest that morphology can serve as a valuable instructional component for older or struggling readers when appropriately integrated with other literacy instruction.

For students beginning at a CVC decoding level, however, morphological instruction is most effective when introduced after foundational decoding skills, such as short-vowel patterns and basic word-reading accuracy, have been established. Once students can reliably decode simple words, instruction in prefixes, suffixes, and common roots can help bridge the transition to longer, multisyllabic words and support the development of academic vocabulary increasingly present in upper elementary texts (Bowers, 2010; Castles et al., 2018).

Theme 5: Motivation and Engagement Protect Persistence

Students who remain struggling readers in grades four and five often carry years of academic frustration and repeated reading-related failures. As a result, they may enter upper elementary classrooms discouraged and disengaged from literacy tasks. Research on struggling readers indicates that persistent reading difficulties can undermine students' motivation, self-efficacy, and willingness to engage in challenging academic work (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013; Scammacca, 2015). For these students, effective interventions must address not only the development of foundational literacy skills but also the motivational factors that influence sustained participation in reading instruction.

Intervention studies have examined approaches that embed motivational supports within word-reading instruction. For example, research investigating multisyllabic word-reading

interventions combined with motivational beliefs training found that incorporating strategies to strengthen students' confidence and persistence can enhance engagement and improve reading outcomes for older struggling readers (Toste, 2017; Toste, 2019). These studies emphasize the role of self-efficacy and engagement in helping students remain actively involved in intensive reading instruction, which is particularly important for students who have experienced long-term reading difficulty.

Intensity and implementation: why "how much" and "how well" both matter

Upper-elementary struggling readers typically require more intensive intervention than students with moderate difficulties. Evidence from studies of intensive remedial instruction demonstrates that substantial gains may occur under high-intensity conditions. High-intensity conditions in an educational environment may include extended instructional time and one-to-one or very small-group instruction. Research has shown that students with persistent reading difficulties benefit from intensive, individualized interventions that provide increased instructional dosage and opportunities for explicit, targeted practice (Vaughn et al., 2010; Vaughn et al., 2013). However, fluency and rate may lag behind accuracy gains- an important reality check for setting outcomes and timelines.

Studies also show that intensity can be manipulated (different dosage levels), and matter especially for students with severe reading difficulties or those at risk for disability. A randomized study by Donegan and colleagues (2020) found that delivering the same multicomponent reading intervention at higher intensity (increased instructional time and smaller group sizes) produced much stronger reading outcomes for upper-elementary students with significant reading difficulties. This underscores the importance of carefully selecting group size and instructional dosage when designing interventions for students with severe decoding deficits.

Finally, meta-analytic work spanning several decades of reading intervention research supports the idea that targeted interventions can improve reading outcomes for struggling readers, although the magnitude of effects often depends on the extent to which instructional methods align with learners' specific needs (Scammacca, 2015; Hall, 2023). In other words, effective instruction must be carefully matched to students' skill deficits, particularly when those deficits involve foundational word-reading abilities (Wanzek, 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2013). These studies reinforce the importance of diagnostic teaching approaches in which educators use assessment data to guide instructional decisions, implement interventions with precision, and monitor student progress over time. For upper-elementary students functioning at a CVC decoding level, this means designing interventions that directly address foundational decoding and word recognition skills while continuously adjusting instruction based on student responsiveness to ensure meaningful reading growth (Institute of Education Sciences, 2022).

Evidence from Interventions

Randomized controlled trials conducted with fourth- and fifth-grade students with significant reading difficulties provide strong examples of effective multicomponent intervention models. Vaughn et al. (2016) compared a researcher-implemented and a school-implemented multicomponent reading intervention that integrated explicit word-reading instruction (including multisyllabic decoding), supported fluency practice, vocabulary instruction, and comprehension activities. Students who were receiving the intervention demonstrated significantly stronger reading outcomes than peers receiving typical classroom instruction, illustrating how structured, multi-component approaches to reading intervention can improve word-level and text-level reading skills in upper-elementary students with severe reading difficulties. Similarly, Vaughn et al. (2019) found that a combined word- and text-based intervention led to critical improvements

in reading outcomes for fourth- and fifth-grade students with persistent reading difficulties. This provided additional evidence that interventions that integrate foundational skills with meaningful text practice are more effective than less targeted instructional approaches.

Additional research further supports the value of explicit routines for teaching multisyllabic word reading in upper elementary grades. In a replication study, Toste (2019) examined an intervention focused on explicit multisyllabic word-reading instruction, with and without an added motivational-beliefs component. Results revealed that students receiving structured multisyllabic decoding instruction demonstrated improved word reading, while the motivational component showed potential to support student engagement and persistence during difficult literacy tasks. Altogether, this finding emphasizes the importance of structured decoding routines and suggests that motivational support plays a complementary role in sustaining participation among older struggling readers.

Gaps and Rationale

Although research shows the effectiveness of reading interventions for upper-elementary students, gaps remain for students at the CVC decoding level. The existing literature reveals several important theoretical, methodological, and practical gaps. Theoretically, many upper-elementary literacy intervention studies are grounded in broad intervention frameworks rather than approaches specifically tailored to students who remain non-readers beyond the primary grades, resulting in limited understanding of how foundational decoding instruction should be adapted for older elementary learners (Ehri, 2005; Kilpatrick, 2015; Moats, 2020). Existing research grounded in the Science of Reading emphasizes the importance of explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, decoding, and word recognition; however, much of

this literature focuses primarily on early elementary populations rather than older students experiencing persistent reading difficulties (National Reading Panel, 2000; Seidenberg, 2017).

