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Primary Teachers' Implementation Experiences Transitioning From Balanced Literacy to Science of Reading

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Rachael Garritano Spires

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2025

Abstract

Primary Teachers' Implementation Experiences Transitioning From Balanced Literacy to

Science of Reading

by

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MA, Walden University, 2015

BS, Saint Leo University, 2010

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

In a suburban charter elementary school in the southeastern region of the United States, primary grade teachers were not fully implementing new strategies for all five components of the science of reading (SoR) during the shift from balanced literacy in the reading wars. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore primary grade teachers' experiences with implementing new strategies to support the five components of the SoR. Guided by Hall and Hord's concerns-based adoption model (CBAM), data were collected from a purposeful sample of 15 primary grade level teachers at the charter school, who participated in semistructured interviews. Data were analyzed using open inductive coding to identify six themes. Themes indicate that most teachers were at the "preparation for mechanical use" level within CBAM. Implementing strategies without a complete understanding left them feeling overwhelmed as they did not feel confident in their ability to fully implement components, correctly use strategies, or develop activities for students. Data also revealed that teachers wanted professional development for the "how" in implementing the SoR. Teachers requested hands-on professional development tailored to their classroom needs. Teachers wanted additional support to ensure the successful implementation of strategies, ensuring the strategies are taught and used effectively and efficiently. Based on the findings, a 3-day professional development was created to address the instructional gaps and support teachers' continued growth in implementing the SoR. Supporting improved literacy instruction through the SoR may foster positive social change through enhanced student reading achievement, which could bridge learning in other content areas to assist in the development of well-rounded students.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family. My children and parents have traveled with me on this journey, supporting my dream to create a difference in the world of education. Each member of my family encouraged me, motivated me, took on extra responsibilities, and worked through my many emotional needs during an intensive process. However, if not for my daughter, Kylie, and watching her persevere through her personal struggles with reading due to being dyslexic, I am not sure I would have completed this rigorous program. Her hard work and dedication to be successful in school, despite all the obstacles she had to overcome encouraged me to explore best reading strategies. It all started to better help her and ended to better serve my peers in education. Kylie was my fighting factor for exploration and research of the best way to ensure teachers received proper development and strategies promote successful reading achievement in all students.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my chair, Dr. Andersson, for guidance and encouragement along the way. I know that I took the long way around to finish my final project. Thank you for not giving up on me and helping me find my way all the way to the end. Throughout this process, I experienced numerous significant and life-altering changes. Thank you to my children and my family for their continued encouragement through this journey.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

In a suburban charter elementary school in the southeastern region of the United States, primary grade teachers were not fully implementing new strategies for all five components of the science of reading (SoR) during the shift from balanced literacy in the reading wars. Within the charter school, the SoR was being implemented to support the new Florida B.E.S.T. Standards due to the shift from balanced literacy in the reading wars. The shift in framework required that primary teachers have knowledge of the “how” and the “why” behind the SoR to understand the best ways to implement the new strategies for phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. It is challenging to transition teachers to new components, and this process requires teachers to have time for reflection and confidence in their implementation of new components (Korthagen, 2017). Petscher et al. (2020) suggested that student success will depend on the teacher’s ability to gain knowledge of the SoR to successfully implement new strategies to the pillars of reading confidently and adequately. Other researchers suggested that additional studies are needed to address primary grade teachers’ perspectives and experiences with the implementation of new strategies in the components for the SoR, and further supports are required to ensure the continued implementation of these components with fidelity (Didion et al., 2020; Korthagen, 2017).

When educators fully understand the benefits of the SoR and consistently implement new strategies to the components of reading to support strong foundational reading skills for students with fidelity, positive social change will begin to occur. In

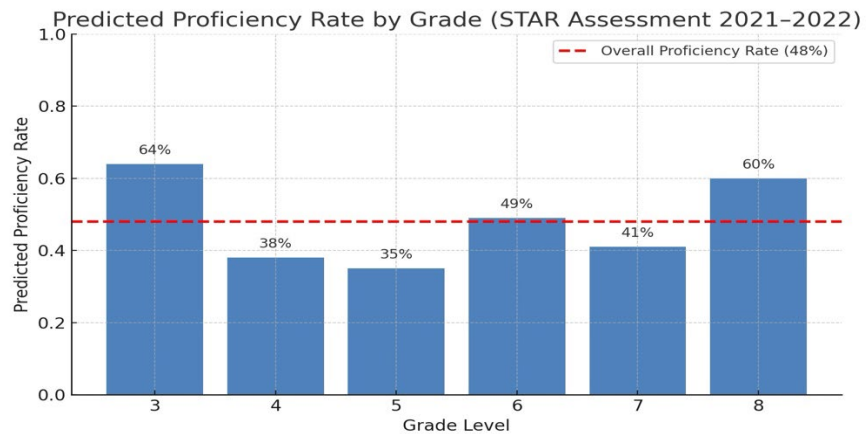
Chapter 1, I present the background, purpose of this study, and rationale. I also provide the conceptual framework as a blueprint for the research questions and methodology of this basic qualitative study. I address the significance of the study, my presumptions, and key vocabulary. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary.

Background

The SoR represents “knowledge about reading, reading development, and best practices for teacher instruction based upon the use of the scientific method” to help support all stakeholders in education (Petscher et al., 2020, p. 268). According to Moats (2020, p.14), “Unlike spoken language, which is learned with almost any kind of contextual exposure, reading is an acquired skill,” therefore, it is important to understand the science behind reading. Kerns et al. (2020) suggested that the SoR framework provides valuable insights into the cognitive processes essential for developing proficient readers. Foundational literacy skills acquired in primary grade levels serve as strong predictors of later reading achievement and overall literacy proficiency (Hudson et al., 2021; Sop & Sezgin, 2021). According to Hudson et al. (2021), when the foundational pillars of phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are systematically and explicitly taught, students exhibit proficiency in reading. The SoR ensures that all pillars are being taught through means that are explicit and systematic.

Foundational early literacy skills during the primary years are critical to develop proficient readers (Sparapani et al., 2019). However, the Nation’s Report Card for 2019 showed that 38% of students are performing at proficiency levels (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Meanwhile, the National Assessment of Educational Progress

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2019) found that approximately 65% of fourth-grade students and 64% of eighth-grade students achieved scores below proficiency. In Florida, state policy requires students to demonstrate reading proficiency before promotion to fourth grade to ensure mastery of foundational literacy skills (Florida Department of Education, 2022). Despite these expectations, the suburban charter school selected for this study reported a reading proficiency rate of 43% in 2021 (Florida Department of Education, 2022). Although the charter school's established goal for reading proficiency was 60%, recent benchmark assessments indicated the student performance remained below this target (see Figure 1). This data point was from a January 2022 winter benchmark with the SoR being implemented since the August 2021 school year.

Figure 1*Predicted State Test Results Based on Star Assessment*

Note. The figure was created using data from Renaissance Learning (2022) Predicted State Proficiency Report.

This gap in proficiency showed that foundational skills were not being mastered in the primary grades. Due to the lack of results and new frameworks set by the state, the suburban charter school was shifting from balanced literacy to the SoR. Schneider (2018) suggested that teachers still have an underdeveloped understanding of teaching literacy, and the adoption and implementation must be done successfully to sustain the new practices. Evidence from the charter school's executive vice president, regional director, and curriculum specialist expressed concerns regarding the transition to the implementation of the new framework (SoR) to raise reading proficiency.

During a resource development meeting, concerns were discussed regarding the transition in implementation of the SoR. The executive vice president and regional director questioned whether the teachers were understanding and gaining appropriate knowledge of the SoR as it was being presented, as well as the way primary teachers

were implementing the new strategies for the components of reading. The curriculum director stated that there may be a need for further teacher education and development to implement the components of the SoR (personal communication, September 28, 2021). There was a consensus regarding the following concerns from the regional team of the charter schools:

- The transition from balanced literacy to the SoR was done very quickly.
- Teachers were still developing their understanding of how to implement the new strategies aligned with the SoR.
- Meeting notes of the academic coach from the collaborative team planning meetings on October 31, 2021 indicated a gap in knowledge of the SoR, causing uncertainties in the implementation of new strategies for the five components and failure to use systematic curriculum.
- In classroom observations, the new curriculum, designed to align with the new teaching framework, appeared to leave teachers feeling overwhelmed and less confident in their teaching abilities.

Additional evidence was presented from the principal, vice principal, and academic coaches from the school within the region who believed that the transition was leaving teachers overwhelmed in their implementation of the SoR. The principal and assistant principal, during this meeting, observed a substantial lack of growth in the primary grade levels following the implementation of balanced literacy. The number of students being placed within the multitiered system to help fill the gaps in foundational reading skills was growing each year. There was a high concern that if teachers did not

understand the “how” and the “why” behind the SoR and its benefits, they would revert to balanced literacy, thereby causing larger learning gaps. The academic coaches, in a collaborative meeting, expressed their concerns about the proper implementation or refusal to use systematic phonics instruction. The academic coach (personal communication, October 6, 2021) stated “systematic phonics is one of the key strategies in the SoR” and “the systematic approach for phonics will greatly increase students’ reading proficiency; therefore, teachers need to be onboard in using it.” Due to the lack of proper implementation and utilization of the curriculum, STAR Renaissance Student Testing data from November 18, 2021, indicated little student growth.

The coaches stated that their teachers expressed a struggle in implementation and a lack of clarity in the SoR. Without the knowledge of the rationale behind the SoR and the how to make the shift in framework, the new strategies that needed to be applied to the components were not being fully implemented (personal communication, October 12, 2021). Although the struggles the teachers were feeling during the shift were unclear, teachers often taught the approach that they were confident in and believed works. Ensuring that teachers develop confidence within the SoR and in applying new instructional strategies is important for a positive shift into the new framework (Cervetti et al., 2020; Gilliland et al., 2019). S. Vaughn and Fletcher (2020) reminded school leaders that, although they are developing their knowledge of the SoR, there are still gaps in understanding how to instruct using the SoR. It was important to learn the teachers’ perspectives on why they were shifting to the SoR and how the implementation of the new strategies for the components was beneficial for student growth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to address primary grade teachers' experiences with the implementation of new strategies to support the five components for the SoR as the framework shifts from balanced literacy at a suburban charter school in the southeastern United States. Researchers noted that the new strategies involved within the framework of the SoR are difficult for teachers to implement if the "how" and "why" are not fully developed, making it less effective, and recommended further studies to investigate teachers' fundamental experiences with the adoption and implementation of the SoR to discover what is needed to support teachers (Gilliland et al., 2019; Hudson et al., 2021; Paige et al., 2021; Petscher et al., 2020; Schneider, 2018).

Rationale

There is an ongoing struggle for students to reach foundational reading skill proficiency by the end of second grade in the United States. Sohn (2020) discovered that 10 million children struggle with reading; therefore, it is crucial to examine strategies for teaching reading. Students must transition smoothly and with minimal challenge from the basics of foundational reading to reading that involves comprehension and retention of knowledge (Missall et al., 2019). One challenge that teachers are facing is how to shift from balanced literacy to the SoR. The shift in framework requires increased knowledge of why and how the SoR benefits student learning. A lack of knowledge of the understanding of how and why to use the SoR will impact teacher implementation of new strategies to support the framework. The change necessitates the adoption of new strategies in the areas of systematic and explicit instruction in all foundational reading

components (Porter et al., 2023). By examining the experiences of teachers implementing the new strategies of SoR across the five components, I sought to provide a better understanding of the supports and resources required for effective implementation of SoR, leading to a more efficient approach. Proper implementation of the new strategies for the components of the SoR could increase the number of students proficient in reading before leveling the primary grade levels.

Definitions of Terms

In this subsection, I provide definitions for the phrases and words used in the study. The definitions are provided to enhance the reader's learning and understanding of the study.

Balanced literacy: A combination of whole language and phonics that gives students a balance of guided reading and independent practice through many different learning environments (Fountas & Pinnell, 2022).

Language comprehension: The ability to understand spoken and written text (Silverman et al., 2020).

Phonemic awareness: The ability to recognize phonemes, which are the sounds heard in spoken language, allowing the students to isolate, break apart, and blend words (Mesmer & Kembach, 2022).

Phonics: An approach that allows readers to understand spoken language by recognizing letters and the sounds represented to decode words (Duke & Mesmer, 2019).

Phonological Awareness: The ability to understand and manipulate the component sounds of spoken words (Piasta & Hudson., 2022).

Science of reading (SoR): “A body of research that examines developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience on reading to determine the best practices of teaching reading focusing on explicit and systematic instruction” (Seidenberg, 2017, p.12).

Significance of the Study

The study is significant to the stakeholders of primary students who encounter difficulties in developing foundational reading skills before entering third grade. The most recent STAR Reading results showed that less than 45% of students in grades K-2 were scoring at or above benchmark. Teachers at the study site were struggling with the shift from balanced literacy to the SoR, making the implementation of new strategies under the five components of the SoR challenging. Shanahan (2020) expressed that teachers should understand the knowledge and research behind reading proficiency. However, there was a gap between that knowledge and the benefits of SoR, resulting in a disparity in the implementation of new strategies in the classroom. Research on this phenomenon was important for further understanding the theories behind the SoR, providing a deeper explanation of how to utilize SoR strategies to enhance the five components of reading, and identifying strategies that teachers will need to implement. Findings from the current study may inform the resources and support required for teachers to fully implement the SoR framework, enabling them to integrate new strategies into their daily reading instruction. The study may contribute to closing the gap in understanding teachers’ experiences and perspectives on using new strategies with primary grade level students who have foundational skills under the SoR framework. The

results of the study may contribute to the understanding of supports and resources needed when teachers are asked to implement new strategies after a shift in educational frameworks.

In a related study, Hindman et al. (2020) found that transitioning to a SoR suggested framework does not inherently lead to increases in teacher knowledge. The findings emphasized that educators require targeted, explicit training to understand how instructional strategies must be adjusted to implement the core components of the SoR effectively. Seidenberg et al. (2020) further underscored that effective reading instruction is a cognitively demanding task that necessitates precise and in-depth teacher knowledge to be applied meaningfully in classroom settings. Facilitating positive social change in literacy outcomes depends on equipping educators with the knowledge, pedagogical skills, and strategic support necessary to implement the SoR with fidelity and confidence. The shift in the SoR requires using curriculum and strategies that are explicit and systematic, which will benefit all stakeholders.

Research Questions

In the basic qualitative study, I explored primary grade teachers' experiences with the implementation of new strategies to support the five components for the SoR as teachers transition from balanced literacy to the SoR. The following research questions (RQs) guided this study:

RQ1: From the perspective of the teachers, what have their experiences entailed as they have begun the implementation of new strategies for the five components of the SoR?

RQ2: From the perspective of the teachers, what resources and supports are still needed to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies for all five components of the SoR?

Review of the Literature

The literature for this study was conducted primarily through the Walden University Library and Reading Research Quarterly. I obtained additional resources from databases such as EBSCOhost, Educational Research Starter, Sage Journals, ProQuest Central, and Google Scholar, focusing on current, peer-reviewed articles using sources published within the last five years. The search terms included *the SoR, balanced literacy, Scarborough's Rope, implementation of new frameworks, simple view of reading, reading proficiency, phonemic awareness, direct phonics instruction, explicit phonics instruction, fluency in reading, vocabulary, reading comprehension, professional development for learning new strategies, the concerns-based adoption model, and Gene Hall and the concerns-based adoption model.*

The literature review is structured into the following eight subsections: the conceptual framework, a review of the broader problem, transition of framework, foundational reading skills, fluency instruction, comprehension instruction, vocabulary instruction, and teacher implementation. This chapter relates to primary teachers meeting the challenges of implementing new strategies for the SoR framework into the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This study is important because it allowed teachers to share their perspectives and experiences regarding their experience of implementing the new

strategies for the five components as they shift from a balanced literacy framework to the SoR. Paige et al. (2021) stated that changes in lesson planning could result in incorporating the appropriate strategies to develop a new framework. Therefore, my study results could provide elementary reading educators with information on how to design lessons that incorporate strategies to fully develop each of the SoR components.

Conceptual Framework

The concerns-based adoption model (CBAM) addresses the concerns that teachers have when they begin to implement new curriculum, framework, or innovations (Hord et al., 2006). In this study, I examined teacher knowledge and experiences with the implementation of the SoR through the five components of reading. Fuller et al. (1974) suggested that by recognizing the concerns teachers have regarding the benefits to self and their pupils, it enables them to look for future success.

The implementation of new strategies to follow the SoR requires teachers to undergo a process of change. Hall and Hord (1987) developed assumptions about change to help explain the process educators will go through to be successful in implementation. These assumptions include:

- “Change is a process,
- change is accomplished by individuals,
- change is a highly personal experience,
- change involves developmental growth in feelings and skills,
- change can be facilitated by interventions.”

The process of change is evaluated within three frameworks: the stages of concern (SoC), levels of use (LoU), and innovation configuration (IC).

SoC provides a clear understanding of the emotional processes that teachers experience during a curriculum change (Anderson, 1997). At this stage, the teacher is concerned about the effects of the innovation on their day-to-day routines and procedures. Hord et al. (2006) explained the development of change through six levels: (a) awareness, (b) informational, (c) management, (d) consequence, (e) collaboration, and (f) refocusing. By identifying the level at which the teacher is currently, I can determine the proper interventions and supports that can be put into place.

To determine the stage of concern level of a teacher, the SoC questionnaire, accompanied by a simple interview, can be given. Fischer et al. (2019) utilized the SoC questionnaire to investigate the curriculum implementation efforts in relation to teacher concerns. Trapani and Annunziato (2018) provided information on determining teacher efficacy in instructional change, using the SoC questionnaire as well as informal interviews. These tools of measurement best equip researchers to determine which level of change the teacher is at regarding implementation.

Levels of use are the next component within the process of change that focuses on general patterns of teacher behaviors. During this portion of the framework, the teacher seeks to implement the innovation in accordance with the guidelines. The eight stages of LoU include “Level 0: nonuse, Level 1: orientation, Level 2: preparation, Level 3: mechanical, Level IVA: routine, Level IVB: refinement, Level V: integration, and Level VI: renewal, identify placement in the implementation process” (Hall & Hord., 2015).

The level of use is valuable in determining the best strategies to improve implementation (Anderson, 1997).

Determining the teachers' level of use can be achieved through interviews with specific questions to assess the present level (Anderson, 1997; Hall & Hord, 1987). Masarweh's (2018) study focused on teacher patterns of implementation of new curricula using the level of use to show the developmental stages, rather than allowing the interview only to show summative information. Meanwhile, Trapani and Annuziatio (2018) saw value in the level of use to encourage movement to new levels by having a clear understanding of the current level through behavioral patterns. A clear understanding leads to the power of change.

The last step in the framework in the change process is the innovation configuration stage. IC is a reminder that teachers will not implement new strategies, curricula, or standards in the same way; therefore, it is important to understand their response to the change (Austin, 1984, as cited in Anderson, 1997; Rutherford, 1984; Hall & Hord, 1987). This stage of development enables one to examine the implementation on a personal level for the teacher. The teacher begins to consider how the implementation will impact their students. The teacher will start focusing on the best ways to ensure the implementation meets the unique needs of their students. This stage of change is important, as interventions and support will be created to facilitate the teacher's growth as they journey through the innovation.