Methodologically, existing research often groups struggling readers into broad intervention categories, making it difficult to isolate the effects of interventions specifically for students functioning at the earliest stages of reading development (Wanzek et al., 2013). In addition, many intervention studies rely on relatively short implementation periods, limited progress-monitoring measures, or highly controlled research conditions that may not reflect authentic classroom environments (Denton et al., 2013; Vaughn et al., 2012). Researchers have also noted inconsistencies in intervention intensity, instructional fidelity, and participant characteristics across studies, limiting the generalizability of findings for upper-elementary struggling readers (Scammacca et al., 2015).

In practice, the literature offers limited guidance on how educators can implement intensive foundational skills instruction in upper-elementary settings while also addressing grade-level curriculum expectations, diverse learning needs, and instructional time constraints (Foorman et al., 2016; Moats, 2020). This challenge may be particularly significant in public school settings where intervention resources, staffing, and instructional time are limited. At the same time, existing research consistently demonstrates that literacy outcomes for struggling readers are influenced by instructional intensity, systematic foundational skills instruction, and strong alignment between intervention design and individual student need (Torgesen et al., 2001; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007). Collectively, these theoretical, methodological, and practical gaps underscore the need for a targeted intervention for upper-elementary students who continue to struggle with reading and highlight the present study's potential contribution to both literacy research and instructional practice.

Accordingly, the present project is justified as a targeted intervention designed to (1) rebuild the earliest decoding foundations (phoneme and grapheme correspondences, blending, CVC decoding), (2) progress toward more complex decoding (including multisyllabic routines and morphology when appropriate), (3) incorporate fluency building through supported practice, and (4) embed language and comprehension supports that maintain meaning making and engagement. This design aligns with evidence-based practice guidance for grades 4-5 and the broader intervention literature, which emphasizes explicitness, intensity, and responsiveness to individual student profiles.

Chapter 3: Project Design

This chapter describes the design and development of a structured reading intervention intended to support upper-elementary students with persistent reading difficulties. Grounded in the research presented in Chapter 2, this project draws upon established frameworks in literacy development, including Scarborough's Reading Rope and evidence-based practices in explicit and systematic instruction. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of the context in which the project was developed, the methodological processes used to design the intervention, and the rationale underlying key instructional decisions. This chapter further outlines the components of the intervention, the tools and resources used, the development timeline, and considerations for evaluation and ethical practice. Collectively, these elements are presented to ensure that the project is both replicable and grounded in current literacy research.

Contexts of the Project

I serve as the fourth-grade literacy teacher at a public elementary school in Oregon, where I provide literacy instruction to the entire fourth-grade student population. The school serves

students in grades K–5 and operates within a district that prioritizes standards-based instruction and instructional alignment with the Science of Reading. This instructional role affords me a distinctive vantage point from which to observe patterns in literacy development across diverse learners, instructional settings, and intervention contexts. Furthermore, my direct engagement with all fourth-grade students positions me to conduct this project with a high degree of instructional relevance, ecological validity, and responsiveness to the varied academic and literacy needs present within the school community. My professional responsibilities include delivering core literacy instruction, analyzing student data, and providing targeted support for students performing below grade-level expectations. Despite the presence of a structured literacy framework, a subset of students in upper-elementary grades continues to demonstrate significant academic needs in foundational reading skills. These students require intervention beyond core instruction to address persistent opportunity gaps.

Student Demographics

State assessment data and district benchmarks indicate that a substantial proportion of students are not meeting grade-level reading expectations. According to the Oregon Department of Education's statewide assessment data (2024), approximately 57% of Oregon students in grades 3–5 do not meet established reading proficiency benchmarks on statewide English Language Arts assessments. This data aligns with broader trends indicating that students who do not achieve reading proficiency by the end of third grade are at increased risk for ongoing academic difficulties (Scammacca, 2015). In my classroom, multiple students demonstrate significant challenges with decoding, fluency, and comprehension. These academic needs reflect incomplete development across both strands of Scarborough's Reading Rope- word recognition and language comprehension- highlighting the need for comprehensive and targeted intervention.

Researcher Positionality

My professional experiences directly inform the project's development. Through my work with upper elementary students, I have observed that many struggling readers exhibit not only academic skill gaps but also diminished confidence in literacy tasks. These patterns often result from prolonged difficulty and limited access to effective early intervention. As an educator, I recognize that literacy instruction must extend beyond exposure to grade-level content and instead provide explicit, systematic support tailored to individual student needs. My positionality as a classroom teacher working within this context has shaped my commitment to designing an intervention that is both research-based and practically applicable. This project reflects my belief that all students can develop reading proficiency when provided with appropriate instructional support.

The Identified Need

The need for this project emerges from the intersection of student data, classroom experience, and existing research. Upper-elementary students who continue to struggle with reading often have unmet foundational literacy needs not fully addressed in earlier grades. Without targeted intervention, these students are likely to experience ongoing academic challenges, as reading proficiency is critical for accessing content across subject areas (Filderman, 2022). Research indicates that effective interventions for struggling readers must include explicit instruction in foundational skills, opportunities for repeated practice, and structured comprehension support (Scammacca, 2015). However, many existing instructional models at the upper-elementary level prioritize comprehension alone, without adequately addressing underlying decoding and fluency deficits. Therefore, this project was designed to address this gap by

developing a comprehensive reading intervention that systematically and intentionally integrates foundational skill development with comprehension instruction.

Design Methods

A systematic review informed the design of this intervention, drawing on the relevant literature in literacy education. Primary sources were identified through academic databases, including ERIC and Google Scholar, as well as university library resources. Search terms included *upper-elementary reading intervention*, *explicit instruction*, *reading comprehension strategies*, *fluency instruction*, and *the Science of Reading*. Sources were selected based on their empirical rigor, relevance to the target population, and alignment with evidence-based practices. Particular attention was given to meta-analyses and synthesis studies, which provide comprehensive insights into effective instructional approaches.

Design Decisions and Rationale

The intervention was designed to reflect the principles of explicit and systematic instruction, which are effective for students with reading difficulties. Each lesson incorporates direct instruction, guided practice, and opportunities for independent application, ensuring that students receive clear modeling and structured support (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Moats, 2020). Fluency instruction was incorporated through repeated reading and guided oral reading practices. These approaches have shown to improve reading rate, accuracy, and overall comprehension by allowing students to develop automaticity (Filderman, 2022).

Comprehension instruction is embedded in each lesson through structured questioning, summarization, and discussion. This aligns with research indicating that explicit comprehension instruction strategies significantly improve reading outcomes for struggling readers (Filderman, 2022). The decision to maintain a consistent lesson structure was intentional, as predictable

routines support cognitive load reduction and allow students to focus on skill development (Rosenshine, 2012; Sweller, 1988). Additionally, the gradual increase in text complexity ensures that students are appropriately challenged while still experiencing success.

Description of the Project

The final deliverable is a structured reading intervention curriculum designed for upper elementary students performing below grade level. The intervention consists of 20 lessons that can be implemented over 10 weeks. Each lesson follows consistent instructional principles: 1) Explicit instruction in foundational skills, 2) Guided reading practice with targeted texts, 3) Fluency development through repeated reading, 4) Comprehension instruction using higher-order questioning, and 5) Opportunities for student reflection and response. The instructional materials include both fiction and nonfiction passages, allowing students to engage with a variety of text types that are intriguing to older elementary readers. Questions are designed to promote critical thinking and deeper engagement with the text, rather than surface-level recall. The progression of lessons reflects intentional scaffolding of skills, moving from more supported instruction to greater independence.

Tools and Resources

This project development utilized a variety of digital tools and resources. Instructional materials were created using Google Docs and Google Slides, allowing for flexibility and accessibility. These platforms were selected due to their widespread availability and ease of use in educational settings. Research served as a primary resource in guiding instructional design, while existing assessment frameworks informed the development of comprehension and fluency tasks. The integration of these tools ensured that the project is both research-based and practical for classroom implementation.

Timeline

The project was developed over 20 weeks, organized into the following phases:

- Phase 1: Comprehensive literature review and identification of key instructional frameworks
- Phase 2: Development of lesson structures, materials, and instructional sequences
- Phase 3: Revision and alignment with research-based practices
- Phase 4: Final editing and preparation of materials

This phased approach allowed for iterative refinement and ensured that each component of the intervention was aligned with current research.

Evaluation Procedures

The quality and effectiveness of the intervention were evaluated through feedback from colleagues and mentors, as well as formal feedback from committee members. Feedback focused on the clarity of instructional design, alignment with evidence-based practices, and overall usability. If implemented, the intervention's effectiveness would be measured using pre- and post-assessment data, including reading fluency and comprehension measures. Additionally, qualitative observations of student engagement and confidence would provide valuable insight into the impact of the intervention.

Ethical Considerations

This project involved the design and development of instructional materials and did not include data collection from human subjects. As such, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required. All aspects of the project were conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for professional education practice.

Summary

This chapter detailed the design and development of a research-based reading intervention to address the needs of upper-elementary struggling readers. By situating the project within a specific educational context and grounding its design in established literacy research, this chapter provides a comprehensive account of the project's development. The following chapter will present the final intervention and discuss its implications for instructional practice and future application.

Chapter 4: Project Artifacts

This project was designed to address the persistent challenge of upper-elementary students who continue to struggle with foundational reading skills, particularly decoding, fluency, and comprehension. As discussed in Chapter 1, these gaps can significantly limit students' access to grade-level content and contribute to frustration and disengagement. Drawing on the research presented in Chapter 2, particularly findings related to the Science of Reading and the National Reading Panel, this project set out to develop a structured, small-group literacy intervention that integrates explicit phonics instruction with fluency development and meaningful comprehension practice. The goal was to create an intervention that not only builds foundational skills but also supports student engagement and confidence as readers.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the completed intervention, named Foundations Forward. The project is organized by component, including lesson plans, reading passages, and instructional materials such as story cards and student practice activities. Each component is designed to work cohesively within a consistent instructional framework that emphasizes explicit instruction, guided practice, and ongoing assessment. The full project is

available on a website (see below) and on Google Drive, and is organized into these components for ease of use and implementation.

The artifacts developed for this project, including the lesson plans, reading passages, and data-tracking sheets, collectively support the primary goal of improving decoding, fluency, and comprehension for upper-elementary struggling readers. The lesson plans demonstrate a consistent, structured approach to instruction that aligns with research-based practices, particularly through explicit phonics instruction, repeated practice, and integrated comprehension activities. The reading passages further support these goals by providing students with controlled, decodable texts that allow for meaningful application of newly learned skills while maintaining age-appropriate content to support engagement.

The data tracking sheets play a critical role in ensuring that instruction remains responsive and targeted. By monitoring decoding accuracy, fluency growth, comprehension, and writing, these tools provide a comprehensive view of student progress and allow for instructional adjustments as needed. Together, these artifacts reflect a cohesive and intentional design that aligns closely with the goals of the intervention.

Link to Website

Overview

This project is a targeted literacy intervention curriculum designed to support upper-elementary students who are significantly below grade level in reading. The project takes the form of a structured instructional toolkit that includes detailed lesson plans, decodable reading passages, story cards, student workbook materials, and assessment tools. The intervention is

designed for small-group instruction and is delivered through in-person teaching, with materials that can be printed or accessed digitally. All components are organized within a Google Site, allowing for easy access, implementation, and adaptation by educators.