Review of the Broader Problem

At the charter school under study, teachers have experienced various reading frameworks and curricula to ensure students are proficient in reading by the end of third grade. In this research, I explored the perspectives of primary-grade teachers regarding their understanding and experiences with implementing new strategies for the five components of the SoR to enhance student reading proficiency as they transition from balanced literacy. It was also important to explore the teachers' perspectives of the knowledge, understanding, and resources needed for the SoR. The results of the study provided valuable feedback that could give clarity to the administrative and regional team of how the teachers' perspectives influence their experiences in implementing new strategies for the components of the SoR. Allowing the administrators to understand and provide support, primary teachers still need to ensure student reading success.

Reading Proficiency

Foundational early literacy skills during the primary years are critical to develop proficient readers (Sparapani et al., 2019). It is essential to identify proficient students in the primary grades to ensure students continue to develop (Missall et al., 2019). Cadiz-Gabejan and Quirino (2021, p. 30) stated that "reading proficiency and academic performance are both of paramount importance to a learner's holistic academic success." Nyarko et al. (2018) also suggested that developing reading proficiency in primary grades leads to academic success in all remaining grade levels. However, despite an abundance of research and policies put into place to improve reading achievement, the NEAP (2019)

data show that 65% of fourth-grade students and 64% of eighth-grade students attain less than proficient scores.

It is critical for students to develop literacy skills that allow them to progress from learning to read to reading to learn as they move through primary grade levels (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Reading proficiency in many states is determined by a state assessment in third grade. To ensure students are proficient readers, foundational skills must be systemically and explicitly taught. Fischer et al. (2019) reported that the persistent lack of reading proficiency among students has prompted greater focus on defining the supports and equitable opportunities for all children to achieve literacy.

Transition of Framework

Balanced Literacy

Balanced literacy combines whole language and phonics centered around multiple teaching components. Teachers are encouraged to use components such as read alouds, instructional based guided reading, collaborative learning, independent reading and practice, and word study. This philosophical framework allows students to become self-directed readers. Teachers will guide students as they learn to read on their own. In the framework of balanced literacy, strong emphasis is placed on guided reading time and modeling how students can use pictures and clues to help them decode words and understand the text (Bowers, 2020). Under balanced literacy, reading is viewed as a natural process that children can acquire through exposure to meaningful texts and supportive instructional strategies.

Balanced literacy involves the five pillars of reading to include phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In this framework, these skills are taught intertwined with one another and not as separate skills. Ian and Bradbury (2022) suggested that teaching letters and phonemes is not particularly strong under this framework. Bowers (2020) suggested the importance of understanding word parts such as prefix, base, and suffix to connect a definition to words. Wyse and Bradbury (2021) suggested the importance of explicit links in teaching phonics within reading using whole texts and reading books with controlled vocabulary. Teachers teach without a scope and sequence to phonics instruction but rather to phonics instruction based upon the literature and stories being worked on in class (Fischer et al., 2019). Leaders in balanced literacy conclude the need for equilibrium across the language arts domain and the pillars of reading so that there are diverse methods of delivering instruction.

The Science of Reading

According to the International Literacy Association (2010, p.2), “effective reading instruction is based on a combination of research evidence, professional wisdom, and the informed judgement of teachers who understand the needs of individual learners.”

According to Graham (2020), the SoR examines how reading develops, how it is taught, and how it influences students’ cognitive and academic growth. Seidenberg (2017, p. 12) described the SoR as a “body of research that examined developmental psychology, educational psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience on reading to determine the best practices of teaching reading.” All three definitions of the SoR include the idea that there is a cognitive factor behind students’ learning to read. The

development of learning to read is a critical achievement and one of the most complex skills to acquire. Reading is not naturally learned or prewired as language is (Kents et al., 2013).

The transition to the SoR is designed with student reading success in mind. SoR furthers the scientific research that has occurred on the development of the brain in accordance to learning how to read. Neuroscience research has shown that although the brain is mapped to have oral language and visual images, people were not born with the ability to bridge the two together (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Research indicates that effective literacy development takes place in 3 regions of the brain: the phonological processor, the orthographic processor, and the phonological assembly region (Caffarra, 2020). The ability to process language takes place with the phonological processor region of the brain (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987). The ability to make visual systems to form and recall words happens within the orthographic processor region of the brain. In the phonological assembly region of the brain vision and speech are created. The brain must develop efficient pathways through explicit and deliberate instruction. Learning to read is a highly complicated skill that uses multiple cognitive processes. Therefore, because reading is not a natural process it must be properly instructed for students to become proficient readers.

The SoR places a large demand on the importance of the systematic and explicit instruction over the five components (Cervetti et al., 2020). The five components or pillars of reading that are essential to reading development are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Petscher et al., 2020; Vaughn et al.,

2020). Graham (2020) recognized that the SoR is the scientific study that involves all areas of reading and learning the integral pieces will lead to the success of readers. In 2000, the National Reading Panel established that the five pillars of reading also known as the “big five” would be equivalent to student reading success. The SoR relies heavily on these components with very specific instructional strategies for all five and through these practices, the SoR guides student success in learning to read.

The Simple View of Reading

The simple view of reading (SVR) is a scientific theory that identifies the skills believed to be needed for students to become skilled readers. Gough and Tunmer (1986) proposed the SVR, a model that illustrates reading requires both decoding and language comprehension. Both components are needed to achieve the skill of reading. Once decoding skills have been learned, readers can comprehend written text as language (Cervetti et al., 2020). Decoding can only begin when students can identify and recognize the sounds and sound patterns within the alphabet (Petscher et al., 2020). In the SVR formula, if decoding or language comprehension is missing, the student is not considered a reader (Hoover & Tunmer, 2020). The assurance of both decoding and language comprehension establishes readers that will be proficient, and these multicomponent skills can be seen better developed by the reading rope.

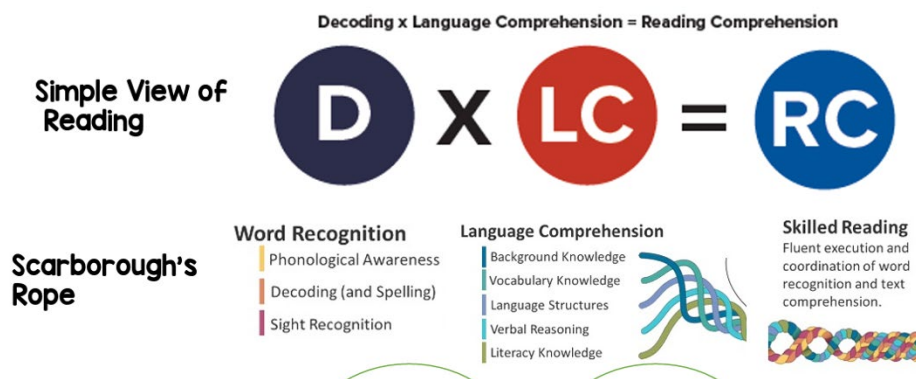
SVR gives a map of where student breakdown is for a struggling reader, allowing an understanding of the skills needed (Cervetti et al., 2020). As the formula stands, reading comprehension = decoding x language comprehension. Just as in a multiplication problem, if any part of the equation equals zero, then the result will be zero. When

students struggle with their language comprehension, they cannot comprehend the words. Educators can measure language comprehension by means of “vocabulary tests, verbal cognitive ability tests, and listening comprehension activities” (Sánchez-Vincitore et al., 2022). Language comprehension is the key to students becoming readers.

The other half of the formula includes the students having the capability to apply sound symbols to letters and decode words. The first part of reading words is the phonological awareness route which enables the procedure of mapping sounds to letters begin. Students first use the phonological route to allow decoding abilities to connect graphemes and map the phonemes to decode a word (Sánchez-Vincitore et al., 2022, Introduction, para.3). The second part of reading words is the Lexile route which then allows students to recognize words automatically. Once both the phonological route and the Lexile route have been met, students have that portion of the SVR equation met. The SoR framework places an emphasis on the understanding of SVR to develop strong readers.

Scarborough’s Reading Rope is a visual representation that emphasizes reading as multicomponent skills (Scarborough, 2001). The reading rope is divided into two strands, making 2 subsections; language comprehension which includes background knowledge, vocabulary, and literacy knowledge (Scarborough, 2001). The second part is word recognition. The sub-strands included in this portion of the rope are phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition (Scarborough, 2001). Both strands of the visual model represent the development of reading skills that students develop over time to make them proficient readers (Scarborough, 2001). The infographic below shows a

clear picture of the individual components that must be woven together to produce a skilled reader. When students increase their strategic and automatic skills, they become fluent, skilled readers. The reading rope aligns to the SoR as it confirms the importance of explicit instruction and the assurance that students develop skills over time.

Figure 2*Simple View of Reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope*

Note. The image, courtesy of Dr. Stephania Sherman, Regional Academic Specialist, referenced from Scarborough, H. S. (2001).

The understanding of SoR allows for educators to give effective reading instruction. Together, the SVR and Scarborough's reading rope gives a better insight into the importance of the type of instruction students need to receive to achieve the goal of a skilled reader. By adding in the understanding of the SoR it becomes clear that cognitive processes are essential in the development of reading proficiency. In primary grade levels, the highest level of reading growth is seen when students are taught foundational literacy skills explicitly and in a systematic order (Petscher et al., 2020). The SoR aligns the components to ensure distinct strategies (Paige et al., 2021) that promote positive growth in students and educators (Hudson et al., 2021). The success of the reading instruction is up to the school to provide appropriate research-based strategies, such as structured literacy.

Foundational Reading Skills

Reading is not a skill that one can acquire naturally like spoken language; instead, reading must be explicitly taught. Research shows that 40–50% of students require explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction to become readers (Castles et al., 2018; Duke & Mesmer, 2019; Mesmer & Kambach, 2022). This research is compared to the 5% of students who learn how to read on their own. Ciesielski & Creaghead (2020) suggested that students' literacy trajectory is often identified in the early stages of school. As Melesse and Enyew (2020) suggested providing reading foundational skills and best practices is essential to producing proficient readers. Research has shown that many educators have a low level of understanding of phonological awareness and the best strategies. The SoR helps to support best strategies and results are produced when each element is clearly understood and taught explicitly.

Components of Science of Reading

Across the nation, there has been a huge emphasis placed on the importance of creating a strong foundation in literacy skills to develop skilled readers. In 2000, the National Reading Panel identified the elements of what needed to be taught to ensure students became skilled readers. These components are called the big five and include phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Castles et al. (2018, p.16) describe reading as laying down a foundation, “cracking the alphabetic code is essential for learning to read...assisting children to do so is nonnegotiable.” “However, the acquisition of phonic knowledge is by no means all there is to learning how to read,” (Castles et al., 2018, p.16). All five components are important to develop skilled readers,

however, each is not equally weighted in reading success. The SoR allows for a deepening in teacher knowledge through adding strategies of orthographic mapping, computational learning, complexity, motivation for readers, and a greater role of comprehension to each of the pillars of reading.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Phonological awareness is essential in the reading process because written words correspond to spoken words. Spoken language is heavily relied upon when learning to read. The process of learning to read involves the ability to match the printed code to the sounds of spoken language (Seidenberg et al., 2020). Phonological awareness occurs when students can determine sounds and manipulate them into different parts of speech (Piasta & Hudson, 2022). Instruction of phonological awareness is separated in the areas of syllable, awareness, and phoneme. The stages of phonological awareness do not come natural to students. Therefore, teachers must have a clear understanding of each stage.

Syllable awareness is the first stage of phonological awareness that allows students to detect or manipulate rhymes and syllables. Syllable awareness is the skill that presents early and prior to literacy (Vazeux et al., 2020). Syllable awareness falls under the segmentation level and allows for students to explore sounds by pulling apart words and manipulating the sound structure (Carson et al., 2019; Mehta et al., 2018). Students first need to indicate how many syllables are in a word, then determine if two words have the same ending sound, or if words have the same vowel, finally allowing the student to understand if the word rhymes (Seidenberg et al., 2020). Research indicates that teaching letter-to-syllable correspondences leads to greater gains in phonemic awareness in

prereaders (Vazeux et al., 2020). Successful instruction of this skill will move students into a better understanding of phonemes.

Phonemes are defined as the “smallest unit of sound” and make up words spoken (Duncan, 2018, pg. 226). Zugarramurdi et al. (2022) suggested that during this stage students should have knowledge of letter sounds and be able to quickly recognize alphabetic letters. Duncan (2018) mentioned alphabetic letters and their sounds help to give concrete development of phonemes. The SoR finds that instruction of letters is most effective when teachers focus on instructing letter sounds and names together (Gerde et al., 2019; Roberts, 2021). Teachers should have a full understanding of each part of the process, including pronouncing phonemes accurately (Piasta & Hudson, 2022). The SoR places a high level of focus accuracy of phonemes.

Students at the phoneme level are considered proficient when they can hear, identify sounds, and work with individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken language. Researchers have found that explicit phoneme instruction in identifying and manipulating individual sounds in words is key for effective phonics instruction (Clayton et al., 2020; Ehri, 2020). The mastery of these skills will help to change the trajectory of students’ reading achievement.

Phonemic awareness is the most essential role in students learning to read as they begin to understand that phonemes make up all the words we speak (Mesmer & Kambach, 2022). During this stage students will gain the ability to apply alphabetic decoding strategies as they now understand how to manipulate sounds (Carson et al., 2019). The National Reading Panel (2000) describes phonemic awareness as the ability

for students to know that spoken words contain smaller segments of sounds. Brown et al. (2021) suggested that this manipulation of letters that students learn during instruction will be a powerful tool for teachers to understand their reading outcomes. Instruction needs to be properly executed to allow for growth.

It is important that educators understand the proper ways to instruct students in sounds. Studies have shown the lack of knowledge for educators in phonological and phonemic awareness (McNeill, 2018). Phonemic awareness instruction should be explicit, systematic, and ample practice should be given. Rotela et al. (2019) suggested that the complexity of multiple neurocognitive processes must happen for students to link phonemes. Therefore, teachers must devote instructional time to the concepts for students to fully understand the process. Moats (2020) suggested that students must consistently be monitored and challenged in blending and segmenting phonemes. Gaps in reading performance tend to begin at this stage of instruction (Melesse & Enyew, 2020). Explicit instruction and ample practice will be proactive in ensuring student progress and success.

Phonics

Phonics is an instructional method that bridges together the orthographic and phonological processors that are deeply integrated (Piasta & Hudson., 2022; Seidenberg et al., 2020). Orthographic mapping occurs in the area of the brain responsible for oral language processing. In this section of the brain a map is created which connects the sounds of words or phonemes to the letters for students to have automaticity. When sounds and letters are connected through repeated exposure, they are permanently stored in long-term memory, allowing words to be instantly recognized (Piasta & Hudson,

2022). When students can determine if the way they pronounce a word and a order of the letters matches a known word they are developing fluency (Seidenberg et al., 2020).

Orthographic mapping and phonological processors are the first pieces needed to ensure that literacy acquisition will occur during the teaching of phonics.

Researchers have found that phonemic awareness and phonics are two predictors for how well students will learn to read during their instruction in kindergarten and first grade (Carson et al., 2019). Ehri (2020) suggested that for students to be successful readers they must have a firm foundation in decoding and phonics skills. Phonics instruction focuses on the correlation between letters and their sounds. Explicit and systematic phonics instruction is an important piece in ensuring this success. SoR suggests that teachers should use a scope and sequence to ensure the pattern of sounds are being taught in a systematic order (Mesmer & Kambach, 2022). Through scope and sequence, students learn single sounds, digraphs, blends, and diphthongs in a predetermined order, allowing them to develop the proper mouth position and pronunciation. The explicit and systematic order makes a difference in students establishing words in their long-term memory to become fluent and proficient readers.

Fluency Instruction

Scarborough (2001) identified the importance of fluency for skilled readers as it is a fluent execution of word recognition and text comprehension. Fluency is a combination of automaticity and prosody that bridges together the ability to recognize words from memory and the ability to comprehend text. In obtaining fluency, students begin to develop orthographic mapping, which allows early readers to use their knowledge of

sounds and associate them with written words (Paige et al., 2019). Words are anchored in students' long-term memory through the sounds (phonemes) that students learned and practiced as they developed phonemic awareness (Ehri, 2014; Nevo et al., 2020).

Building fluency requires fluent execution and accuracy at every level.

Fluency is developed within stages that must be assessed to collect a full picture of where students are in the reading process. In building fluency, instruction is taken beyond accuracy at every level and then assessed. Primary grade levels will complete assessments for letter naming. Letter naming consists of the ability to have instant recognition of the 26 letters. Mastery of letter naming then moves students into phonological/phonemic awareness. Once students can form new words through isolation, phonemic awareness skills are automatic. Automaticity of phonemic awareness leads to letter-sound correspondence and explicit instruction of letter features in predictable sequences for developmental spelling, which moves students to word reading. Students then begin to put together all the skills to map words. Finally, in developing reading fluency, students begin to integrate their skills and start to master the skill of prosody (Rupley et al., 2020). Oral reading fluency practice helps develop decoding skills in students (O'Reilly et al., 2019). Each fluency stage builds upon the next, providing educators with knowledge about reading development to guide students in increasing text complexity (Rupley et al., 2020). Assessing students at all stages allows teachers to have knowledge of the skills needed so that fluency will be linked to comprehension.

Comprehension Instruction

Through developmental research, it is suggested that language and reading comprehension will increase in students as they become more efficient in decoding and can understand word meanings in a text (Silverman et al., 2020). Language comprehension will grow throughout students' academic career; however, it must be focused on in early elementary school, allowing students to gain the language skills needed to decode texts (Silverman et al., 2020). Reading comprehension occurs when students no longer need to decode words and can understand and gain meaning from written text. Students begin to develop comprehension skills through oral language and listening comprehension. When students begin to read fluently, listening comprehension changes into reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is enhanced through instruction in knowledge, vocabulary, predicting outcomes, summarizing, clarifying, visualizing, generating inferences, and comprehension modeling (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Moats, 2020). Educators must understand all the components of comprehension to help instruct the wide range of readers (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Focusing on building students' knowledge and word reading benefits students in comprehension.

According to Duke and Cartwright (2021), fluent reading supports comprehension by allowing students to focus less on decoding and more on understanding the text. Research indicates that the development of foundational skills of phonological awareness, phonics, and accurate word recognition becomes the groundwork for comprehension (Babayigit et al., 2021; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Students who have mastered connecting graphemes, phonemes, and orthographically complex words spend

less time focusing on words and more time reading to comprehend. Morphological awareness instruction involves paying attention to the small meanings of words; students who are successful in this build a strong bridge to reading comprehension (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). When students are given this instruction early and explicitly, their reading comprehension will be stronger.

The use of content-rich ELA instruction that builds background and content knowledge accelerates students' language skills (Cabell & Hwang, 2020). Strategies within the SoR suggest that comprehension is not taught in isolation (Moats, 2020). For primary grade levels, it is important to build cross-curricular content knowledge. Students will gain the knowledge needed to better adapt to taking comprehension assessments as they progress to older grades. Decoding is a key component of reading comprehension (Elleman & Oslund, 2019); however, when students have background knowledge of a topic, they can make connections more easily, leading to improved comprehension skills (Cabell & Hwang, 2020). By building knowledge, students will begin to connect ideas in rich literature with ease.

Vocabulary Instruction

Balanced literacy and SoR share similar methods for enhancing student vocabulary, which in turn leads to stronger comprehension. Balanced literacy encouraged teaching vocabulary explicitly to students (Moody et al., 2018). For this type of learning, words that students may not know from a story or curriculum book were taught individually and primarily out of context. Whereas SoR still encourages explicit instruction to learn more words, it also incorporates the use of conversations around new

words and rich literature to increase exposure to vocabulary (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Elleman & Oslund, 2019). By combining the best of both frameworks, students can enhance their vocabulary knowledge when proper instruction is provided.

The use of oral language, explicit instruction, and rich literature in all strategies will break the barrier to comprehension (Moody et al., 2018). Moats (2020) explains the importance of examining relationships among words, word structures, origin, and meaning to help the brain connect the meanings of new words. Cabell and Hwang (2020) found that at primary grade levels, the ability to teach vocabulary explicitly using read-alouds increased student comprehension. Rodge et al. (2019) noted that when educators expose primary-grade students to new words through rich literature, their oral language and comprehension skills improve. At a very young age, before students read, their vocabulary will be the strongest predictor of reading comprehension (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). The more words that students are exposed to, the greater the chances for reading proficiency.

Teacher Implementation

Transition from one literacy framework to another is difficult in schools. A gap exists between empirical findings and the implementation of evidence-based practices within schools (Solari et al., 2020). Teachers often become lost in the research of the new framework and the strategies to be employed, as they are not provided with practical ways to apply the latest knowledge (Willingham, 2018). Hoffman et al. (2020) suggested that when teachers do not feel confident in their abilities under a new framework, they often fail to implement the new strategies, despite recognizing their importance. The

importance of a well-thought-out transition plan will increase the proper implementation by teachers.

Districts and school administrators must determine the most effective ways to ensure teachers feel confident in implementing new strategies within the new framework (Willingham, 2018). Solari et al. (2020) discussed that leaders may have mixed opinions about the research presented to them, the framework in which it is structured, the language used, and the dialogue it creates within the collaboration time with staff. Leaders will decide on the best way to present all information for complete understanding by the staff. Implementation is successful when there is full communication of expectations and collaboration throughout the process (Solari et al., 2020). Seidenberg et al. (2020) suggested translating the SoR into verifiably effective practices that outline the skills to be learned, at what point of development, and how to differentiate them for all learners. Seidenberg et al. (2020) also suggested examining and having conversations around the existing systems of learning to determine what strategies can be done to move them closer to the new framework. It is important to remember that change will not happen overnight, and consistency is key.

Leaders must determine the ways to encourage implementation and measure the implementation. Adjusting to a new literacy framework affects all stakeholders; therefore, SoR will require innovative ways to engage with the diverse group of individuals involved, ensuring that SoR is mutually beneficial to all (Solari et al., 2020). Shanahan (2020) reminds leaders that teachers' personal experiences guide their decision-making on instructional approaches used. Therefore, the more professional

development, real-life scenarios, applicable strategies, and resources given, the greater the chance of teachers being willing to use the strategies properly and with fidelity (Hudson et al., 2021). Solari et al. (2020) suggested measuring success based on teacher behavior, teacher usage and understanding, a change in student knowledge, and finally, growth on standardized testing. Implementing a new framework has challenges; however, with proper support and resources, teachers can be successful in its implementation.

Implications

The purpose of this basic qualitative study allowed me to address primary grade teachers' experiences with the implementation of new strategies to support the five components for the SoR as the framework shifts from balanced literacy. Through the exploration of teachers' knowledge and experiences with the implementation of the new strategies to support the SoR, this study provided administrators with valuable insights into the knowledge, understanding, resources, and support that teachers need to effectively teach under the SoR. The implications of the research will generate new ideas for quality training of teachers and provide appropriate resources for them at the school, enabling the enhancement of the implementation of the SoR and the new instructional strategies. Once data collection and analysis are complete, teachers will be grouped by their level of implementation. Based on the collected data, professional development will be created to focus on new strategies that promote foundational reading skills under the SoR. The PD will consist of a deeper dive into the SoR, the new strategies that follow the SoR for the five reading components to ensure each reading component is understood and teachers are given applicable ways to implement each. Positive social change within this

qualitative study can be achieved by supporting teachers in implementing the reading framework changes and providing support at their respective levels of implementation to ensure that students' foundational reading skills improve with the implementation of the SoR.

Summary

The problem being addressed in this study is that primary teachers are not fully implementing new strategies for all five components of the SoR during the shift from balanced literacy in the reading wars at the study site. Personal communication from the regional team and teachers from within the study site has provided evidence of the problem. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was for the researcher to address primary grade teachers' experiences with the implementation of new strategies to support the five components for the SoR as the framework shifts from balanced literacy at the study site. The research questions that were addressed are:

RQ1: From the perspective of the teachers, what have their experiences entailed as they have begun the implementation of new strategies for the five components of the SoR?

RQ2: From the perspective of the teachers, what resources and supports are still needed to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies for all five components of the SoR?

This study is relevant to the community and stakeholders of primary students who struggle in the development of foundational reading skills before entering third grade. The literature review provided background knowledge and information for the SoR and

the five components of reading, which together offer a strong foundation in reading skills for primary students. As well as promoting research-based implementation skills and strategies for the SoR and the reading components. Ultimately, the literature review underscored the necessity for effective and practical resources and professional development opportunities for teachers. Section 2 of this study includes the methodology used to address the research questions in Section 1. I will discuss the data collection and analysis procedures I will use to answer the research questions from Section 1.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

A basic qualitative approach addressed the purpose of this study because there was a need to understand individuals, behaviors, and experiences within their learning environment (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The purpose of the current study was to explore primary grade teachers' experiences with the implementation of new strategies to support the five components of the SoR as the framework shifts from balanced literacy at the study site. To explore the teachers' experiences of the implementation of the SoR, I collected data using semistructured interviews that gathered information regarding teacher experiences in their implementation of the new strategies of the five components to support the SoR as they meet their students' instructional needs.

Relationship of the Research Design to the Problem

A basic qualitative approach was most suitable for addressing the issue that primary teachers were not fully implementing new strategies for all five components of the SoR during the transition from balanced literacy in the reading wars at the study site. Qualitative methodology contributed to a better understanding of the problem at the study site by valuing the experiences of the teachers (see Fusch, 2018). Qualitative methodology allowed me to grasp the meanings that teachers had constructed regarding their experiences (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I gathered data through face-to-face interviews to explore the teachers' interpretations of their experiences with implementing the components of the SoR at the study site.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The basic qualitative design enabled me to uncover local perceptions of implementing the new strategies through semistructured interviews helping to gain insight into the problem at the study site (see Creswell & Báez, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Through the discussions and vivid descriptions provided by the interviewees, I gained insights into how others interpret their experiences (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This basic qualitative approach facilitated the collection of descriptive data based on each participant's experiences as they transitioned from balanced literacy to the SoR. In selecting participants, I ensured they met the necessary criteria to contribute relevant information to the study. This study used a basic qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of kindergarten through Grade 2 teachers in implementing instructional practices aligned with the SoR. One-on-one interviews were conducted to explore teachers' experiences and to identify the supports and resources necessary for effective implementation of the SoR.

Relationship of Research Design to the Guiding Questions

The basic qualitative research design was appropriate to address the following RQs for this study:

RQ1: From the perspective of the teachers, what have their experiences entailed as they have begun the implementation of new strategies for the five components of the SoR?

RQ2: From the perspective of the teachers, what resources and supports are still needed to ensure successful implementation of the new strategies for all five components of the SoR?

The research questions were developed while meeting with the regional team of the charter school, including my personal experiences as an instructional coach and recent literature. It was of great value to design the research questions around the CBAM to ensure a clear understanding of where teachers are regarding their stages of concern, level of use within the framework, and standing within the innovation configuration of the SoR. The research questions were created to obtain significant insight into the teachers' knowledge, experiences, and perspectives when implementing new strategies to support the five components of reading to understand what resources and supports are needed to ensure student growth. The qualitative approach included semistructured interviews to gather data from those being interviewed to gain knowledge of their experiences and perspectives of implementing the strategies and components of the SoR.

Justification for Research Design

When deciding on the best approach for the research design of this study, I found that qualitative research would be a more suitable choice than quantitative research. Qualitative researchers aim to understand how people interpret the experiences of others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In contrast, a quantitative study involves researchers using numbers to analyze data, determine averages, or make predictions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Quantitative research would only be applicable if I wanted to analyze student data in relation to teachers implementing the strategies and components of the Science of SoR.

However, for this study, I wanted to understand the implementation of the strategies and components of the SoR. The study emphasized the experiences of teachers, making the qualitative method the most appropriate approach.

There are six types of qualitative research: basic qualitative research, phenomenological, ethnographic, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative analysis, and qualitative case study. The basic qualitative approach would serve the study most appropriately. The first research design to consider is a case study. The focus of a case study is to focus on one piece of data for analysis, such as one program, one teacher, or one classroom (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For my study, I have chosen to use only interviews as the data source to analyze multiple teacher experiences, making a case study not a suitable choice. Another research design considered was the phenomenology design; however, this design approach would have only been acceptable if I were only interested in the emotions of the teachers through the implementation and not working towards a solution (Farrell, 2020).

As Van Maanen and Kolb (1982) described, ethnographic research involves a cultural description. This type of research involves an extended period of fully immersing oneself in the setting where the research is conducted. Ethnographic research would not be well-suited to my study, as I did not immerse myself in the site for a prolonged duration. Grounded theory research addresses questions about a process and how it changes over time, allowing for comparisons of the collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Grounded theory would not be suitable for my research, as my focus was on teachers' experiences within a single school rather than the experiences of teachers across

various schools implementing the strategies and components of the SoR. Patton (2002) describes narrative studies as first-person accounts of experiences told through storytelling; they are in-depth. A narrative study would not be the best approach for my research, as I was not looking to analyze a story but rather to examine data from multiple participants' experiences.

The basic qualitative approach explains how people depict their experiences and the meanings those experiences hold (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This approach enabled me to conduct in-depth interviews with teachers, gaining a clear understanding of their perspectives and experiences as they implement and instruct using the five components of reading through the SoR. A qualitative approach was the most effective in understanding the perspectives and experiences of primary grade level teachers regarding the implementation of new strategies for these components.

Participants

In this subsection, I outline the study's context, describe participant demographics, selection criteria, and the procedures used to gain access to participants. It also explains the importance of establishing and building rapport with the participants. Finally, this section outlines the measures to protect participants before, during, and after the study.

Participant Demographics

The focus of this study was to understand the experiences and perspectives of teachers within the primary grades; therefore, my participants will be teachers currently teaching in Grades kindergarten to 2. Purposeful sampling was used to select the

participants, as the sample size is relatively small (Shaheen et al., 2019). Staller (2021) describes purposeful sampling as the researchers using their best judgment to intentionally invite people who will best give knowledge and insight to the studied problem. To be included in the study, the teachers should have at least one year of experience within the school. The targeted selection of teachers included those who have experienced implementing the SoR components during the transition from balanced literacy. I invited 18 teachers to take part in the study. Out of this sample, seven kindergarten teachers, five first-grade teachers, and six second-grade teachers are eligible to participate based on their time at the school. Inviting 18 participants allowed for teachers who may not wish to join, as my goal was fifteen participants. For the fifteen participants, I sought at least three teachers per grade level to ensure an equal distribution of implementation and strategy knowledge.

Setting and Population

The school where I conducted the study is a suburban charter elementary school located in the southeastern region of the United States. In 2021, the demographic makeup of the students is 7% Caucasian, 21% African American, 19% Hispanic, and 13% other. Additionally, 59% of the students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Criteria for Selection

The criteria required for participation was based upon the following:

- (a) participants have taught in the primary grade levels within the previous 2 years,

- (b) participants have a minimum of 1 year of experience teaching all components of reading in the primary grade levels,
- (c) participants are actively choosing to engage in the interview,
- (d) participants are offering to share their perspectives and experiences about the implementation of the SoR within the school under study.

Through purposeful sampling, I selected participants who were able to share meaningful perspectives and understanding related to gap in practice within the study site.

Justification for the Number of Participants

The study's goal was to conduct an in-depth investigation into the phenomenon. To achieve saturation within the study, I selected 15 participants from grade levels K-2. Hennick and Kaiser (2021) stated that saturation focuses on the sample size to develop a theory of the phenomenon. Having at least 15 participants in the study was sufficient to recognize common themes. Francis et al. (2010) stated that data collection will capture the "diversity, depth, and nuances" of the problem being studied when the proper number of participants are used. I chose 15 participants, as Rowlands et al. (2016) contended that a sample size of eight to ten provides a 95% confidence level and offers a diverse group of participants. In this study, fifteen participants provided the diverse and detailed data needed for a productive and meaningful analysis.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

The conduction of this study occurred after I consulted with the Regional Director of the charter school to obtain permission for data collection and access to the school and

primary teachers. I also spoke with the principal of the study school to secure permission to visit the campus and interview teachers about the phenomenon. I completed the Walden University research application process and obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB approval no. 03-16-23-0649712). Following IRB approval, I invited eligible participants to take part in the study via email.

Establishing Researcher–Participant Relationship

The relationship with the regional director of the charter school has developed over the last 10 years of my work with the organization; thus, there was no hesitation in gaining access to the participating school. My professional relationship with the principal at the study site was established within the past three years. After discussing my study with the principal, I was granted access to the teachers. I had not previously established relationships with the participants, as I was unfamiliar with any of the teachers at the study school. My relationship with the research participants involved gathering information about their perspectives and experiences with the implementation of the SoR. During the participant recruitment process, I provided sample interview questions and assured participants that I would address any questions they had. Each participant received a consistent form in advance to help them feel comfortable with the process.

According to Guillemin et al. (2018), trust in qualitative research is crucial to the study's success. Bell et al. (2016) suggested that building a relationship with the participants builds mutual comfort. Participants who feel comfortable engage more deeply in the interview process and with the researcher (Bell et al., 2016; Merriam &

Tisdell, 2015). To ensure that the participants felt comfortable knowing their information was confidential, each was assigned a unique number.

Gaining the trust of the participants began before the interview process did. Participants were provided detailed information about the study through email when they were invited to participate. This will allow them to make an educated decision about whether they want to participate. The participants were informed that I had obtained consent from the principal and regional director of the school to conduct the study. Once the decision was made to participate in the study, I continued communication through emails, allowing them to know the process of conducting thorough interviews. Building rapport with participants before the study began was essential in gaining trust and ensuring that the data collected were authentic and credible.

Understanding my role as the researcher was crucial before starting any part of the interview process. Through consistent reflection on my role, I remained focused on understanding the problem being examined from each participant's perspective. I needed to refrain from judging the responses or allowing any biases to influence my reactions. Before conducting the interviews, I took the time to engage with the participants through conversation to develop a relationship. I made sure each participant understood the reasons for the interview and the purpose of the study.

During the interview process, I maintained credibility and trust with the participants. I used a recording device that transcribed the interviews and handwritten notes. The recording device that allows for transcription is imperative, as it builds the credibility of the research and ensures that no interview answers are misinterpreted

(Nascimento & Steinbruch, 2019). The handwritten notes allowed me to record what the interviewee mentioned or the profound pieces that stood out to me during the interview. The notes and transcription allowed me to compare, eliminate biases, and interpret the results.

Protection of the Participants' Rights

To uphold the integrity of the study, I secured a letter granting permission and cooperation from the regional director of the charter schools and the principal of the study site. Once permission was granted to contact the teachers, a flyer (Appendix A) was distributed to all teachers meeting the prerequisites of the study to invite them to participate. Accompanying the flyer was a letter of consent (Appendix B). The letter of consent informed potential participants about the study, the requirements for participation, and the expectations for the participants. A second email was sent seven days after the first as a reminder of my request for their participation in the study. Participants were asked to check one of two boxes within the email: "Yes, I give my consent to participate in the research study" or "No, I do not give my consent to participate in the research study." For those who chose to participate, a third email was sent to schedule a time and date for the interview.

The participants were informed of all protocols and that no monetary compensation would be provided for their time. It was important for participants to understand that there were no physical risks associated with their participation in the study. I ensured the participants' confidentiality before, during, and after the study. Each participant was assigned a number, which served as their identification during the coding

and reporting of the study. Each participant was required to read the transcripts to verify the accuracy of the transcription. Additionally, all identifying information, notes, and recordings were stored on my personal computer, which is only accessible through my fingerprint.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of participants in a study is extremely important. Before starting the study, to ensure full transparency during the interviews, all involved parties understood that the information provided would be confidential. No names or identifying details were included in the study, and the participants were given access to all documents used. According to Walden University, all documents will be retained for five years, and they will be destroyed after that period. Each participant has signed a consent form; however, the form is not kept with any of the data collected to protect their identity. The signed consent form serves as the participants' acknowledgment of all the guidelines and as their permission to participate.

Informed Consent

Before beginning the interviews with each participant, I collected informed consent through a participant's signature. The purpose of the informed consent form was to explain the study's goals and the rights of all participants involved. The consent form also stated that all participant information was confidential within the study.

Data Collection

In this study, a basic qualitative design was employed to explore the experiences of 15 teachers of kindergarten through Grade 2 students as they implemented aligned

instructional practices of the SoR. The teachers shared their experiences through one-to-one interviews, which provided me with an understanding of their perspectives, experiences, and resources needed to assist in implementing the SoR to improve foundational skills among the students at the school.

Data and Justification and Data Collection Instrument

Qualitative data for this study were gathered from primary grade teachers of students ranging from kindergarten to Grade 2 through the semistructured interview process. Utilizing open-ended questions allowed me to understand teachers' perspectives and experiences with the SoR as its implementation occurs in the classrooms. The unique design of a semistructured interview was beneficial for both the participant and me, as it allowed for clarification and the opportunity to ask follow-up and probing questions, facilitating a precise understanding and rich collection of data. Ralston et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of recognizing that participants possess extensive information, insight, and knowledge about the phenomenon being developed, often exceeding that of the researcher. It is crucial to gather as much information as possible from the participants for the research to be successful.

Justification of Data Chosen for Collection

Semistructured interviews allow the researcher to obtain extensive information and documentation from the interviewees. The interviewing protocols provided evidence regarding the teachers' experiences in implementing the new strategies for the components of the SoR. According to Ruslin et al. (2022), interviewing in a semistructured format has more potential to discover ways to resolve the problem. In

semistructured interviews, researchers participate in a conversation, allowing for the clarification of questions. Collecting data in this manner is the most appropriate for this study.