The intended audience for this project is elementary educators working with students in grades 4-5 who are reading at an early elementary level (approximately kindergarten through second grade). These students often demonstrate challenges with decoding, fluency, and comprehension, and may also experience low confidence or engagement with reading tasks. The project is specifically designed to meet the needs of these learners by providing structured, scaffolded instruction that builds foundational skills while maintaining age-appropriate content and expectations.

The project is organized into multiple components that work together to support instruction. At its core is a 20-lesson intervention sequence implemented over approximately 10 weeks, with each lesson following a consistent instructional framework that includes explicit instruction, guided reading, fluency practice, comprehension, and writing. Supporting this sequence are supplemental materials, including decodable reading passages aligned to each lesson, phonics-based word cards for skill practice, student workbook pages for reinforcement and reflection, and assessment tools for monitoring progress. Together, these components form a cohesive system that allows educators to deliver targeted, data-informed literacy instruction in a structured and accessible way.

Scientific Rationale

Please refer to the infographic below for a visual overview of the intervention rationale. A typed version is also included below to improve readability and accessibility for all readers.

Overall Intervention Rationale

This literacy intervention is grounded in research from the National Reading Panel (2000) and the Science of Reading, which emphasizes the importance of explicit, systematic instruction in foundational reading skills. According to Philip B. Gough and William E. Tunmer (1986), reading comprehension is dependent on both decoding and language comprehension. This intervention integrates these components by combining phonics, fluency, and comprehension within a structured routine. Repeated practice supports automaticity, which allows students to allocate more cognitive resources to understanding text (Rasinski, 2012).

Lessons 1-5 Rationale

Lessons 1-5 focus on foundational decoding skills using CVC words and short vowel patterns. Research from the National Reading Panel (2000) demonstrates that systematic phonics instruction is essential for developing early reading skills, particularly for struggling readers. At this stage, instruction is explicit, scaffolded, and repetitive, which helps reduce cognitive load and supports skill acquisition (Moats, 2020). Building automatic recognition of simple word patterns enables students to begin reading connected text, laying the groundwork for the development of fluency and comprehension.

Lessons 6-10 Rationale

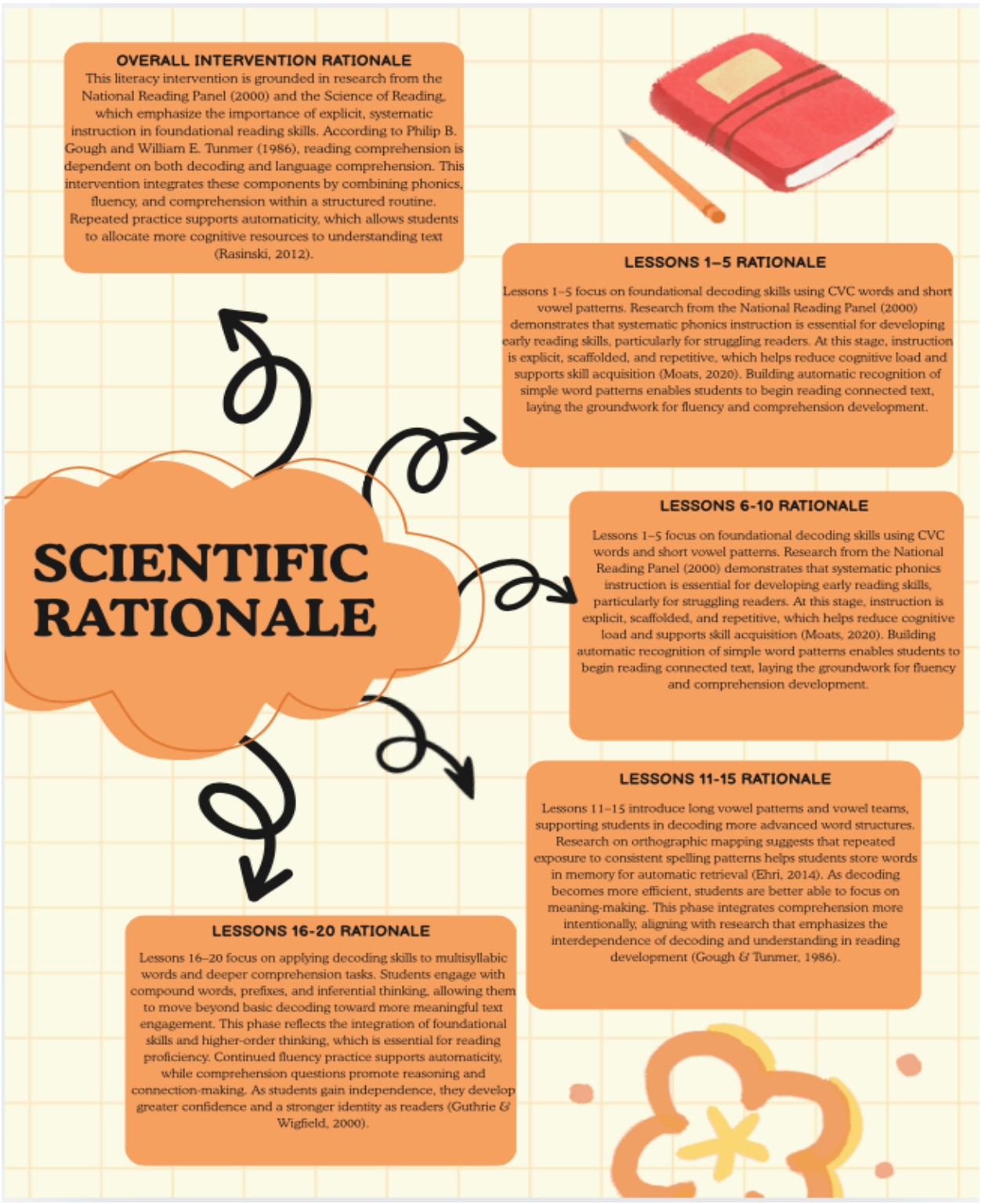
Lessons 6-10 continue to develop foundational decoding skills using CVC words and short-vowel patterns while increasing opportunities for fluency and connected reading practice. Research from the National Reading Panel (2000) demonstrates that systematic phonics instruction is essential for developing early reading skills, particularly for struggling readers. Instruction during this phase remains explicit, scaffolded, and repetitive to support automaticity and reduce cognitive load (Moats, 2020). As students become more confident in decoding familiar word patterns, they can develop stronger fluency and comprehension skills.