Collection Instrument

The data collection tool used in this study is an interview protocol (Appendix C). To develop an understanding of the problem identified within this study, key interview questions are essential for gathering meaningful and useful information. The interview included 16 questions. To effectively implement the SoR, a collection of data from the interview protocol is constructed to obtain teachers' knowledge, experiences, perspectives, and resources used. The interview questions were intentionally designed to be open-ended, allowing participants to expand on their experiences and perspectives on a deeper level. Gülbetekin (2022) highlighted the importance of open-ended questions in a study, as they enable a researcher to generate new ideas to address the problem. During the interviews, probing was employed to clarify questions or encourage participants to explain their responses. This facilitated in-depth responses. The alignment is shown in Table 1.

Table 1*Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions*

Research question	Interview question
Background questions (CBM: stages of concern)	Please tell me what your understanding is regarding the SoR? What are your school's expectations for using the SoR within the five components of reading? Where are you currently in the implementation of SoR within your classroom?
RQ1: From the perspective of the teachers, what have their experiences entailed as they have begun the implementation of new strategies for the five components for the SoR? (levels of use)	Describe a new strategy that you have used within your classroom for one of the "big 5" components (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension). Why is the strategy you described important under the SoR? What have you done with this strategy that has made it successful within your classroom? Describe a strategy that has been unsuccessful with your classroom. Why do you believe you lacked success within this strategy? Describe a strategy that has been unsuccessful with your classroom. Why do you believe you lacked success within this strategy?
RQ2: From the perspective of the teachers, what resources and supports are still needed to ensure the success of the implementation of the new strategies for all five components of the science of reading? (level of innovation)	Describe what a lesson looks like when you teach phonics. What resources do you believe are still needed to help make your lessons more successful? How has your school helped you to implement the new strategies for the components of SoR? Describe the impact the transition from balanced literacy to the SoR has had on you professionally. How are you benefiting from collaboration with other teachers on your team, as you work within these new strategies for the components of the SoR? In your everyday teaching, what strategies and components of SoR do you feel have been the most difficult to transition to? How could your school help to make the transition less difficult in those areas? If you were designing professional development, which areas would you focus on to make the practice easier for teachers?

To certify the alignment, accuracy, and caliber of the interview questions about my research questions, I was first given feedback from the instructor of the methodology class. The interview protocol was then sent to my committee chair, my second chair, and I collaborated with a colleague to ensure ample feedback. The questions were sent through email, as were the suggestions. When feedback was given, revisions were made, and the interview protocol document was returned to my committee chair. These revisions will be inputted.

Sufficiency of Data Collection Instruments to Answer Research Questions

The interview questions were adequate to answer RQ1 because the questions were designed to gather information regarding the teachers' experiences with implementing the new strategies for the five components of the SoR. The participants will share their knowledge of the strategies and components, and how students in grades kindergarten to 2 are benefiting. Clarification questions were offered as needed during the interview.

The interview questions were adequate to answer RQ2 because the interview questions were designed to gather the teachers' perspectives on the resources and supports still needed to implement the new strategies and components of the SoR. The interview questions helped develop professional development for the teachers.

Process for Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data

Each participant was deliberately selected through purposeful sampling. Participants in the study must be knowledgeable about the phenomenon, ensuring that data collection is intentional. The 15 participants selected teach in grades kindergarten through second grade.

Data was collected using semistructured interviews. The interviews were conducted separately and kept to 45-60 minutes. After transcribing the interviews, some participants were contacted by phone for any clarification of their responses. Interviews were conducted until saturation was met. I knew that saturation was reached when no new information was being presented.

System for Tracking Data and Emerging Understanding

The answers to the interview questions were analyzed to determine whether the research questions were answered. I created a spreadsheet to track emerging patterns within the data. The first step in completing the spreadsheet was to use the constant comparative method (Thomas, 2017), allowing for repeated data analysis by reviewing each phrase, sentence, and paragraph of the interviews. In doing this, open coding began. Open coding involves making temporary constructs based upon common categories (Thomas, 2017). A color-coded system was implemented to highlight points that were mentioned by more than one participant. The color-coded system facilitated easier data interpretation. It was critical that the data be reviewed several times and notes taken to understand what themes or categories were developed (Saldana et al., 2011). The second step was to create axial coding, during which labels were developed and applied (Saldana et al., 2011; Thomas, 2017). Finally, selective coding developed the main themes as they related to categories and validated the relationships. Once the data had been analyzed, I revisited the literature to build and understand the relationship between the research I collected and that of other researchers.

Role of the Researcher

When the study was completed, I served as the director of instruction at a different school within the same region of charter schools. I had not worked with any of the teachers at the study site. My role as a researcher was to produce valid and reliable results that would assist in addressing the phenomenon at the study site. I remained unbiased, focusing solely on the experiences and perspectives of the participants throughout the study. The school being examined was not one where I worked, which limited my access to the participants. This limited access restricted their exposure to my knowledge, perspectives, and understanding of the issues within their school environment.

Over the past 11 years, I have served in various instructional and leadership roles within the charter school region under study, including 7 years as first-grade teacher, 1 year as a fourth-grade teacher, and 3 years as an academic coach. Within my school, I work daily with teachers in grades kindergarten through eighth in all subject areas. I have been involved in the implementation process of the SoR within my school, but not at the school under study. Regarding the school under study, I am unaware of how the implementation of the SoR was carried out.

With my experience working in Grade 1 and the implementation of the SoR, I recognized the bias I developed regarding the best methods to teach new reading strategies effectively. Understanding the significance of proper implementation to ensure that students are learning foundational reading skills effectively was the foundation of

this research. The careful selection of research questions helps minimize bias within the study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research provides an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the study's focus (Lester et al., 2020).

Thematic analysis, a widely used approach in qualitative research, enables researchers to systematically identify and interpret patterns within data to uncover recurring themes and relationships (Lester et al., 2020; Miles et al., 2020). In this study, thematic analysis was used to examine teachers' experiences with implementing the SoR.

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, a method in qualitative research that ensures rich and relevant data while facilitating saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Each interview was conducted via Google Meet, recorded, and transcribed to uphold participant privacy and ensure accuracy in data collection. I also took observational notes to capture additional nuances in participants' responses. To maintain confidentiality, participants were assigned unique identification numbers, and when clarification was needed, follow-up communication was conducted.

Data analysis was conducted promptly after each interview to maintain consistency and rigor. Once the data was collected, the next step involved systematically organizing and coding the data to identify patterns, relationships, and emerging themes. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023) was used as the primary method to analyze the data, enabling the identification of recurring concepts that aligned with the research questions. ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, was employed for data

management and organization to streamline the coding process and maintain consistency. ATLAS.ti is known for its capability to help systematically categorize and analyze qualitative data, providing an efficient and organized approach (Friese, 2012).

The coding process was multi-layered, guided by Saldaña's (2021) comprehensive approach to qualitative coding. Initially, a priori coding was employed based on predetermined categories aligned with the research questions. As analysis progressed, in vivo coding was incorporated to capture participants' exact words, providing deeper insight into their experiences (Saldaña, 2021). This coding method combination allowed for a broad thematic overview and a detailed examination of individual responses.

Subsequent analysis involved pattern coding, which grouped related codes into overarching themes, facilitating a more abstract understanding of the data (Miles et al., 2020). This process was crucial in achieving data saturation, ensuring that the identified themes comprehensively reflected the participants' perspectives without the emergence of new insights.

By employing a structured yet flexible analytical approach, this study effectively captured the complexity of teachers' experiences with the SoR. The integration of ATLAS.ti for data organization, Otter.ai for precise transcription, and Saldaña's (2021) coding methodologies ensured a rigorous and transparent data analysis process.

Evidence of Quality of the Data

As a qualitative researcher, I evaluated the quality, accuracy, and credibility of studies to ensure that the findings accurately represent participants' experiences and are

trustworthy (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2020). Validity in a case study is established through various strategies, including triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing, all of which enhance the transparency and rigor of the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Creswell and Báez (2020) emphasized that incorporating direct quotes from participants and allowing them to review their responses ensures that the data remains authentic and unbiased. Additionally, Nowell et al. (2017) emphasized that maintaining a clear audit trail is essential in qualitative research to demonstrate consistency and reliability. By implementing these strategies, I can enhance the validity of my study, thereby reinforcing its credibility and ensuring that the findings make a meaningful contribution to the field.

Member Checking

Member checking ensures a study's trustworthiness by accurately portraying the participants' voices (Candela, 2019). Once I had collected and analyzed all the data, I returned it to the participants with the transcription of their interview to gain input (Roller, 2020). The participants needed to ensure their answers were represented appropriately. The participants were given one week to respond with any clarifications. Any clarification the participants wished to make gave me a clear perspective and increased the study's validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This approach helped ensure the study's integrity by reinforcing the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing was crucial for the study's credibility, serving as an external check to ensure no biases influenced the findings (Nowell et al., 2017). It enhances

qualitative research by allowing an objective colleague to assess the data analysis process and provide constructive feedback (McLeod, 2024). My peer debriefer understood the SoR and its instructional components, which allowed them to provide input throughout the study. To maintain objectivity and alignment, the peer debriefer reviewed the interview protocol to ensure that each question corresponded with the research questions and did not lead participants to answer in a particular way. Based on their recommendations, adjustments were made to improve the interview questions.

After the interviews were completed, the peer debriefer reviewed the anonymous transcripts to provide an additional perspective on data interpretation. Finally, after coding and thematic analysis were completed, the peer debriefer helped interpret the findings to reinforce the study's credibility. By incorporating peer debriefing, the study adhered to the standards of qualitative research. The systematic use of external review contributed to a more transparent, unbiased research process.

Data Analysis Results

The problem being addressed in this basic qualitative study is primary teachers are not fully implementing new strategies for all five components of the SoR during the shift from balanced literacy in the reading wars at the study site. Table 2 shows the six themes that were developed and identified.

Table 2*Codes, Categories, and Theme*

Code	Categories	Themes
Definition of SoR Components of SoR Components of SoR Use of SoR as a roadmap	Understanding the SoR School expectations of the SoR	Teachers' knowledge and understanding.
Beginning stage of Implementation multisensory learning Personal Progress in SoR Use of decodable texts Vocabulary Decodable Readers Emphasis on components of SoR Orthographic Mapping	Implementation progress Strategies of SoR components Transition from balanced literacy to SoR	Teachers perceived themselves to be implementing various new teaching.
Systematic and explicit phonics instruction Phonics lessons following FUNdation patterns Emphasis on explicit instruction Successful strategies Curriculum alignment Success in implementation Support for diverse learners	Structured curriculum Success in implementation	A newfound improvement of teaching phonics.
Lack of deep understanding Phonemic Awareness activities underutilized Comprehension challenges for 1 st grade Challenges with comprehension and vocabulary Challenges in phonemic awareness	Challenges in strategy implementation Instructional strategies	Teacher struggles with new strategies.
Unsuccessful strategies Additional resources Need for additional training Comprehension challenges for 1 st grade Personal growth as an educator Better understanding of components in practice Time constraints Importance of teacher consistency	Needed resources Professional development needs Teacher implementation progress Classroom practices	Teachers need more resources and training to be successful.
Tailored professional development Lack of targeted feedback Support for diverse learners Professional development Personal growth Focus areas for training	Collaboration and professional growth	Moving towards professional development wanted by teachers.

Research Questions Answered

The semistructured interviews helped address the research questions in this study, supporting the change agent's progress with the SoR. Data analysis revealed teachers' perspectives on their experiences while implementing the strategies for the SoR. It was found that teachers had different levels of comfort with these strategies. Many teachers shared their experiences using a curriculum that promoted systematic and explicit teaching of phonemic awareness. This experience was beneficial for teachers, as it increased their confidence in teaching phonics and phonemic awareness. However, other experiences left teachers feeling overwhelmed because they did not know how to fully implement components, understand the correct ways to use the strategies, or develop activities for students. From one, the themes that emerged include teacher knowledge and understanding, teachers' perception of implementing various new strategies, and the newfound improvement in teaching phonics.

Data analysis revealed the resources and supports still needed to ensure the successful implementation of the new strategies across all components of the SoR. There was an overwhelming desire from the teachers for further professional development in the "how" of the SoR, rather than the "why." Teachers wanted hands-on professional development that was specifically tailored to their classroom needs. Teachers are seeking additional support to ensure the successful implementation of strategies, ensuring they are taught and used effectively and efficiently. From research question two, the themes that emerged included teacher struggles with new strategies, the need for more resources and training to be successful, and a desire for professional development among teachers.

Theme 1: Teachers' Knowledge and Understanding

Understanding the why in the SoR and the expectations the school placed on the participants encompassed the theme of teacher knowledge and understanding. Learning the participants' background knowledge and understanding the school's expectations allowed me to create a whole picture to understand the site school and its expectations better. The similarities and differences in the participants' responses reflect their placement on the CBAM continuum. The participants ranged from the early stages of self-concerns to advanced levels of student-centered impact. These findings highlight the importance of structured support systems to successfully adopt evidence-based literacy instruction and reinforce the school's commitment to SoR implementation.

Teachers expressed their knowledge and understanding of the SoR. Most of the participants had a firm understanding of the SoR. Specifically, teachers understood the research and science behind the SoR, and most of the participants understood the "why." Without proper knowledge of the SoR, teachers would not be able to effectively use the strategies that best support students in learning how to read. Table 3 below shows how the participants defined the SoR.

Table 3*Teachers' Understood Definition of the Science of Reading*

Participant	Response
Participant 1	“It is based upon decades of research and explains what components are needed in order for an individual to become a proficient reader. It explains the different components and how they work together to develop a reader.”
Participant 2	“From my understanding, the SoR is a culmination of various domains that are involved in the full spectrum of what it takes to teach someone to read. These various domains/skills are intertwined with one another to create a well-rounded reader who can effectively comprehend texts.”
Participant 3	“It is research based and covers the 5 areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The SoR allows us to explore the best strategies to use in teaching reading so that we fully understand the way in which the brain processes learning.”
Participant 4	“The SoR is a philosophy of the most effective reading skills to students. There are different components that need to be followed.”
Participant 5	“The SoR breaks down how our brain learns how to read. It is made up of 5 parts: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension which is the ultimate goal.”
Participant 6	“The SoR is the phonological awareness, the phonics, and the phonemes. And being able to like not just focus on one of them but put them all together to help the kids learn.”

- Participant 7 “The SoR increases the success rate of children learning to read because it examines neurodevelopment and then relates it to the best strategies for teaching students.”
- Participant 8 “The SoR helps to move students away from predictable texts and brings in the use of decodable readers.”
- Participant 9 “A shift in mindset for everyone. Teachers have to retrain their brain to teach students how to read systematically.”
- Participant 10 “The SoR will help to close reading gaps because there is focus on building strong foundational skills.”
- Participant 11 “It is research-based evidence that supports multi-sensory learning when teaching students how to read.”
- Participant 12 “The SoR focuses on all components of reading and does not include strategies such as cueing or memorization.”
- Participant 13 “It is many years of research that has firmly identified the best ways for reading instruction where students have clear phonemic and phonological awareness.”
- Participant 14 “I’ve been teaching for many years, it is the current belief of the correct way to teach reading and comprehension skills to children.”
- Participant 15 “I believe the SoR is research-based evidence on how to support every child in learning how to read, gradually bringing in all components.”
-

Most participants expressed their understanding of the SoR. Participants 8 and 14 seemed to have the least knowledge. Through the interviews and insights from the CBAM, I gained a clearer perspective on the teachers' stages of concern. There was awareness of the topic and recognition of the SoR's significance to students.

Gathering background information on the expectations given to teachers by the administrators at the study site was crucial to completing this study. When expectations are clear and well-communicated, then there can be a successful educational change. One of the most critical early factors influencing implementation progression is the clarity of expectations school leadership sets (Hall & Hord, 2020). When expectations are vague or inconsistently communicated, teachers may struggle with uncertainty, which can lead to resistance or ineffective implementation of the new framework.

Therefore, a well-defined instructional vision is essential to helping teachers move past personal anxieties and focus on practical application. Participant 2 explained that the school expects the use of all five components to begin altering their learning strategies. For example, "teachers will teach vocabulary explicitly through the context of grade-level texts." Participant 8 mentioned feeling it was understood that SoR had to be implemented immediately, but was "unsure how." Participant 3 was surprised that the school "expected us to begin using SoR strategies immediately" as certain items necessary to develop the strategies were not readily available.

Participants understood the school's expectation to use the curriculum to help guide SoR. Participant 1 found the expectation to be "using our curriculum to teach phonics systematically and explicitly while using the SoR as a roadmap." Participant 13

also spoke about the new curriculum. The participant mentioned that the expectation was to use the curriculum to fidelity as it would help guide in key areas of the SoR. All participants understood that the school wanted them to transition from balanced literacy to SoR fully. They understood the curriculum needed to be used for fidelity, but most were unclear on how to implement the strategies.

While teachers understood the reasons for the change, they felt that the implementation occurred too quickly. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), specific benchmarks for the SoR implementation should include targeted support through coaching, collaborative planning, and peer observation. Participants did not mention that these items had been implemented. The CBAM provides a structured approach to understanding and addressing teachers' concerns. At this point, the teachers are unclear about the implementation path.

Theme 2: Teachers Perceived Themselves to Be Implementing Various New Teaching Strategies and the Impact of the New Strategies

The teachers perceived themselves as actively implementing various new teaching strategies and identified their impact on student learning. According to the CBAM, the Level of Use framework assesses how teachers engage with innovation by analyzing their instructional practices (Hall & Hord, 2015). This model highlighted teacher progress through distinct stages of adoption through their level of engagement and confidence.

Several participants expressed concerns related to personal impact and self-efficacy, which aligns with the self-oriented concerns stage of CBAM. Teachers voiced concerns about their effectiveness in implementing SoR strategies. According to CBAM,

during the informational and personal stages, teachers focus on understanding a new initiative and its personal impact. When expectations are unclear or inconsistently communicated, teachers may experience uncertainty or resistance (Ogletree et al., 2018)

Additionally, some participants questioned their ability to effectively integrate SoR strategies while transitioning from a balanced literacy approach. Their uncertainty corresponds with the management stage of concern, in which teachers focus on the logistics and mechanics of implementation. Most participants seemed to be at the levels of preparation for mechanical use in the CBAM framework. They exhibit initial attempts to apply SoR strategies without fully changing their instructional practices (Jones & Carrell, 2022). Teachers will adopt a trial-and-error approach, experimenting with new strategies, but may need additional support. Understanding teachers' placement within the CBAM model and their level of use is essential for providing targeted areas of support. It is also important to recognize the strategies currently being used.

One key benefit of implementing the SoR for participants is the ability to teach phonics and phonemic awareness using various evidence-based and multisensory strategies. Research has emphasized the importance of systematic and explicit instruction in phonics as a critical factor in developing early literacy skills (Castles et al., 2018; Ehri, 2020). Before transitioning to SoR, many participants had misconceptions about phonics instruction. They often believed that repeated, structured, and sequential instruction was not needed for teaching phonemic awareness and decoding, which has led to gaps in foundational reading skills.

One popular strategy among primary teachers was to use songs and skywriting to practice sound fluency. Participant 2 mentioned using songs to identify words with new sounds. Participants 2 and 12 noted that once they identify the words with a particular sound, students then sky-write the words they recognize. This provides students with two multisensory activities. Participant 6 described the importance of students being allowed to work together. Students are learning to tap out sounds, find the correlating letter tiles, spell the word, and blend it. Participant 6 explained that students must understand how to blend before joining the small group.

The use of multisensory activities has been helpful in supporting the development of phonemic awareness and phonics during the transition to the SoR. Research highlights that engaging multiple senses—sight, sound, touch, and movement—enhances students’ ability to process and retain phonological information (Ehri, 2020; Kilpatrick, 2020). By incorporating strategies such as tapping, tracing, and using manipulatives, teachers help students make deeper connections between letters and sounds. This results in teachers gaining confidence in using multisensory activities along with systematic instruction, to support changing students’ literacy development.

Orthographic Mapping

A common phrase repeated regarding implementing new strategies based on the research of the SoR is orthographic mapping. Most participants explained that orthographic mapping refers to how students map sounds or words in their brains. The participants agreed that orthographic mapping was a new term for them when

transitioning from balanced literacy to SoR. They now understand the importance of mapping sounds and words in the brain so that they become part of the student's memory.

Participant 4 shared that orthographic mapping has been “a game changer for getting my students to progress in their reading skills.” The participant is using orthographic mapping in every aspect of reading and writing. Students must understand “they have to say the word, tap it, and map it.” Participant 5 described the strategy of orthographic mapping as the “brain creating a path so the student will recognize the word when they see it again.” The participants had previously understood sight words, and students had to memorize those words. However, many students struggled with retaining those words, especially as they moved from kindergarten to first grade. The method of orthographic mapping makes it easier for students to store the words in their muscle memory because of their experiences with the word. Participant 5 uses orthographic mapping strategies in both whole-group and small-group settings: “I have the students tap out the word, and then using sound boxes, the students put a chip in the box for each sound.” Most participants have found that small changes to their classroom activities help to support the mapping of sounds, blends, and words, making learning to read more successful.

Vocabulary

Participants clearly understand that background knowledge and vocabulary are key components at every stage of reading development (Castles et al., 2018). Primary grade-level teachers previously taught vocabulary in isolation and relied on predetermined word lists that were not explicitly connected to the texts students read.

This approach limits the students' ability to connect meaningfully between new vocabulary and their existing knowledge base. With a new curriculum that is rich in diverse and complex text, teachers are now teaching vocabulary directly from the text. This helps teachers in building background knowledge through cross-curricular reading and activities.

Several participants shared the new strategies being implemented in the classroom to help better support classroom instruction and student understanding. These strategies include explicit vocabulary instruction, morphology-based word study, and opportunities for repeated exposure through oral and written language activities. Participant 1 spoke about using vocabulary presentations to pre-teach vocabulary found in a new text. "The presentations include the word, visuals, the word used in context of the new story, and sometimes the word used in context of another sentence."

Participant 13, a second-grade teacher, has begun to incorporate more time to teach her students the importance of root words and the effects of adding a prefix or suffix. The teacher mentioned that word study took only a small portion of her ELA block. However, she now recognizes the significance of students having a solid foundation in understanding morphology. The curriculum aligned with the SoR provides more instruction on the importance of morphology in each lesson, which has benefited many teachers. Participant 10 discussed the advantages of repeated exposure to vocabulary and how it supports students. The participant noted that in the past, after students learned the vocabulary words for the week and took a test on them, those words often were not known later. With the SoR approach, vocabulary words derived from the

literature are often seen throughout the unit rather than just for the week. Participant 10 emphasized the importance of consistent vocabulary across different subjects and the value of hearing these words in various readings.

By contextualizing vocabulary instruction within authentic reading experiences, students learn not just new words but also their relationships, which strengthens their spoken and written language skills. Some participants (1, 8, 10, 13) emphasized that this shift in instruction has increased student engagement and is leading to improved comprehension. This demonstrates the significance of vocabulary as a foundation for literacy development (Quinn et al., 2020). Moving forward, it is essential to focus on vocabulary instruction, as it became evident during the interviews that not all participants felt successful in this area.

Decodable Readers

Before transitioning into SoR, teachers were taught under balanced literacy to use leveled readers to help build students' reading skills. Teachers taught students strategies such as looking at the pictures for assistance, stretching the sounds, or using predictive strategies to support student reading. However, educators often did not teach strategies like tapping out sounds to blend words or use readers that focused on the sounds and blends they had been learning in the classroom. The participants found the strategies implemented under balanced literacy to be appropriate. However, now with an understanding of the SoR, they are beginning to recognize the benefits of using decodable readers with their students.

Many participants highlighted the advantages of providing students with decodable books that support the specific skills they were developing, particularly for those learning to read. Students are no longer expected to rely on pictures to “guess” words; instead, they learn how to decode unknown words. Participant 3 shared the classroom’s successes with decodable readers, which enable students to read in pairs. Participant 3 remarked, “It is wonderful to see the students collaborating to sound out unfamiliar words.” Participants 3, 4, 7, and 9 all emphasized that decodable books are invaluable for students as they acquire phonics skills. However, they do not have decodable readers that align with their phonics curriculum.

Theme 3: A Newfound Improvement of Teaching Phonics

A third theme that emerged was the improvement of teaching phonics through the SoR. The school and teachers had been using balanced literacy for several years. They must now learn how to teach phonics under the SoR strategies. Most teachers spoke about their school’s new curriculum, Foundations, to help transition to the SoR. Participants 3, 5, 8, 12, and 15 mentioned that the school gave them materials to help with phonics instruction. However, there was little training that went along with it. Participants 2, 6, 7, 11, and 14 mentioned that even with the training received, they are learning Foundations and seeing a difference in their phonics instruction.

Eight teachers out of 15 mentioned using Foundations and its systematic approach for understanding. Participant 1 said, “Foundations is a curriculum with a scope and sequence to follow a very systematic way of teaching phonics.” Participant 3 said, “I follow the Foundations lesson plans in the teacher manual because it is a scripted,

systemic, and explicit phonics program.” Participant 4 mentioned that she starts with a Heggerty lesson first for phonemic awareness and then does a portion of her Foundations lesson in whole group and part small group.” Each participant understood that using Foundations within their classroom was an expectation set by the school. They are willing to use it daily with fidelity to the best of their ability.

Foundations has now been implemented in all primary grade levels. Since it is a systematic and explicit curriculum, students learn the routines to make them successful each year. In the past curriculum, there was a phonics skill of the week, but there was no routine to teaching it, and students were not taught the specific rules. Several participants mentioned noticing the gaps in first and second grade, as they had not used it before. When comparing the phonics lesson for each day with the various participants ranging from grades K-2, it became clear that the lesson structure was the same for each grade level. Each lesson started with a drill, then moved into trick words, phonemic awareness practice, teaching a new concept, an activity involving a multisensory skill, and sentence dictation. It was all very uniform as you moved through the grade levels.

During the interviews, it was clear that most teachers understand and embrace the routine of teaching Foundations. Participant 2 mentioned warmup drills of letter-word-sound cards completed in her classroom. Participant 9 mentioned using multisensory practices: “students tap out words with their fingers or use magnetic letters to show understanding of sounds.” Participants 1 and 10 spoke of using Mama Echo (a snowy owl) for the kids to repeat the sounds they are trying to master. It provides engagement and interaction as the students are excited to do what Mama Echo does. Several second-

grade participants spoke about using whiteboards to complete sentence dictation at the end of each lesson. Participant 15 mentioned sentence dictations at the end of the lesson, “they are one to two sentences allowing students to display their understanding of sounds and blending them to spell words correctly.”

Seven of the 15 teachers either did not go into detail about Foundations and their usage in their classroom or spoke about small changes they have made that haven’t necessarily changed their instruction. Three participants noted they are following the order in which sounds and blends are taught, but they are not using the scripted curriculum or drills, as they are unnecessary. Participant 13 believed the sentence dictations in first grade were not helpful to students’ learning as “students were left to feel discouraged.” Two participants did not go into detail because they were uncomfortable using all the strategies in the curriculum with such limited training.

According to the CBAM, the Level-of-use framework assesses how teachers engage with innovation by analyzing their instructional practices (Hall & Hord, 2015). The proper curriculum helps ensure that phonics is taught in the appropriate sequence and systematically across the various classrooms and grade levels, as used in the primary grades. In interviewing participants, some showed that they had changed their teaching of phonics and used the curriculum as intended. These participants understood the importance of the curriculum and how it corresponds to the SoR. Most participants found that the curriculum supports SoR’s theories and strategies. Other participants did not completely change their approach, indicating a low level of use in their instructional

methods. The participants using the curriculum to fidelity believe that phonics instruction will strengthen over the next few years and impact reading learning.

Theme 4: Teacher Struggles With New Strategies

A third theme that emerged was teachers' struggles with implementing various strategies under the five components of SoR. There are a variety of concerns with implementation: (1) independent activities, (2) gaps in student learning, and (3) time to teach the components correctly. Participants noted the difficulty of transitioning to various new strategies, as they have been trained and actively used balanced literacy for so long. Depending on the grade level and student experience with balanced literacy teaching strategies for learning how to read, teachers may experience gaps in the student's knowledge of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills.

Three teachers mentioned independent reading centers as unsuccessful for them. Students are supposed to use this time to practice their phonics and reading skills. Participant 2 said independent reading centers have "the absence of a clear purpose or accountability." Participant 6 mentioned that the students blended well and tapped out sounds during small groups but then "went out to do independent centers and struggled. Some struggle because they don't know the picture and become disengaged." Participant 12 mentioned that when they are struggling readers, there is no effort put into their center time. All three teachers felt discouraged using center time as they do not find it beneficial for the strategies, they teach with the SoR.

First and second-grade teachers noted the foundational gaps in reading that make the transition to the SoR even more difficult. Several participants highlighted vocabulary as a key area of struggle. Vocabulary has traditionally been taught in isolation, but now it is expected to be integrated into lessons using rich literature. This shift required students to have background information before reading the books. Participants expressed concern about students' lack of background knowledge on many topics being taught and how those gaps will be addressed. Foundations include trick words that differ slightly from traditional sight words. Participant 5 faced challenges using the heart method due to a lack of knowledge from the teachers and a gap in vocabulary skills among students due to the curriculum change.

All participants struggled with time management to fit in all the components. Many participants spoke to Foundations, taking anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes every day, taking up most of the reading block. Participant 1 struggles to include phonemic awareness before phonics and gives both the "attention and time it deserves." Participant 7 also struggles with time: "All the resources are super helpful, but no one has said how to fit it all in." Participant 3 spoke about vocabulary instruction and finding time to "review words and their meaning more than once a week" because the vocabulary is not being taught in isolation. Several participants mentioned the lack of time they had to review vocabulary words in the text more than once. Second-grade teachers struggle with time to fit in phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary daily while still trying to ensure students have time to practice skills. Participant 11 stated, "I love teaching

reading, but I do not like feeling inadequate because of time restraints and the amount of materials I need to cover.”

The struggle perceived in teaching strategies aligned with the SoR has caused some teachers to feel inadequate and frustrated. According to the CBAM, educators adjusting to change often face self-oriented concerns, such as doubts about their competence and the effectiveness of new instructional methods. When teachers do not immediately achieve success or comfort with newly introduced methodologies, they tend to revert to familiar, previously used strategies (Hall & Hord, 2020). Teacher regression can hinder the full adoption and effectiveness when they are concerned about independent student learning, gaps in student understanding, and the time needed to implement the elements of the SoR properly.

Theme 5: Teachers Need More Resources and Training to be Successful

A fifth theme that emerged was concern regarding the inadequate training on the “how” of the SoR. While participants expressed confidence in understanding the “why” behind the SoR, they credited thorough and well-developed training on its research-based foundations. Many participants struggled to apply that knowledge effectively in the classroom. Eleven out of 15 participants saw benefits in the curriculum they received, but struggled with missing resources and changing their teaching strategies. The participants discussed a gap in professional development and resources, emphasizing that they understood the theoretical aspect but lacked the necessary support for proper implementation.

When implementing new teaching methods and strategies, it is crucial to have all the necessary tools and materials to implement the necessary changes correctly. Most participants felt their school had done a great job with purchasing the correct curriculum to support the SoR. They were happy with their reading curriculum (Wit & Wisdom), their phonics curriculum (Foundations), and their computer component (Lexia Core5 Learning). Participant 2 stated, “The school did a great job researching curriculum and purchasing what fit the standard of SoR.” However, participants still believed there were items necessary to help support their everyday teaching.

Nine out of fifteen participants expressed the challenges of not having enough computers for all their students. Participant 2 discussed having excellent digital resources, such as *Lexia*, but because of the limited availability of computers, they only had 5-6 computers at their disposal at a time. This was a significant point raised by all primary grade-level teachers. Although the lack of technology did not affect anyone’s ability to teach, it was mentioned repeatedly that sharing computers complicated the use of certain resources. Another point of discussion was Foundations, the newly approved phonics program. Participant 15 highlighted the interactive lessons that can be displayed on a Promethean board for student engagement, stating, “it’s a wonderful way for multi-sensory learning, but only team leaders have access to the board.” Using all pieces of the curriculum would greatly help in the implementation being done correctly and with fidelity.

Another common resource that teachers identified as necessary was decodable readers. In transitioning from balanced literacy to the SoR, teachers are replacing level

readers with decodable readers that require students to practice their phonics skills.

Participants 3, 4, 7, and 9 all emphasized that decodable readers are invaluable tools for students as they learn phonics skills. Participant 6 spoke about the need for more texts for their Wit and Wisdom curriculum so students could have a book to follow. “We only have so many of course because of funding, but the kids hate to share...” For a curriculum to be used to the best of the teacher’s ability it is necessary to have all needed resources.

Participants were clear that they received professional development on the SoR; however, they lacked training on specific implementation. Many participants spoke about the “how” of the SoR and felt they only had the basic skills to use strategies. Participant 4 wants “more training in SoR and in using the various strategies effectively.” Participant 3 described needing more help with “phonemic awareness activities or ideas; ideas for comprehension and vocabulary instruction.” Participant 12 said, “I am unsure of how to implement vocabulary best in my daily lessons.” The participant was still encouraged to continue with the new vocabulary teaching strategies but needed help.

Five of the 15 participants mentioned that they do not want to lose autonomy within their classrooms and worry that the new changes will cause that to happen. Participant 4 mentioned that “Transitioning to a curriculum that is much more scripted is different.” It is essential to the participant that while following a systematic curriculum with direct instruction, there is still room for autonomy. Professional development to help understand how to merge curriculum and what students need would be helpful in making teachers more comfortable. Participant 2 described professional development given to

assist with assessing student progress through reading, but again, more help is needed with understanding and having more ways to teach the strategies. Participant 1 did not feel that intentional or targeted training was given, leaving the participant unsure if they were “appropriately implementing new strategies or if I’m using the strategies correctly.” Providing the appropriate professional development so that strategies can be implemented correctly is just as important as the materials necessary to teach. The participants all agreed that further training would help support their implementation abilities in transitioning from balanced literacy to SoR.

An apparent gap emerges in learning about teacher experiences and what they believe is needed to be successful. While the materials discussed by the participants are important, it is evident that the professional development they are requesting is more important to them. In the participant’s previous interview responses, most teachers stated they were using the strategies under the SoR to the best of their ability. Within this theme, participants need more training to help them fully implement the SoR with a better understanding of how to do so. According to the CBAM by Hord et al. (2006), if teachers do not clearly understand how to apply these strategies or receive sustainable support, they will revert to the old teaching model. Therefore, it is essential that they feel more supported through professional development.

Theme 6: Moving Toward Professional Development Wanted by Teachers

During any transition, it is essential for those involved to feel supported. For change to occur in education, teachers must believe that what they are doing is in the best interest of their students. Once teachers embrace the new methods and teaching

strategies, they will further develop their skills. School leaders must then listen to the needs of the teachers to maintain positive momentum in the change process.

The participants at the school of study have the “buy-in” to transition from balanced literacy to SoR. There is a clear understanding of the science behind why the transition benefits all students and how it will help change how students learn to read. Most participants are ready to instruct their students to become excellent readers by breaking it down one piece at a time and focusing intensely on the different components. They expressed the advantages of having professional development that is not one-size-fits-all but offers options they can choose from. Six out of 15 participants prefer professional development that focuses on their specific grade level needs rather than a universal approach, such as “this is how we teach vocabulary for all grade levels.” The use of break-out professional development to focus on specific teacher needs was an underlying theme for most participants.

Participants are also interested in seeing “it in action.” They spoke about the benefits of seeing strategies in real-time rather than just having to sit and get professional development. Participant 6 mentioned the sound wall within the classroom. Knowing exactly how to support students best using it is a struggle. Participant 6 believed, “If I can see someone else using it and their strategies that make it successful, I can use it better.” Teachers’ ability to see other teachers model their successful strategies is a great resource. Seven out of the 15 participants mentioned needing to see concrete activities that they can use in the classroom. Two participants are looking for a PD with guidance

on designing and implementing targeted interventions, and a demonstration of how it looks would be helpful.

The participants felt that having activities modeled within professional development, allowing for hands-on engagement as active learners, or observing an “expert teacher” deliver a lesson would effectively strengthen their skills. According to the CBAM, teachers move through various stages of concern when implementing new instructional practices, ranging from self-concerns (how the change affects them) to impact concerns (how the change affects student learning) (G. Hall & S. Hord, 2020). The participants’ eagerness to learn and implement strategies effectively suggests they are moving beyond early concerns and are now focused on refining their practice to maximize student outcomes.

The participants are overall happy with the transition from balanced literacy to the SoR. They all feel it has been a much needed change, as previous approaches had not significantly improved reading scores. Their experiences with SoR have shown a clear understanding of the “why,” but they still seek more support in mastering the “how.” CBAM emphasizes that for educators to adopt new instructional methods successfully, they must receive targeted professional development that aligns with their stage of concern and level of use (George et al., 2013). The participants are seeking clear and precise guidance on the best ways to implement each component. They wish to have hands-on learning experiences and opportunities to observe expert modeling, which reinforces their confidence in daily instructional decisions and ensures they are making the necessary changes to support student learning effectively.

Discrepant Cases

In qualitative research, researchers must identify and address any discrepancies in the data to ensure accuracy, consistency, and trustworthiness in their findings. It is also important to look for outliers in response to the interview questions. Although not every participant provided the same thoughts or answers, Question 15 revealed two outliers. The question asked if participants were to design professional development, what would it look like? Participant 11 commented, “I do not believe there is a need for further professional development.” The participant believed what is needed is more practice with strategies within the classroom. The participant believed collaboration with their team would ensure success within the transition.

The second outlier for Question 15 was Participant 15. This individual was the only one who indicated that they did not feel the school could provide professional development to meet any of the identified needs. Participant 15 believed that the methodology behind the SoR and how the strategies are implemented should come from experts in the field. The participant does not believe that spaced out training sessions would be beneficial. In contrast, the other thirteen participants felt that professional development focused on implementing SoR would be extremely helpful.