Lessons 11-15 Rationale

Lessons 11-15 introduce long vowel patterns and vowel teams, supporting students in decoding more advanced word structures. Research on orthographic mapping suggests that repeated exposure to consistent spelling patterns helps students store words in memory for automatic retrieval (Ehri, 2014). As decoding becomes more efficient, students are better able to focus on meaning-making. This phase integrates comprehension more intentionally, aligning with research that emphasizes the interdependence of decoding and understanding in reading development (Gough & Tunmer, 1986).

Lessons 16-20 Rationale

Lessons 16-20 focus on applying decoding skills to multisyllabic words and deeper comprehension tasks. Students engage with compound words, prefixes, and inferential thinking, allowing them to move beyond basic decoding toward more meaningful engagement with text. This phase reflects the integration of foundational skills and higher-order thinking, essential for reading proficiency. Continued fluency practice supports automaticity, while comprehension questions promote reasoning and connection-making. As students gain independence, they develop greater confidence and a stronger identity as readers (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).



Teacher Guide Introduction

This teacher guide was designed to support educators in implementing the literacy intervention with consistency, structure, and intentionality. The guide provides an overview of the instructional framework, lesson components, and research-based practices embedded throughout the intervention. Each lesson is organized to promote explicit instruction, scaffolded practice, repeated exposure to foundational literacy skills, and meaningful opportunities for reading comprehension and fluency development.

The intervention is grounded in principles from the Science of Reading and emphasizes systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Lessons are designed to build progressively, allowing students to strengthen foundational decoding skills before applying them to increasingly complex reading tasks. The guide also includes instructional support, pacing recommendations, and differentiation strategies to help teachers meet the diverse needs of learners.

The purpose of this teacher guide is not only to provide lesson procedures but also to help educators understand the rationale for the intervention's instructional design. By combining evidence-based literacy practices with structured and accessible instruction, the intervention aims to support upper-elementary struggling readers in developing confidence, independence, and long-term reading proficiency.

Teacher Guide

Lesson Structure

1. Explicit Skills Instruction (8 min)
2. Direct teaching of phonics/phonemic awareness using "I Do, We Do, You Do." We start simple (CVC words) and build up.
3. Guided Reading (8 min)
4. Students read a short, decodable text tied to the skill. I support with modeling, echo reading, and prompts.
5. Fluency Practice (6 min)
6. Repeated reading of the same text—choral reading, partner reading, timed rereads.
7. Comprehension (5 min)
8. Ask questions that go beyond recall—get them thinking, even if the text is basic.
9. Quick Response (3 min)
10. Short written or oral response. Sentence frames help a lot here.

Big Picture

The goal here is to build foundational reading skills while still keeping learning meaningful and engaging. It is very grounded in structured literacy and Science of Reading practices, with lots of explicit instruction, repetition, and a predictable routine to help kids feel more confident.

Why this works

This intervention combines:

- Explicit phonics instruction
- Reading + writing together
- Repetition and practice
- Meaningful text work

The goal isn't just skill-building- it's helping students start to see themselves as readers.

Scope and Sequence

1. Lessons 1–5: CVC words, short vowels → build confidence + routines
2. Lessons 6–10: Blends/digraphs (sh, ch, th) → expand decoding
3. Lessons 11–15: Long vowels + vowel teams → improve accuracy
4. Lessons 16–20: Multisyllabic words + comprehension → apply skills

By the end, students should:

- Get better at decoding (actually reading the words accurately)
- Improve fluency (speed + accuracy + expression)
- Be able to read simple fiction and nonfiction texts
- Think deeply about what they read (even if the text is simple)
- Write short responses connected to reading

Lesson Plans

The lesson plans developed for this intervention are grounded in evidence-based instructional practices aligned with the Science of Reading and recommendations from the National Reading Panel (2000). Each lesson follows a consistent instructional framework that includes explicit instruction, guided reading, fluency practice, comprehension, and written response. This structure reflects research indicating that struggling readers benefit from predictable routines and systematic instruction that reduces cognitive load while promoting skill acquisition (Moats, 2020).

The explicit instruction component of each lesson is designed to provide direct, systematic teaching of phonics skills, progressing from simple to more complex patterns. This aligns with research demonstrating that structured, cumulative phonics instruction is essential for developing decoding skills, particularly for students who have not acquired these skills through implicit instruction (Moats, 2020; National Reading Panel, 2000). Lessons are intentionally sequenced to build on previously learned skills, supporting students in developing automaticity in word recognition. Repeated exposure to consistent spelling patterns supports orthographic mapping, enabling students to store words in memory for quick, efficient retrieval (Ehri, 2014).

The lesson plans developed for this intervention are grounded in evidence-based instructional practices aligned with the Science of Reading and recommendations from the National Reading Panel (2000). Each lesson follows a consistent instructional framework that includes explicit instruction, guided reading, fluency practice, comprehension, and written response. This structure reflects research indicating that struggling readers benefit from predictable routines and systematic instruction that reduces cognitive load while promoting skill acquisition (Moats, 2020).