Summary of Data Analysis and Deliverable

The problem investigated in this study was that primary grade teachers were not fully implementing new strategies for all five components of the SoR during the shift from balanced literacy amid the reading wars. The purpose of this study was to examine primary grade teachers’ experiences with implementing new strategies to support the five

components of the SoR as the framework transitions from balanced literacy at the study site. Six themes emerged from these experiences, including (1) teachers' knowledge and understanding, (2) teachers' perception of implementing various new strategies, (3) a newfound improvement in teaching phonics, (4) teachers' struggles with new strategies, (5) the need for more resources and training to be successful, and (6) a move towards professional development. A 3-day, consecutive professional development workshop for kindergarten through Grade 2 teachers emerged as the most appropriate deliverable to address the instructional gaps identified in the study. Participants specifically expressed a need for ongoing professional development focused on the implementation of strategies aligned with the SoR framework.

The following section of this project study presents the professional development initiative designed in response to the research questions, informed by both the data analysis and the literature review. This section outlines the structure and content of the proposed professional development, the methods for evaluating its effectiveness, and the potential implications for participating teachers. The initiative aims to enhance instructional practices and ultimately improve student reading proficiency, particularly through the effective implementation of strategies aligned with the SoR framework.

Section 3: The Project

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore primary grade teachers' experiences with the implementation of new strategies to support the five components for the SoR as the framework shifts from balanced literacy at the study site. The basic qualitative design allowed teachers to share their experiences on the various components and implementation of the SoR within their classrooms. The 15 participating teachers, each with a minimum of 2 years of experience teaching in primary grade levels, engaged in 45–60-minute semistructured interviews guided by a consistent set of questions. The purpose of these interviews, aligned with the study's RQs, was to explore the resources and professional development necessary to support the continued implementation of new strategies aligned with the components of SoR. The focus was identifying what is needed to build foundational reading skills among primary students.

Project Genre

The resulting project deliverable was a 3-day professional development workshop held during the beginning of the year on in-service days, designed in response to the resources that teachers identified as necessary for the successful implementation of the SoR. The expected learning outcomes of this professional development were to provide teachers in primary grade levels with hands-on learning time to learn and develop new strategies to support the components of the SoR, which may lead to larger gains in foundational reading proficiency.

Rationale

The findings indicated that a professional development program was the most appropriate approach for achieving the goals of the study. Analysis of data from the semistructured interviews revealed that teachers felt they had enough curriculum resources but needed more resources to develop learning strategies and activities to support the components of the SoR. The participants asked for hands-on, activity-driven professional development.

Although alternative project genres were considered, such as an evaluation report, they did not align with the needs expressed by participating teachers. The data indicated that teachers were not seeking program assessment but rather practical support and targeted professional development to enhance their implementation of the SoR. Another option was a curriculum plan. A curriculum plan could help teachers evaluate learning activities. However, the problem lay in using various strategies to ensure that the activities were based on SoR rather than balanced literacy.

The best option was a professional development project because it could provide teachers with hands-on training and examples of activities and strategies that would support each component of the SoR. When implementing an educational reform, it is essential to consider that professional development should consider not only the years of teaching experience but also the needs of teachers (Coppe et al., 2024). Allowing the training to be organized by specific grade levels and/or components would enable teachers to collaborate and share ideas and experiences with other K-2 teachers who were not part of the initial interview process. A professional development project was the most

efficient way to present to teachers, directly addressing their challenges and concerns regarding the implementation of strategies for components aligned with the SoR.

Review of the Literature

The data analysis from this qualitative study highlighted primary teachers' experiences in implementing SoR strategies in their classrooms. Through data analysis, trends were identified in the teachers' perspectives regarding what their experiences have entailed as they have implemented the strategies for the SoR. I discovered that teachers had varying levels of comfort implementing these strategies. Many teachers described their experiences using a curriculum that allowed for systematic and explicit teaching of phonemic awareness. Teachers consistently emphasized the success of explicit and systematic phonics instruction, noting its positive impact on student outcomes. Multisensory activities were identified as valuable tools for engaging students and enhancing learning; however, teachers expressed a desire for additional training to ensure the proper use of such strategies.

Data analysis revealed trends in the resources and support needed to ensure the successful implementation of new strategies across all components of the SoR. There was an overwhelming desire from the teachers for further professional development in the "how" of the SoR rather than the "why." Teachers wanted hands-on professional development that was tailored to their classroom needs. Teachers were seeking additional support to ensure the successful implementation of strategies, ensuring they are taught and used effectively and efficiently.

According to Knowles' Andragogy Theory (Knowles et al., 2020), adult learners are self-directed, problem-centered, and motivated by learning experiences that have immediate, practical application. The teachers in this study demonstrate these characteristics by seeking relevant, hands-on professional development that supports them in being successful in the implementation of the SoR. The findings of this study align with Knowles' principles, as teachers preferred modeling and real-world applications that would enhance their instructional effectiveness, making them feel more confident in the "how" of the SoR.

The transition from balanced literacy to SoR is a shift in practice that may leave teachers feeling less than confident in their new practices. The CBAM shows that when teachers are less than satisfied with their teaching strategies, they naturally revert to the old strategy. To avoid this, teachers must be provided with container support, opportunities for reflection on their practices, and a space for collaborative learning, allowing for effective implementation (Trapani & Annunziato, 2018). These frameworks provide insight into the challenges and needs of teachers adapting to SoR-based instruction. By aligning professional development with adult learning principles, educational leaders can effectively bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and classroom application, fostering greater teacher confidence and competence in implementing new instructional practices.

Method of Literature Research

The themes identified in the literature review focus on teacher self-efficacy, accountability in implementing new strategies, teacher-based instruction of phonics,

positive impacts of the transition from balanced literacy to SoR, areas yielding improvement, and professional development. These themes emerged from data analysis and reflected the experiences teachers described during their semistructured interviews.

To conduct the literature review, a comprehensive search was carried out using Walden University Library resources, *Reading Research Quarterly*, and additional databases such as EBSCO Research Database, Educational Research Starter, Sage Journals, and ProQuest Central. The keywords included “teacher self-efficacy,” “professional development,” “SoR strategies,” and others related to the study’s focus. Google Scholar was also utilized to identify current, peer-reviewed articles published within the past five years. These sources provided critical insights into how professional development and teacher preparation intersect with implementing the SoR effectively in primary education.

Conceptual Framework

It is essential to understand the needs of adult learners to ensure they continue to develop in the field of education. The conceptual framework guiding the results of this study are based on Knowles’ Theory of Andragogy (2020). Knowles’ theory addressed adult learners, specifically educators, and the unique learning characteristics that must be considered when designing professional development. Knowles developed six key assumptions about adult learning: adults tend to be self-directed, rely on their accumulated experiences, are motivated to learn when content relates to their role, prefer problem-centered learning, are driven by intrinsic motivation, and want to understand the reasons behind learning something new. For successful professional development to be

designed, these principles must be used, as they will help guide educators' needs and classroom realities. The goal of professional development for educators is that it is relevant and collaborative, aligning with their needs, encouraging active participation, and fostering implementation in the classroom (Fütterer et al., 2024; Khasawneh et al., 2023).

In this study, Knowles' andragogical framework is used to explore how professional development can support the implementation of the SoR in primary classrooms. Effective professional development should be job-embedded, flexible, feedback-oriented, and designed to use teachers' prior experiences (Anderson & Boutelier, 2021). As teachers transition from balanced literacy to the SoR, professional development should connect theory to practice and offer hands-on modeling, collaboration, and continuous support to develop both competence and confidence in new instructional methods (Fütterer et al., 2024). Educators' self-efficacy has been shown to increase when professional development honors their autonomy and addresses authentic instructional challenges (Alemdar & Aytaç, 2022).

This conceptual framework emphasized that when professional development aligns with andragogical principles, educators will succeed. These principles support enhanced curriculum fidelity, increased confidence, and improved instructional practices, ultimately benefiting student learning outcomes. By treating educators as experienced adult learners, this framework fosters a culture of professional growth. It also ensures that educational shifts, like the SoR, are meaningful and effectively implemented.

Teacher Perception and Self-Efficacy

How teachers view themselves regarding their teaching ability highly affects how teaching will transition into a new framework. A teacher's self-efficacy will shape the effectiveness of their teaching strategies, making it essential that they are supported during these times of change (Gordon et al., 2023; Nanit, 2024). The teachers interviewed described themselves as comfortable with the change from balanced literacy to the SoR and understood the why behind the transition. However, there were areas of self-doubt regarding the "how."

During the transition from balanced literacy to the SoR, teacher self-efficacy is crucial to classroom success. Teachers noted being unsure of which activities to use with various strategies, indicating that while they are open to change, their self-efficacy can be lowered by uncertainty around implementation (Fütterer et al., 2024). Teachers mentioned the need to better understand activities and methods to ensure that the students had practice with new strategies. The CBAM shows that for change to happen and stick, teachers must thoroughly understand each step and procedure. This will reduce the risk of teachers reverting to previous teaching methods. Therefore, teachers must have the confidence and knowledge to plan activities that align with the five components of the SoR.

For teachers to have the confidence needed, curriculum fidelity is critical in planning activities that address the needs of their learners during the teaching and learning process (Alemdar & Aytaç, 2022). The teachers noted that they received a new curriculum to adapt to the educational shift to the SoR. However, they did not provide

much information regarding the training included in the curriculum. Given the struggle to find student activities, it is possible that teachers may not have been using the curriculum to fidelity, which could lead to low self-efficacy. Additionally, gaps in teacher knowledge, familiarity with resources, and time constraints also impact teacher self-efficacy (DahlLeonard et al., 2023). As teachers transition to new instructional methods, building both self-confidence and trust in their abilities, they rely heavily on structured support and self-regulation (O'Reilly et al., 2019).

Educational shifts, such as the SoR, can decrease teacher self-efficacy. Teachers question if they have failed past students because of a different teaching model. Teacher confidence tends to lower in their ability to align theories, concepts, and practices simply because they haven't had enough practice in the new alignment (Reaves et al., 2023). Educational debates that arise when reform occurs often harm teachers, as research gaps and points of disagreement frequently become topics of conversation (Goodwin & Jiménez, 2020). During the transition, teachers should focus on the positive shifts they see in their students' learning. Teachers have recently observed improvements in many areas of their students' phonics and phonemic awareness skills, largely due to the changes they have implemented in their classrooms and the effort they have invested in becoming successful (Youssouf & Lu, 2024).

Accountability to Implementing New Strategies

Implementing accountability when introducing new instructional strategies, such as the SoR, ensures teachers adopt evidence-based practices that enhance literacy outcomes. The SoR approach, grounded in cognitive research, emphasized explicit

phonics instruction and a structured literacy framework to improve foundational reading skills. To affect this shift, teachers must understand the principles underlying these strategies and feel accountable for applying them with fidelity. According to recent research, the successful implementation of any new framework, such as the SoR, requires accountability and strong support from school leadership (Chitpin & Jones, 2015).

During the interviews, it was noted that the teachers wanted to maintain their autonomy by teaching their students to best meet student needs, while also desiring opportunities to learn from one another. Administrators must create a supportive environment that balances professional freedom with expectations for improvement. Professional development strengthens teacher accountability through ongoing collaboration, reflective dialogue, and shared responsibility, contributing to improved instructional practice and student achievement (Robinson & Lloyd, 2023). Robinson and Lloyd (2023) reported that teachers who are engaged in regular data discussions and reflective practices often show strengthened instructional consistency. Research shows that teachers are more likely to embrace and sustain new methods when they have collaborative learning opportunities and understand how these methods align with school-wide goals (Smith & Benavot, 2019).

During the interviews with teachers, no concrete goals were set by the administrators for the teachers to follow. Fostering accountability involves building a framework that combines autonomy with clear expectations. Studies indicate that while teachers value professional autonomy, providing them with clear expectations helps align individual classroom practices with broader educational standards. According to

Parcerisa et al. (2022), a balanced approach allows teachers to have both freedom in implementation and accountability for student outcomes. Administrators can support literacy achievement by clearly defining specific targets, providing training on assessment methods, and supplying educators with the resources and structured time needed to monitor student progress toward benchmarks (Buggy, 2024). This ensures literacy instruction is intentional, data-driven, and aligned with school-wide benchmarks.

The teachers were particular about the type of professional development they wanted to see to ensure a smooth transition into the SoR. Professional development is an important component for effective accountability in implementing SoR. When teachers receive ongoing training, they are more likely to apply research-based reading strategies effectively. Just as with students, when administrators use a gradual release model, teachers have the time needed to adapt to new strategies with the support of instructional coaches or mentors. Gradual release helps teachers build confidence in their practice. When gradual release is paired with professional development focused on literacy, teachers can best foster reading comprehension and phonemic awareness in young learners.

Assessment and feedback are essential for ensuring the successful implementation of SoR and maintaining high levels of accountability. Teachers must be encouraged to continuously assess students' progress and adjust their approaches based on data collected. Research indicated that when teachers monitor student outcomes and reflect on the effectiveness of their instructional methods, they not only enhance their practices but also foster a culture of accountability within their schools (Chitpin & Jones, 2015).

Effective assessment practices enable educators to identify learning gaps early, allowing tailored interventions to meet the diverse needs of students.

Teacher-Based Improvements in Teaching Phonics

Over the past five years, the SoR has influenced teachers' instructional practices, particularly in phonics instruction for K-2 classrooms. One essential improvement is the integration of systematic and explicit phonics instruction. Studies, such as those by Castles et al. (2018), emphasized that systematic phonics instruction is beneficial for emergent readers. It provides a structured approach for children to decode words, ultimately enhancing their reading fluency and comprehension.

Teachers noted that when phonics instruction is shifted from balanced literacy to the SoR, significant gaps in foundational skills may occur. With the shift in framework, the gaps in students' foundational skills become more noticeable, as do the gaps in teacher knowledge. The role of diagnostic assessments then becomes even more critical in showing any skills that students may be missing. For example, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) has been used to identify students struggling with specific phonics components, allowing teachers to individualize interventions. Research by Good and Kaminski (2020) found that the targeted use of assessments helped teachers address individual student needs, resulting in substantial growth in reading skills across diverse student populations.

Teachers expressed that it can be challenging to retrain themselves to teach phonics in a completely different way. Collaborative teaching models have also shown promise in helping with phonics instruction. A study by Kilpatrick (2020) examined the

impact of peer coaching in K-2 classrooms, where teachers collaborated to implement phonics activities, including blending and segmenting. The collaborative model improved instructional quality and increased teacher confidence in delivering evidence-based strategies. Kilpatrick's case study highlights the potential of fostering collaborative professional development to support the SoR.

Teachers are discovering that integrating multisensory approaches has made a significant impact in K-2 classrooms. Techniques such as Orton-Gillingham, incorporating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements, have enhanced phonics learning, particularly for students with dyslexia. Research by Ritchey and Goeke (2019) demonstrated that such methods increased student engagement and retention of phonics skills, leading to better outcomes for struggling readers.

The SoR provides a framework for improving phonics instruction in K-2 classrooms. Teachers can create effective and engaging learning environments by focusing on systematic instruction, leveraging diagnostic assessments, fostering collaboration, and incorporating multisensory techniques. As the school continues to adopt these evidence-based practices, the potential to close reading gaps and build strong literacy foundations continues to grow.

Positive Impacts From the Transition of Balanced Literacy to the SoR

Transitioning from balanced literacy to the SoR has many benefits for both teachers and students in K-2 classrooms. This transition reflects an emphasis on evidence-based practices supported by decades of research about how children develop reading proficiency, offering a more structured approach to developing foundational

literacy skills. Balanced literacy, which often relies on cueing systems and leveled readers, can leave many students without explicit instruction to decode and comprehend text effectively. When teachers understand and implement these strategies, they are better prepared to support all students in developing strong reading skills, regardless of background or ability.

The teachers described how the knowledge and strategies gained through the SoR had improved their ability to support students in improving their reading skills. One benefit for teachers is the clear instructional framework that SoR provides. In contrast to balanced literacy, which often lacks consistency, SoR equips educators with a systematic and explicit approach to teaching phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Research by Moats (2020) highlighted that teacher knowledge of the SoR directly impacts student outcomes. Professional development centered on SoR makes teachers feel more confident in addressing diverse learning needs, fostering a deeper understanding of the reading process. Teachers who implement the SoR also benefit from data-driven tools, such as DIBELS (Good & Kaminski, 2020), which provide actionable insights into student progress and inform targeted interventions.

For students, the move to SoR addresses common gaps in reading development. Early readers require explicit instruction to decode words and build phonemic awareness, which leads to fluent and meaningful reading. Teachers have learned the skills and strategies to teach explicitly, enabling students to learn the rules of reading. Studies show that balanced literacy's use of guessing strategies, such as using pictures or context, can hinder the development of decoding skills (Castles et al., 2018). Conversely, SoR ensures

that students acquire the skills to decode unfamiliar words, leading to improved reading accuracy and comprehension. This structured approach is efficient for struggling readers, including those with dyslexia, as it aligns with their need for explicit, systematic instruction (Kilpatrick, 2020).

While still early in the process, primary teachers are beginning to see success with teaching under the SoR framework. Looking forward, the SoR will support the long-term impact on reading proficiency. SoR practices help close achievement gaps, especially for students from low-income or underserved communities who may lack access to literacy-rich environments at home. Research by Foorman et al. (2015) indicated that schools implementing instruction aligned with the SoR demonstrated significant gains in early literacy skills, particularly for students at risk.

The transition to SoR fosters collaboration and professional growth among teachers. During interviews, teachers emphasized the importance of collaborating to design lessons that utilize their new skills. They must have one another to bounce ideas off and compare data. Peer coaching and shared professional development opportunities foster a community of practice, enabling educators to refine their skills and share effective strategies. Kilpatrick (2020) noted that teachers who adopt SoR practices often report greater satisfaction as they see tangible improvements in student outcomes. This collaborative environment promotes classroom consistency, ensuring all students receive high-quality instruction. Allowing students to gain essential decoding and comprehension skills needed for lifelong literacy success.

Areas That Need Assistance

The transition from balanced literacy to the SoR presents significant challenges for teachers, particularly in the areas of comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary instruction. While balanced literacy often emphasizes strategies such as guessing from context or relying on pictures, the SoR focuses on evidence-based practices that systematically and explicitly develop these skills. When adopting this research driven approach, the teachers interviewed felt unprepared in specific components, as it requires a deeper understanding of language structures, cognitive development, and integrating instructional strategies across content areas. For example, comprehension strategies within the SoR rely on building background knowledge and conducting text analysis, fluency requires explicit modeling and practice with prosody, and vocabulary instruction emphasizes morphology and contextual word usage. Addressing these gaps is essential, as research shows that students in early grades who receive structured, explicit instruction in these areas outperform their peers in overall literacy achievement (Foorman et al., 2015; Wexler, 2020). Equipping teachers with the necessary tools, professional development, and resources to embrace this shift ensures they can effectively support all learners during this critical phase.