The explicit instruction component of each lesson is designed to provide direct, systematic teaching of phonics skills, progressing from simple to more complex patterns. For example, in the early lessons of the intervention, students practice decoding and blending CVC words with short vowel sounds such as *cat*, *sit*, and *hop* before progressing to more advanced vowel teams and multisyllabic words in later lessons. Lesson materials include teacher modeling, guided blending routines, word cards, and repeated decoding practice to ensure students receive scaffolded support as they develop automatic word recognition skills. This aligns with research demonstrating that structured, cumulative phonics instruction is essential for developing decoding skills, particularly for students who have not acquired these skills through implicit instruction (Moats, 2020; National Reading Panel, 2000). Lessons are intentionally sequenced to build on previously learned skills, supporting students in developing automaticity in word recognition (Ehri, 2014).

Story Cards

The reading passages included in the story card intervention are designed to support both skill development and student engagement. These texts are carefully constructed to align with the phonics focus of each lesson, ensuring that students can apply newly learned decoding skills in a meaningful context. For example, in lessons targeting short vowel CVC patterns, students read decodable passages containing a high concentration of words such as *map*, *sit*, *red*, and *hot* so they can practice the exact phonics patterns taught during instruction. As the intervention progresses, the passages gradually incorporate more complex spelling patterns, vowel teams, and multisyllabic words to support the transfer of decoding skills into connected reading and comprehension practice. This approach is consistent with research supporting the use of decodable texts in early and intervention literacy instruction, as it allows students to practice targeted skills while building confidence in their reading abilities (National Reading Panel, 2000).

At the same time, the passages are intentionally written to be age-appropriate for upper elementary students, despite their lower reading levels. Research on motivation and engagement suggests that students are more likely to persist in reading tasks when materials are relevant and respectful of their developmental stage (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). To address this, the passages incorporate topics such as independence, daily activities, and relatable experiences, allowing students to connect with the content while still accessing it at their instructional level.

The structure of the passages also supports the development of fluency and comprehension. As students reread the same text multiple times, they build automaticity and improve reading rate and accuracy. Rasinski (2012) emphasizes that repeated reading not only enhances fluency but also improves overall comprehension by allowing students to focus on meaning rather than decoding. Additionally, the passages increase in length and complexity over time, reflecting a gradual release of responsibility as students develop greater proficiency.

Beyond decoding and fluency, the passages are designed to support comprehension through embedded opportunities for higher-order thinking. Even at early reading levels, students are asked to make inferences, explain reasoning, and connect ideas within the text. This aligns with research suggesting that comprehension instruction should occur alongside, rather than after, foundational skill development (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). By integrating comprehension into all stages of the intervention, the reading passages support the development of both decoding skills and deeper understanding, ultimately contributing to overall reading proficiency.

Data Tracking Sheets

The reading passages included in this intervention are designed to support both skill development and student engagement. These texts are carefully constructed to align with the phonics focus of each lesson, ensuring that students can apply newly learned decoding skills in a

meaningful context. This approach is consistent with research supporting the use of decodable texts in early and intervention literacy instruction, as it allows students to practice targeted skills while building confidence in their reading abilities (National Reading Panel, 2000).

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Data sheets link:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/15G2_1C_196N2EiWzDqOlteROS_IH_Ln2rIu6IMeNNKo/edit?usp=sharing

Student Workbook

The student workbook is a central component of this literacy intervention, designed to provide structured, scaffolded practice that reinforces the skills introduced during instruction. The workbook within the literacy intervention project is grounded in the principles of the National Reading Panel. It aligns with the Science of Reading by providing systematic, explicit, and cumulative instruction in foundational literacy skills. Consistent with the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000), the intervention emphasizes structured practice in phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension to support struggling readers in developing reading proficiency. The workbook was intentionally designed to provide repeated, scaffolded opportunities for students to apply these skills in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways, ensuring that instruction is responsive to the needs of upper-elementary students who require intensive literacy support. Each workbook page mirrors the instructional routine used in the lesson plans, including word work, reading, fluency practice, comprehension, and written response. This consistency supports students in developing familiarity with the learning process, reducing cognitive load, and allowing them to focus on skill development (Moats, 2020).

The workbook is intentionally designed to reinforce phonics and decoding skills through repeated exposure and application. Students engage with targeted word patterns and immediately apply those patterns in connected text, supporting the development of automatic word recognition. For instance, after practicing the *-at* word family through word cards and phonics drills, students read short decodable sentences and passages containing words such as *cat*, *hat*,

mat, and *sat*. This immediate transfer from isolated word practice to connected reading helps reinforce phonics patterns, strengthen decoding fluency, and build confidence in reading continuous text. Research on orthographic mapping suggests that repeated practice with consistent spelling patterns helps students store words in long-term memory, leading to more efficient reading (Ehri, 2014). By providing opportunities for both isolated word practice and contextualized reading, the workbook supports the integration of decoding skills into meaningful reading experiences.

Summary

The artifacts developed for this project- including the lesson plans, reading passages, and data tracking sheets- collectively support the primary goal of improving decoding, fluency, and comprehension for upper elementary struggling readers. The lesson plans demonstrate a consistent, structured approach to instruction that aligns with research-based practices, particularly through explicit phonics instruction, repeated practice, and integrated comprehension activities. The reading passages further support these goals by providing students with controlled, decodable texts that allow for meaningful application of newly learned skills while maintaining age-appropriate content to support engagement. The data tracking sheets play a critical role in ensuring that instruction remains responsive and targeted. By monitoring decoding accuracy, fluency growth, comprehension, and writing, these tools provide a comprehensive view of student progress and allow for instructional adjustments as needed. Together, these artifacts reflect a cohesive and intentional design that aligns closely with the goals of the intervention.