Comprehension

When transitioning from balanced literacy to the SoR in K-2 classrooms, teaching comprehension involves embedding evidence-based practices focusing on explicit instruction and building foundational knowledge. A key component is fostering oral language development and vocabulary acquisition, which is essential for comprehension.

Research by Spencer et al. (2021) emphasized that students benefit when teachers focus on building background knowledge and exposing them to complex, content-rich texts. Under the SoR, teachers use strategies of teaching comprehension by engaging students in active listening, asking text-based questions, and encouraging them to make inferences about key ideas.

Another strategy involves scaffolding comprehension through systematic approaches, such as graphic organizers, story mapping, and direct modeling of how to ask and answer questions. According to Wexler (2020), teaching comprehension in SoR classrooms shifts away from generic strategies, such as predicting and summarizing, to focusing on understanding text structures and themes. For example, students learn to recognize the main idea and supporting details explicitly, helping them connect information across texts. Regular teacher-led discussions help reinforce understanding and enable students to apply newly acquired knowledge in various contexts. This targeted instruction ensures that students develop both decoding skills and the ability to interpret texts, setting the foundation for reading success as they progress through the grades.

Fluency

One area in which teachers believed additional support was needed was reading fluency. Knowing that it is an integral part of learning to read, some teachers struggle with the best ways to incorporate it in the classroom. Fluency, a critical component of reading, involves accuracy, automaticity, and prosody, enabling students to read texts effortlessly and with understanding. Under the SoR framework, teaching fluency begins with building strong foundational skills such as phonological awareness, decoding, and

automatic word recognition. Repeated reading of decodable texts aligned with students' phonics knowledge is an essential instructional practice for developing reading fluency and accuracy. Research by Kim and Wagner (2023) emphasized the importance of using texts that match students' decoding skills to ensure they focus on fluency and comprehension. Additionally, pairing students for peer reading practice fosters fluency through repeated exposure to text, as highlighted by the findings of Rasinski et al. (2020), which underscore the value of repeated oral reading for building confidence and speed.

Fluency instruction also benefits from integrating guided oral reading with teacher feedback. Teachers can model fluent reading, emphasizing pacing, expression, and phrasing, and then allow students to practice with immediate corrective feedback. Tools such as reader's theater scripts provide engaging opportunities for students to practice fluency within a meaningful context. According to Foorman et al. (2015), structured fluency activities, when coupled with formative assessments such as fluency probes, help track students' progress and provide data to inform instruction. One aspect that teachers often overlook is that the SoR approach ensures fluency is not taught in isolation. Instead fluency is supported by decoding instruction and vocabulary development, enabling students to connect their reading fluency with improved comprehension outcomes. Teachers will need additional support to incorporate it into daily learning rather than being taught in isolation.

Vocabulary

When transitioning from balanced literacy to the SoR, vocabulary instruction becomes more structured and research-driven, emphasizing the direct teaching of word

meanings, morphology, and context usage. Teachers expressed the need to better understand how to incorporate and teach vocabulary effectively. Explicit vocabulary instruction helps young learners decode and understand unfamiliar words, building a foundation for comprehension. The research highlights the significance of tiered vocabulary instruction, which categorizes words into three levels: basic (Tier 1), high-utility academic (Tier 2), and domain-specific (Tier 3) (Beck et al., 2022). Teachers can enhance vocabulary acquisition by incorporating read-aloud with rich language, explicitly teaching word meanings, and modeling word usage in sentences. The teachers have been provided with a curriculum that offers rich literature texts, aligning with these strategies. For example, children might explore root words and affixes to decipher unfamiliar terms, a practice shown to boost decoding skills and comprehension simultaneously (Wright & Neuman, 2021). This systematic approach differs from balanced literacy, which often relies on incidental word learning through exposure.

Another critical aspect of vocabulary instruction in the SoR framework is embedding words within meaningful contexts. According to Wexler (2020), building background knowledge is essential for vocabulary growth, as it equips students with the context necessary to understand and apply new terms. For K-2 classrooms, teachers might use thematic units or cross-curricular content to expose students to vocabulary in authentic settings, fostering retention and application. Studies have shown that embedding vocabulary in informational texts enhances word learning and content understanding (McKeown et al., 2019). Additionally, interactive strategies like semantic mapping and word games can reinforce understanding while engaging young learners.

This shift toward deliberate, evidence-based vocabulary instruction helps bridge the gap for students transitioning to the SoR, ensuring they develop robust language skills that support future literacy success.

The shift from balanced literacy to the SoR offers a transformative opportunity to improve literacy outcomes for K-2 students, but it also requires intentional support and adaptation for teachers. By prioritizing evidence-based strategies in comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary instruction, educators can more effectively meet the diverse needs of their learners and close longstanding achievement gaps. Research has shown that early investment in systematic, explicit literacy instruction has far-reaching benefits for student success (Foorman et al., 2015; Wexler, 2020). Schools can ensure that this shift fosters academic growth and a lifelong love of reading for all students by equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and tools.

Professional Development for Success

Professional development tailored to primary-grade teachers is crucial for effectively implementing the SoR. This evidence-based approach emphasizes explicit and systematic instruction in foundational literacy components, such as phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Research indicates that many educators require additional training in SoR methodologies, often relying on balanced literacy practices that may not fully support struggling readers (Moats, 2020). Professional development programs must provide educators with a clear understanding of the cognitive science behind reading acquisition and practical strategies for teaching these skills in the classroom. High-quality professional development has been linked to improved teacher efficacy and better student

outcomes, making it a necessary investment for schools transitioning to SoR framework (Foorman et al., 2015).

Teachers identified that they felt strongly about the “why” of the SoR; however, they needed more help developing activities for their students. Teachers were clear in asking for hands-on learning experiences for themselves. Hands-on learning experiences are a critical component of effective professional development in SoR. Workshops and training sessions that simulate classroom scenarios allow teachers to practice explicit instruction techniques, such as modeling phoneme-grapheme correspondences or guiding students through decoding exercises. Additionally, these sessions can incorporate real-world materials and tools, such as decodable texts and diagnostic assessments, ensuring teachers are prepared to address diverse learning needs. Research indicates that hands-on, interactive professional development leads to greater teacher engagement and retention of new practices compared to traditional lecture-style training (You et al., 2024).

A key case study from Florida highlighted the effects of professional development aligned with SoR principles. Teachers in several districts received intensive training on explicit phonics instruction, focusing on phoneme-grapheme correspondences and syllable types. According to research by Foorman et al. (2018), classrooms implementing these strategies saw significant gains in student reading proficiency, particularly in students’ ability to decode unfamiliar words. The findings underscore the importance of providing educators with the knowledge and resources necessary to deliver systematic phonics instruction.

Peer coaching and collaborative learning are also vital for sustaining long-term change in literacy instruction. The teachers interviewed appeared to lack collaboration with their peers, making instruction more challenging. Structured coaching models, where experienced literacy specialists or trained peers mentor classroom teachers, provide ongoing support and accountability. Coaches can observe lessons, offer feedback, and model effective strategies, creating a culture of continuous improvement. Collaborative professional learning communities further enhance this process, allowing teachers to share successes, troubleshoot challenges, and collectively analyze student data. Studies have shown that schools implementing peer coaching experience marked improvements in teaching practices, particularly in areas such as explicit instruction and student reading achievement (Torelli et al., 2023). This collegial approach fosters a supportive environment where educators feel empowered to refine their skills.

Professional development in the SoR must prioritize practical, hands-on learning and peer collaboration to equip teachers with the tools necessary to improve literacy outcomes for young learners. Investing in robust training programs enhances teacher confidence and effectiveness, ensuring that all students have access to the high-quality instruction they need to succeed.

Project Description

The project will consist of a 3-day professional development program, delivered at the beginning of the year during in-service days, designed explicitly for primary-grade teachers at the school that participated in this study. Each day will feature two interactive sessions. Day 1 will focus on an overview of the SoR, highlighting the differences

between balanced literacy and SoR methodologies. The morning session will cover explicit phonics instruction and multisensory teaching techniques, while the afternoon will address fluency-building strategies through structured practices. Day 2 will center on vocabulary and comprehension, emphasizing a knowledge-building approach and practical implementation strategies. Day 3 will focus on collaboration and the proper use of the resources available to the school. Collaborative discussions will follow each session.

The professional development program will encourage active teacher engagement and provide opportunities for primary educators to collaborate and share insights. Teachers will also have the flexibility to choose the sessions they wish to attend, tailoring the experience to their specific needs. The training will occur in person during teacher planning days and will be recorded and uploaded to the school's Google Drive. This digital repository will serve as a resource for ongoing review and as a tool for onboarding new teachers.

Needed Resources

Several resources will be necessary to implement the professional development program, which will transition teachers from balanced literacy to the SoR. First, comprehensive training materials such as structured lesson plans, explicit phonics resources, and examples of multisensory teaching aids will be essential. These materials should align with evidence-based practices in the SoR and be accessible to teachers during and after the sessions. Tools like decodable readers, manipulatives (e.g., letter tiles or sound cards), and fluency-building software can further enhance the training.

Additionally, providing a rich library of reference books, journal articles, and digital resources, such as access to platforms like Reading Rockets or research databases, will allow teachers to deepen their understanding and apply these strategies effectively in the classroom.

Another crucial resource is technological support to facilitate the training and its follow-up. Recording equipment and video editing tools will be needed to document the sessions and make them available on the school's Google Drive for future reference. Collaborative tools, such as shared Google Docs or teacher forums, can support peer interaction and reflection beyond the training days. Allocating funds for experienced trainers or literacy coaches specializing in the SoR will ensure educators receive high-quality, hands-on guidance. Time will be the most critical resource: dedicating teacher planning days to this professional development, alongside providing opportunities for follow-up coaching sessions, will ensure teachers have ample space to integrate what they learn into their instructional practices.

Existing Supports

Leveraging existing supports within the school is essential to deliver the professional development program successfully. First, the expertise of literacy coaches or specialists already employed by the school can provide invaluable guidance in aligning the training to the SoR principles. These individuals can co-facilitate sessions, share best practices, and offer ongoing support after the training. Additionally, collaboration with the school administration is crucial for scheduling professional development on teacher planning days, ensuring adequate time is allotted without impacting instructional hours.

Existing digital platforms, such as the school's Google Drive, can store and share resources, session recordings, and follow-up materials, creating a centralized hub for continuous access. Furthermore, if necessary, existing budgets allocated for teacher training or professional development grants can be redirected to cover costs such as materials, external trainers, or substitute teachers, thereby ensuring the program's sustainability and effectiveness.

Barriers and Solutions

Implementing a professional development program focused on transitioning from balanced literacy to the SoR may face several barriers. One common challenge is teachers' resistance to using new strategies effectively. Many educators have spent years implementing balanced literacy practices and may feel hesitant or overwhelmed by the prospect of overhauling their instructional methods. This resistance can stem from concerns about the time and effort required to learn new practices. To address this, the professional development must prioritize clear communication about what works in classrooms and its positive impact on student outcomes. Incorporating teacher testimonies, research findings, and opportunities for discussion during the professional development can help alleviate concerns and build participant buy-in.

Another potential barrier is the need for more time and resources for professional development. Teachers often have packed schedules, leaving little room for in-depth training. Additionally, there might be a lack of funding to provide the necessary materials, external trainers, or substitute teachers to cover classes during sessions. To help with these challenges, scheduling the training on teacher planning days or during in-

service periods ensures it does not interfere with instructional time. Furthermore, schools can use existing resources, such as digital platforms and literacy coaches, to reduce costs. Applying for professional development grants or seeking partnerships with educational organizations can also provide additional funding and expertise to support the program.

A third barrier involves ensuring that the training is practical and sustainable. Teachers may feel frustrated if the training lacks hands-on strategies or follow-up support to implement new practices effectively. To overcome this, professional development should include interactive, hands-on sessions, such as modeling lessons, collaborative planning, and opportunities for teachers to practice strategies in real-time. Peer coaching and ongoing mentorship programs can provide sustained support and guidance, ensuring teachers can confidently apply SoR strategies and classroom activities. By addressing these barriers with practical, targeted solutions, schools can create a professional development program that equips teachers with the knowledge and skills to improve literacy instruction effectively.

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities differ depending on one's level of involvement in the project. Grade K-2 teachers play a central role in professional development, both as participants and implementers. They are responsible for actively engaging in training sessions, applying learned strategies in their classrooms, and providing feedback on the effectiveness of professional development initiatives. Teachers collaborate with academic coaches and peers to refine their instructional approaches and address challenges. They also contribute by sharing successful practices, participating in action research, and using

student data to inform their teaching. By embracing professional development as an ongoing process, teachers ensure that their instructional methods evolve to meet the changing needs of their students and align with educational standards.

The academic coach serves as the bridge between research and classroom practice. Their primary responsibility is to guide teachers in implementing professional development strategies effectively (Boer, 2023). The academic coach will lead the professional development sessions and facilitate collaborative discussions among participants to support effective implementation. The academic coach will work closely with teachers to analyze student performance data, identify areas for improvement, and tailor instructional methods to meet the diverse needs of students. Furthermore, coaches foster a culture of continuous improvement by encouraging collaboration among teachers, facilitating professional learning communities (PLCs), and promoting reflective teaching practices. Like the teachers, the academic coach will be responsible for providing feedback on the professional development, allowing adjustments to be made as needed.

My role as the researcher will be to guide the professional development process by delivering evidence-based strategies and ensuring alignment with current pedagogical and subject-area research. Collaboration with the school leader and academic coach will be central to aligning the training sessions with school goals and student needs. I will also determine the logistics, such as selecting appropriate days and times for the training sessions, to maximize attendance and engagement.

Additionally, I will be responsible for developing the resources and materials required for the training sessions. These resources will be designed to be practical and actionable, ensuring they can be used both during the sessions and in the classroom. After creation, all materials will be linked to the school's Google shared drive, enabling easy access in the future, including onboarding new staff members and refreshing content for returning teachers.

To ensure sustainability, I will train the academic coach, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to deliver the training effectively. This will empower the coach to provide ongoing support and reinforcement of the professional development content, helping teachers integrate new strategies into their daily instructional practices.

Implementation Proposal and Timeline

A 3-day professional development session will be scheduled in coordination with the school principal, with confirmation expected in December. Teachers in the primary grade levels will be informed of the professional development details, including its goals and content to be discussed. Teachers will be notified via email of the dates and provided with a Google Meet link if they are unable to attend. The school leader will inform their team of the training so they can attend should they wish.

I will hold several meetings, both in-person and virtually, to train the academic coaches for professional development. During these meetings, the foundational research supporting the project will be presented, along with an overview of the professional development resources and implementation plan. To ensure continued access, a Google Drive folder will be established for participants to review materials after the training.

The project will follow a preset timeline (See Appendix A). Day 1 will focus on an overview of the SoR, highlighting the differences between balanced literacy and SoR methodologies. The morning session will cover explicit phonics instruction and multisensory teaching techniques, while the afternoon will address fluency-building strategies through structured practices. During each session, time will be allocated for teachers to collaborate, engage in hands-on activities, and discuss any ideas or concerns. At the end of Day 1, teachers will be asked to submit a reflection form to the academic coach and me, describing how they plan to apply the information learned in their classrooms and offering insights on the effectiveness of the session.

Day 2 will center on vocabulary and comprehension, emphasizing a knowledge-building approach and practical implementation strategies. This training will be divided into workshops by grade level, as vocabulary and comprehension look very different at each grade level. Teachers will be given time to collaborate, complete hands-on activities, and discuss ideas or concerns. After the workshops, all primary teachers will be brought back into one group. Teachers will be allowed to share with the K-2 teachers everything they learned during their workshops. Teachers will then spend the afternoon vertically planning and building on the strategies each grade level uses for vocabulary and comprehension. At the end of Day 2, teachers will complete an evaluation for the day, as well as an overall evaluation of how the training will impact their reading instruction.

Day 3 will focus on grade-level collaboration and using resources effectively. This training will be organized by grade level, specifically addressing how to collaborate

effectively with your team and utilize available resources for planning. Teachers will be able to engage in direct conversations with me, the academic and data coach, to address any questions or concerns they may have. A specific guideline will be established to ensure the fidelity of the curriculum, so teachers leave the training feeling secure in their knowledge and confident in their plans moving forward.

After concluding the professional development, I will meet with the academic coach who delivered the training to reflect on the feedback provided by the primary grade-level teachers. The teachers' feedback will help me determine what support and resources the academic coach will need to implement practices and strategies effectively. All teachers who participated in the training will receive a follow-up evaluation one month after the professional development to assess how the training has been applied within their classrooms. At the end of the school year, a final evaluation will be conducted to measure how the professional development affected teachers' growth and instructional implementation. These evaluations will enable any necessary changes before the next training is given to new K-2 grade level teachers.

Project Evaluation Plan

This project aims to increase the implementation of the SoR strategies in all components of reading in primary grades. For this to occur, teachers must have more knowledge and experience with best practices for effectively using the SoR strategies. In the short-term, the project aims to provide primary teachers with practical, hands-on training in new strategies and activities to support the SoR best. This group of teachers is responsible for developing foundational reading skills, enabling students to become

proficient readers. In the long term, this project aims to ensure that students have strong foundational reading skills, specifically in phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary, thereby closing the achievement gap and ensuring that students are at grade level. This requires teachers to shift entirely from balanced literacy to the SoR using the strategies necessary for every part of their instruction. This project lends itself to a goal-based evaluation approach, as its effectiveness will be determined by the degree to which established objectives are met.

One goal of the evaluation tools created for this project (see Appendix B) is to gather feedback on how the professional development influenced teachers' confidence and ability to implement the SoR in the classroom. Another goal of the evaluation tool is to identify where teachers require support to implement activities and strategies effectively. Following each professional development day, teachers will complete an evaluation form to reflect on their increased understanding of the SoR activities and their readiness to implement these practices. The form also includes space for teachers to offer feedback on how the training could be improved to support their instructional needs. This feedback will be reviewed by the trainer and me to provide individualized follow-up and ensure that teacher needs are effectively addressed.

The overarching goal of this project is to expand primary teachers' toolboxes with activities and best practices, fully developing the "how" of the SoR and resulting in strong foundational skills. Once teachers have had an extended period to apply what they learned in professional development, their progress and implementation will need to be monitored and measured. Teachers will receive a follow-up evaluation one month after

the professional development to determine how it is being applied within their classrooms. An additional follow-up evaluation will be distributed at the end of the school year to assess the long-term impact of the professional development.

The primary stakeholders for this project include the academic coach and the school administrative team. Collaboration with the academic coach will focus on supporting teachers as they implement their newly defined toolbox for the “how” of the SoR. The academic coach will also receive an evaluation tool to provide feedback to teachers’ application of the professional development strategies within their classrooms (see Appendix B). The school administrative team will receive access to a Google Drive folder containing training materials and recorded sessions. They will also be provided with an evaluation instrument to assess teachers’ implementation of the professional development content. Input from all stakeholders will inform continued support for teachers and guide planning for future professional development opportunities.