Chapter 5: Reflection and Future Direction

This chapter reflects upon the overall development, implementation, and evaluation of the Foundations Forward literacy intervention project. It examines the extent to which the original goals outlined in Chapter 1 and the project proposal were achieved, and the challenges, successes, professional growth, and future implications that emerged throughout the process. In addition to evaluating the project, this chapter explores how the intervention aligned with findings from the literature review, how the process influenced my development as an educator and instructional leader, and how the project connected to professional teaching standards, including selected InTASC standards. Finally, this chapter addresses project limitations, potential revisions, and future directions for continuing literacy intervention and structured literacy instruction.

Reflection on Project Goals and Overall Progress

The primary goal of this project was to create a structured, research-based literacy intervention resource for upper-elementary students who continue to demonstrate significant foundational reading difficulties. More specifically, the project aimed to address a persistent gap within literacy instruction: the lack of age-appropriate, systematic intervention resources for older elementary students who remain at the earliest stages of decoding and phonological development. The project sought to provide teachers, students, and families with accessible tools that reflected evidence-based literacy instruction grounded in the Science of Reading and structured literacy principles.

Another important goal of the project was to create intervention materials that were both academically rigorous and practically usable within authentic educational settings. Many literacy intervention programs are either highly theoretical or heavily scripted, making implementation difficult for classroom teachers balancing numerous instructional responsibilities. Therefore, the

project aimed to balance strong research alignment with practical usability by creating organized lesson plans, decodable texts, family resources, student workbooks, and progress-monitoring tools that could realistically support literacy intervention in elementary school settings.

Finally, the project also sought to increase awareness surrounding the instructional needs of upper-elementary struggling readers. Too often, literacy intervention conversations focus primarily on early elementary grades. At the same time, older struggling readers receive limited foundational instruction due to increasing curricular pressure surrounding grade-level standards and comprehension instruction. This project aimed to advocate for the importance of continuing explicit foundational literacy support beyond the primary grades.

What Went Well Throughout the Project

One of the strongest aspects of this project was the extent to which the intervention materials aligned with evidence-based literacy research. Throughout the development process, I consistently returned to the literature review and research surrounding structured literacy, phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, fluency development, vocabulary acquisition, and intervention intensity, drawing most heavily on the work of Louisa Moats, Hollis Scarborough, Linnea Ehri, and findings from the National Reading Panel to guide the design and instructional structure of the literacy intervention. This resulted in a project that felt highly intentional and grounded in current literacy research rather than disconnected instructional activities. For example, the intervention lessons were intentionally designed to follow a systematic instructional sequence in which students first practiced phonemic awareness skills orally, then moved into explicit phonics instruction, guided decoding practice, connected reading within decodable texts, and repeated fluency practice. This instructional progression reflected research supporting cumulative, scaffolded literacy instruction for struggling readers. Additionally, the decodable

stories were intentionally written to align directly with the phonics patterns taught within each lesson rather than exposing students to uncontrolled text patterns that could overwhelm beginning readers. The project also incorporated repeated review opportunities, multisensory instructional practices, and progress-monitoring components, all of which are strongly supported within structured literacy and intervention research. By grounding instructional decisions in literacy research rather than personal preference alone, the project became much more cohesive, purposeful, and academically defensible.

Another significant success was the creation of a cohesive, well-organized intervention structure. The project was intentionally designed so that all instructional components worked together to support cumulative skill development. The lesson plans aligned directly with the student workbook activities, decodable stories reinforced targeted phonics skills, and progress-monitoring tools enabled instructional responsiveness and data collection. This level of alignment enhanced the project's overall professionalism and usability. Additionally, the digital website component became one of the most valuable aspects of the intervention. Organizing materials into clearly defined sections- including teacher resources, family supports, intervention philosophy, literacy development information, and student instructional materials- made the project accessible and user-friendly. The website transformed the intervention from a collection of isolated documents into a more comprehensive literacy support system.

The development of family literacy resources was another area that went particularly well. As I created caregiver supports, I became increasingly aware of how important it is for literacy intervention to extend beyond the classroom. Many caregivers want to support their children's literacy development but lack familiarity with literacy terminology or instructional strategies. Designing accessible explanations of reading development, phonics instruction, and at-home

literacy strategies helped strengthen the project's overall inclusivity and practicality. Another success involved creating intervention materials that attempted to preserve student dignity and engagement. Many commercially available foundational literacy materials are designed for very young children and can feel discouraging or embarrassing for older, struggling readers. Throughout the project, I intentionally worked to create age-respectful materials that maintained foundational instruction without appearing overly juvenile. This consideration became an important and meaningful component of the intervention design process.

Challenges and Struggles During the Project

Although the project was ultimately successful in many ways, the development process also presented several significant challenges. One of the greatest struggles involved balancing comprehensiveness with practicality. Literacy intervention is an extremely broad and complex field, and there were many moments where I struggled to determine how much detail to include within instructional materials. I wanted the lesson plans to provide enough guidance for meaningful implementation while also remaining realistic for teachers to use within limited instructional time. Another challenge involved the extensive amount of time required to develop original instructional materials. Designing systematic lesson sequences required careful attention to scope and sequence progression, cumulative review opportunities, instructional scaffolding, and skill alignment. Additionally, creating decodable stories that aligned precisely with the phonics patterns taught while remaining engaging and meaningful for students was far more difficult than I initially anticipated. Every instructional component required repeated revision and refinement.

The emotional realities of literacy intervention also became more apparent throughout the project. As I developed resources for older struggling readers, I became increasingly aware of

how deeply reading difficulties can impact student confidence, motivation, and identity. Designing intervention materials, therefore, required more than simply teaching phonics skills; it also required consideration of student dignity, emotional safety, and academic self-efficacy. This realization challenged me to think much more holistically about literacy intervention than I had previously. Time management represented another major obstacle. Balancing graduate coursework, classroom teaching responsibilities, and extensive project development often felt overwhelming. There were many points during the process where the workload felt difficult to sustain. However, navigating these challenges ultimately strengthened my perseverance, organization, and long-term project management skills. Finally, narrowing the project's scope proved challenging. Countless areas within literacy intervention could be explored in depth, including dyslexia intervention, morphology instruction, multilingual learner supports, and advanced comprehension development. Determining which components to prioritize within a manageable graduate project required ongoing decision-making and refinement.

Connections to Existing Literature

One of the most meaningful outcomes of this project was the extent to which the intervention design process reinforced the findings discussed throughout the literature review. Research consistently emphasized that struggling readers benefit most from explicit, systematic, cumulative, and evidence-based literacy instruction. Throughout the process of developing intervention lessons and materials, these principles repeatedly emerged as essential instructional components. The project strongly reinforced the importance of phonological awareness and decoding instruction for older struggling readers. Before completing this project, I understood these concepts theoretically; however, designing actual intervention lessons substantially deepened my understanding. I became increasingly aware of how foundational skill gaps continue

to impact reading performance long after students enter upper-elementary classrooms. Difficulties with decoding and phonemic awareness often influence fluency, comprehension, vocabulary development, and overall academic confidence.

The project also reinforced research regarding instructional intensity and repeated practice opportunities. Literacy research consistently suggests that struggling readers require substantially more explicit modeling, scaffolded practice, cumulative review, and instructional repetition than typically developing readers. As I created lesson sequences, I recognized how essential repeated exposure and structured review are for promoting mastery and automaticity. Additionally, the project confirmed the value of structured literacy practices associated with the Science of Reading. The process of designing systematic instructional sequences highlighted the importance of predictable routines, cumulative skill progression, and direct instruction for students with persistent reading difficulties. Structured literacy approaches reduce cognitive overload and provide struggling readers with the consistency and clarity necessary for skill acquisition.

How the Project Challenged or Expanded My Thinking

Although much of the project confirmed findings from the literature review, the development process also challenged several of my previous assumptions about literacy intervention. Before beginning this project, I primarily viewed intervention through an academic and instructional lens focused heavily on skill deficits and instructional strategies. However, throughout the process, I became much more aware of the emotional and psychological dimensions of reading difficulties. Older struggling readers often carry years of frustration, embarrassment, and negative academic experiences related to reading. Many students internalize beliefs that they are unintelligent or incapable because of persistent literacy struggles. As a result, I realized that effective intervention must address not only academic skill development but also

student confidence, motivation, and emotional safety. This significantly shifted my understanding of literacy intervention.

The project also expanded my understanding of student engagement. I initially focused heavily on instructional structure and research alignment. However, as the project progressed, I became increasingly aware that even highly evidence-based instruction must still feel meaningful and accessible to students. Students are more likely to persist in the intervention when materials feel age-appropriate, engaging, and emotionally supportive. The project also highlighted important gaps within existing literacy research. While extensive research exists surrounding early intervention and structured literacy broadly, fewer studies specifically address upper-elementary non-readers and the practical realities of implementing foundational intervention at later grade levels. This realization reinforced the importance of continuing both research and resource development focused specifically on older struggling readers.

Personal Growth as an Educator and Leader

This project significantly influenced my understanding of myself as an educator. One of the most important realizations I experienced throughout the process was recognizing how deeply committed I am to literacy equity and intervention advocacy. Developing this project reinforced my belief that all students deserve access to effective, research-based literacy instruction regardless of age or previous academic struggles.

The project strengthened my confidence as a literacy educator. Creating intervention materials required me to analyze in depth reading development, instructional sequencing, assessment practices, and evidence-based literacy instruction. As a result, I now feel significantly more prepared to identify foundational reading difficulties and design targeted instructional responses. Another important area of personal growth involved instructional responsiveness.

Throughout the project, I became increasingly aware that effective teaching requires continuous reflection and adaptation. Literacy intervention cannot rely solely on scripted instruction or rigid pacing systems. Instead, intervention must remain diagnostic, flexible, and responsive to individual student needs.

This process taught me the importance of perseverance and long-term commitment. Balancing graduate school, classroom teaching, and project development was extremely demanding. Completing this project required sustained discipline, organization, and resilience. The experience strengthened my confidence in my ability to manage complex professional responsibilities while continuing to prioritize student-centered instructional goals.

What I Learned About Leadership

This project expanded my understanding of educational leadership. Before this experience, I often associated leadership primarily with formal administrative roles. However, the process of designing and developing this intervention project demonstrated that teachers themselves can serve as instructional leaders through curriculum development, research application, advocacy, and professional collaboration. I realized that leadership often begins with identifying instructional problems and actively working toward meaningful solutions. Through this project, I engaged in teacher leadership practices, including analyzing research, designing instructional resources, reflecting on educational systems, and advocating for underserved student populations.

Next, the project strengthened my understanding of collaborative leadership. Literacy intervention cannot exist in isolation. Effective intervention systems require collaboration among classroom teachers, interventionists, administrators, specialists, and families. Creating family literacy resources reinforced the importance of communication, accessibility, and partnership in

supporting student learning. Finally, the project deepened my understanding of advocacy as a form of leadership. Students with persistent reading difficulties are often misunderstood or overlooked within educational systems. This experience reinforced my responsibility as an educator to advocate for evidence-based instruction, equitable literacy opportunities, and intervention systems that prioritize student need over convenience or tradition.

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