Project Implications

The professional development provided to primary teachers can potentially improve students’ reading foundational skills by deepening their understanding of the “how” of the SoR. Teachers will be better equipped to assist parents with the new strategies and practices that enable primary students to develop proficiency as readers. Students have the best chance of success when they align the practices and techniques from school with those at home. Improving the understanding of the SoR will enable current and future students to develop strong foundational reading skills, which will, in

turn, allow them to excel in later years of school. Literacy skills are essential for productivity in the workforce; parents can then pass those skills on to their children.

The benefits of using the best strategies and activities of the SoR will extend beyond the school. This project will benefit the whole community, from businesses to local government. The charter school and schools within its region will benefit from having teachers who can perform at high levels due to their comprehensive understanding of the “why” and “how” behind the SoR. This will support the potential for increased reading proficiency of the students. When students join the workforce, their employers will benefit from having highly literate employees. Students will graduate from school feeling confident in their reading and comprehension skills, which will enable them to challenge themselves in higher education and professional careers and become productive members of their community.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The project had strengths and limitations. One key strength was the qualitative design, which enabled a deep exploration of the educators' experiences. Additionally, the professional development deliverable, grounded in the current study findings, addressed a gap in current practice and offered educators practical guidance on implementing the SoR by providing hands-on strategies and resources as requested by the participants. This support was designed to enhance instructional practices and expand teachers' classroom "toolbox," thereby improving reading achievement in the primary grades. However, a limitation of the project was the small sample size, which resulted from working within a single study site.

Strengths

A key strength of the study was its qualitative design and subsequent development of the project based on the findings. This project focused on understanding the "how" of the SoR by teaching various strategies related to its components, thereby equipping teachers with a toolbox to enhance their grasp of the new methodology, resource utilization, and teamwork, thereby boosting their confidence. The findings revealed challenges when implementing the SoR within their classrooms, including a lack of understanding of how to teach the various components, limited knowledge of the resources, and unclear expectations from the administration. The professional development was designed to fill a gap in practice by providing the support that the teachers requested during interviews and an opportunity to collaborate while learning

new strategies for each component. The professional development addresses all key areas that the teachers raised in the interviews.

I conducted a literature review to develop a professional development project that provided teachers with differentiated activities to address the challenges they encountered during the implementation of the SoR. Studies confirmed that incentive, collaborative, and well-structured professional development promotes deeper teacher engagement and retention of practices (Fütterer et al., 2024). The teachers of the primary grade levels will engage in activities that help them build a toolbox of strategies to support their reading instruction while continuing to implement the SoR. Additionally, the participants will engage in vertical planning and team collaboration to improve their instructional strategies while further developing their understanding of how to deliver activities to students with the SoR in mind.

The professional development was grounded in adult learning principles, specifically Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy. Knowles emphasized that adult learners possess a unique set of characteristics that must be considered for effective learning to take place. Effective professional development must connect theory to practice, incorporate hands-on modeling, foster collaboration, and provide ongoing support (Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Sims et al., 2022). The professional development designed for this project offered participants a variety of learning experiences intentionally crafted to engage them in practical strategies that can be implemented in their classrooms. These experiences include in-depth exploration of SoR

strategies, guided support in using instructional resources, and meaningful opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and collaboration.

Each professional development day was designed to reflect the requests and needs of the participants. A formative evaluation survey was developed to gather feedback from primary teachers, ensuring the training remained responsive and relevant. Participants were expected to complete these evaluations following each module to provide insights that would inform future professional development opportunities. This feedback would help ensure continued engagement, relevance, and support for the success of primary grade teachers. Additionally, participants completed a reflection activity to promote deeper understanding and encourage the practical application of new learning within their classrooms.

Limitations

The study's limitations stemmed from the relatively small sample size of the chosen school, which resulted in a limited number of participants. I achieved data saturation with the 15 participants from the primary grade levels. However, there was an uneven number of participants from each of the three grade levels. Many of the teachers seemed unsure about participating in the study due to the timing of my approach. However, I was able to collect enough data to reach saturation, and the responses were overall very similar for each grade level. I do not believe that having more participants would have changed the outcome of the findings.

A second limitation is the time required for professional development. Although the participants expressed a desire for training to achieve proficiency within the SoR,

dedicating three full days represents a substantial time commitment. Selecting professional development that occurs during a break may alleviate some stress for teachers. There is always a risk that competing demands may limit their ability to engage fully with the new learning (Kraft et al., 2023). Meaningful professional development must be ongoing throughout the year and embedded within educators' daily schedules to be most effective. By completing the professional development over a break, teachers may not implement it quickly enough, causing some aspects to be lost in translation.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasized that professional development is most effective when it is ongoing, job-embedded, and supported over time. To ease teachers' stress, it may be helpful to consider intensive, short-term sessions instead of having three consecutive full days. While this would increase the time it takes to get through all the materials and the length of time implementation takes, it could also become more focused. The participants may benefit from intensive training one component at a time rather than all together.

If time is a primary concern, collaborative planning could be removed from the professional development. The academic coach could instead meet with each team during their weekly collaborative planning meetings to facilitate discussions and guide the planning of activities and strategies for classroom use. This would eliminate any time commitments outside of school or apart from their regularly scheduled day. The academic coach would facilitate meaningful conversations and employ job-embedded coaching tailored to instructional improvement for each week of instructional planning.

This approach would also enable the academic coach to address the team's immediate needs, thereby promoting greater relevance for teachers and enhancing classroom application.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship is an ongoing process of creating, discovering, analyzing, and sharing knowledge. According to Glassick (2022), scholarship meets standards of goals, requires adequate preparation, employs appropriate methods, and concludes with reflective critique. This project focuses on scholarly learning to better understand the experiences of educators as they transition from balanced literacy to implementing the SoR in primary grade levels. The role of the researcher extends beyond merely collecting and analyzing data; it necessitates identifying, synthesizing, and applying current peer-reviewed research to the study area. The literature review served as a critical foundation for the current study, framing the research questions and helping to validate the findings. This scholarly process has deepened my understanding of the content, the research problem, possible solutions, and the needs of the local educational community. The research enhanced my knowledge of the importance of continued professional development when shifting from one educational methodology to another, ensuring that students' learning needs are effectively met. The focused and systematic examination of the research problem and key themes provided valuable experience in exploring various solutions to the local issue.

The proposal writing process allowed for thoughtful consideration of each essential component of the study, ensuring clarity, alignment with research goals, and

adherence to ethical and methodological standards. Writing the proposal clarified what I needed to do to ensure participant protection, align data collection with the research problem, and analyze the data precisely. This process has significantly contributed to my growth as both an analytical thinker and an educational leader. Engaging in scholarly research and completing a project study deepened my understanding of how to support educators and administrators through evidence-based practices effectively. The skills I developed, such as data analysis, reflective inquiry, and strategic planning, are directly applicable to my ongoing work with teachers and in facilitating impactful professional development for staff.

I have always had a deep passion for learning and a desire to continually expand my knowledge. Through this process, I have come to see myself as a practitioner-scholar. This journey has strengthened my confidence in sharing research with fellow educators and in validating my ideas to implement strategies effectively in practice. With the guidance and support of the Walden University staff, including my first and second chair, the IRB committee, and all the dedicated student support staff, I have evolved from a student to an educational leader who is an agent of change in the field of education.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

As an academic coach, I have designed and delivered professional development over the past several years, often aligning with priorities identified by school leadership. However, my time at Walden University deepened my understanding of how to use research to inform professional learning that truly meets the needs of adult learning. I now recognize the importance of tailoring professional development to help educators

feel both supported and successful in their classrooms. This skill set will continue to guide me in future leadership roles, enabling me to identify a school's most pressing challenges and apply evidence-based solutions that ensure teachers feel heard, empowered, and equipped to grow.

The study was guided by a clearly defined problem and supported through an extensive review of current literature. The selected methodology for data collection and analysis was grounded in research aimed at exploring teachers' experiences transitioning from balanced literacy to the SoR. Findings revealed a clear need for professional development that not only supports primary teachers in understanding and applying strategies for each component of the SoR but also includes hands-on learning opportunities. Research suggests that teachers are more likely to sustain new instructional approaches when they feel confident in their skills and ability to teach students effectively. The study emphasized the importance of collaborative planning time, practical strategy development, and building teacher confidence for successful implementation. Ongoing, research-informed professional development has the potential to drive positive change by enhancing instructional practices and improving reading proficiency in the primary grades.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This project study invited primary-grade-level teachers to share their experiences as they began implementing components of the SoR in their classrooms. Participants expressed a clear need for professional development that would deepen their understanding of the "how" behind instructional practices, enhance their familiarity with

available resources, and introduce practical activities to use with the students. For teachers to be successful in this transition, ongoing professional development must be grounded in research and tailored to their specific needs. When professional development learning is responsive to teachers' challenges and goals, it can foster confidence and support more effective classroom implementation.

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the CBAM, which emphasizes understanding how educators experience and respond to change in educational settings. CBAM identifies specific stages of concern and levels of use that teachers progress through when adopting new instructional practices (Hall & Hord, 2019). This study applied the CBAM framework to explore teachers' experiences with implementing the SoR, focusing on both perceived successes and areas where further support is needed. Understanding where teachers fall within the CBAM stages is critical, as their self-perceptions and concerns directly influence their willingness and ability to implement and sustain new practices. Research showed that when professional development and leadership support are aligned with teachers' specific stages of concern, the implementation process becomes more meaningful and effective. By addressing these individual needs, school leaders can promote a culture of continuous improvement and strengthen instructional confidence (Haines, 2018). Ensuring long-term fidelity to evidence-based literacy practices.

While this project study focused on primary-grade-level teachers, the findings have broader implications given the nationwide stagnation of reading proficiency across all grade levels. Future research could extend to include teachers in grades three through

eight to explore how the SoR is being implemented in upper elementary and middle school classrooms. Investigating the challenges and successes at these levels could uncover patterns similar to those found in primary grade levels, suggesting that targeted professional development may also be beneficial for upper-grade-level teachers. Additionally, future studies could examine the outcomes of such professional development initiatives, particularly those designed around the expressed needs and concerns of teachers. When professional development is responsive to teacher input and tailored to their preferred learning formats, it can enhance instructional confidence and effectiveness, ultimately benefiting all stakeholders.

Conclusion

This project study aimed to explore teachers' experiences in primary grade levels as they transitioned from balanced literacy to the components of the SoR. The data collected from primary-grade-level teachers provided insights into the further support teachers needed to implement the SoR components successfully in their classrooms. The insights guided professional development to address the needs of teachers and provide support to improve their understanding of the "how" behind the SoR. Teachers will be able to continue their professional development to support collaborative planning and expand their instructional toolbox under the SoR.

The biggest takeaway I learned from this project was the importance of listening to the needs of educators and understanding their feelings about new implementation. Teachers want to ensure they are always doing their very best for their students, and until they feel confident in a new teaching approach, teachers will often revert to strategies that

have worked in their previous teaching. By allowing teachers to have a voice in what they need to be successful and setting up paths for collaboration, change will happen.

Teachers will feel confident and be successful, which leads to the success of their students.

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Appendix A: The Project

Diving Deeper into the “How” of the SoR in Primary Grade Levels is a three-day professional development (PD), during the beginning of the year in-service days, created to deepen teachers’ understanding of the “how” to implement strategies for the components of the SoR. This PD will be completed in 3 consecutive days and aims to provide teachers in primary grades with hands-on experiences that will enable them to strengthen strategies in the components of the SoR. While this PD is focused on primary-grade-level classroom teachers, administrators and interventionists for these grade levels are welcome and encouraged to attend.

PD Content

The following topics will be addressed each day of the PD.

Day 1: Building Your Strategy Toolbox

Time	Topic	Notes
7:30-8:00	Check-In, Itinerary, Breakfast, Opening Activity	
8:00-9:00	A review in the difference of the science of reading and balanced literacy	
9:15-10:15	Engaging students with explicit phonics instruction strategies	
10:20-11:20	Engaging students with multi-sensory teaching strategies	
11:30-12:30	Lunch	
12:30-1:30	Engaging students with fluency strategies	
1:30-2:30	Star CBM	
2:30-3:00	Evaluation for the day	

Day 2: Let's Try it Out/Vertical Planning

Time	Topic	Notes
7:30-8:00	Check-In, Itinerary, Breakfast, Opening Activity	
8:00-9:00	Workshop: SoR and Comprehension by Grade	
9:15-10:15	Workshop: SoR and Fluency by Grade	
10:20-11:20	Workshop: SoR and Vocabulary by Grade	
11:30-12:30	Lunch	
12:30-1:30	K-1 Vertical Planning Grade 2:	
1:30-2:30	1-2 Vertical Planning Kinder:	
2:30-3:00	Evaluation for the day	

Day 3: I Understand the How...Now What?

Time	Topic	Notes
7:30-8:00	Check-In, Itinerary, Breakfast, Opening Activity	
8:00-8:45	I Understand the How...Now What?	
8:50-9:50	Understanding the Fidelity of Curriculum and Expectations	
9:55-10:55	What Resources Do I Plan With and What Should Collaboration Look Like?	
11:00-12:00	Collaborative Planning Time with Your Grade Level	
12:00-12:30	Lunch	
12:30-1:15	Collaborative Planning Time with Your Grade Level	
1:20-2:30	Q&A	
2:30-3:00	Evaluation for the day	

All Google Slides will be available to teachers via a shared Google Drive. After the professional development concludes, they will be able to access all information needed to support their implementation of strategies in the classroom. The primary teachers will continue collaborating to provide mutual support.

All of the primary grade-level participants work at the same school; therefore, they have established relationships. To help the team better collaborate with the new strategies, work toward fidelity to the curriculum, and discuss their resources, the participants will be seated by grade level for most of the professional development. There

will be times during the professional development when the grade-level teams will mix, allowing for vertical planning with other teams. It is the hope of this professional development that the teachers strengthen their collaboration and work together to navigate and share ideas regarding the “how” of the SoR.

Presenters

Due to the unique design of the school site, the academic and peer coaches for this school will present the professional development to the teachers. They will all receive prior training and resources regarding the “how” of the SoR to provide primary classroom teachers with strategies they can use within their classrooms. I will collaborate with the academic coach to prepare for the professional development and designate who will be responsible for presenting each session. The academic and peer coaches will be able to support and provide the guidance needed to the teachers after the conclusion of this professional development as they are all on campus.

Professional Development Goals

The overarching goal of this project is to expand primary teachers’ toolboxes with activities and best practices, fully developing the “how” of the SoR and resulting in strong foundational skills. Once teachers have an extended period to use what they learned in professional development, the progress and implementation will need to be monitored and measured. Teachers will be sent a follow-up evaluation after one month from the professional development to determine how the professional development is being applied within the classrooms. Another follow-up evaluation will be sent at the end of the school year.

The goals of this PD are:

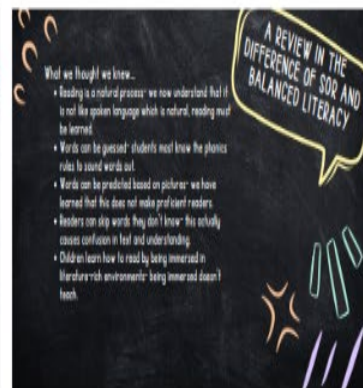
- Teachers will learn various hands-on strategies for the components of the SoR.
- Teachers will understand the difference between showing fidelity in their resources and using their resources.
- Teachers will understand how to enhance reading instruction through new strategies learned under the SoR.
- Teachers will learn best ways to engage in collaborative planning with their teams to lead to meaningful instruction.

Anticipated Outcomes

As a result of this PD, the following outcomes are expected:

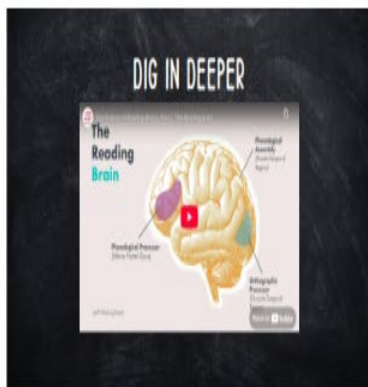
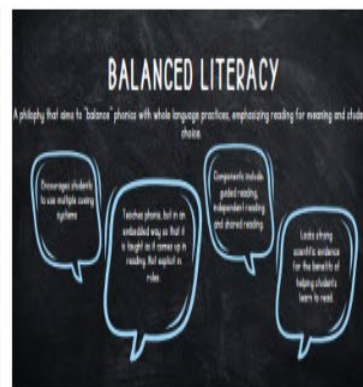
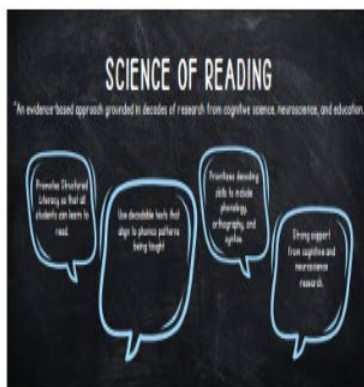
- Teachers will be confident in their experiences with implementing the components of SoR.
- Teachers will have developed a toolbox of activities and best strategies for the components of the SOR.
- Teachers will better understand the best ways to use their resources.
- Teachers will be given explicit instructions on the fidelity the administration expects from the curriculum.
- Teachers will interact with their team members, peer coach, and academic coach that can assist and support them.

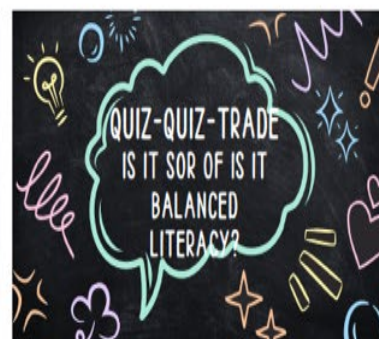
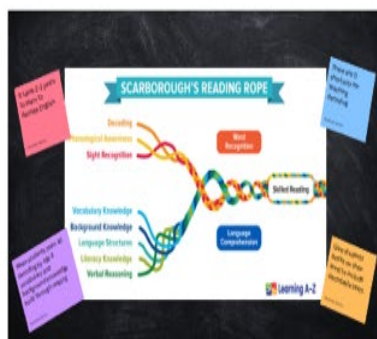
Day 1:



COMPARISON TABLE

Aspect	SOR	Balanced Literacy
Foundations	Based on Brain/Cognitive Research	Instructional Philosophy
Phonics Instruction	Explicit and explicit	Often implicit
Writing Strategy	Reading Strategy	See writing, picture, context/meaning
Text level	Decodable Texts	leveled Readers
Assessment Use	Formative/ Diagnostic	Less frequent, after instruction
Goal	High Accuracy, Automatic Reading Prof	Emphasis on fluency, comprehension and Deepening Understanding





WHAT IS EXPLICIT PHONICS INSTRUCTION?

Systematic, direct teaching of the relationship between sounds and letters.
Teaching decoding by focus on letter correspondences.
Builds foundational reading skills.

Activity: Share with a partner how you are currently teaching phonics with the curriculum you have?

STRATEGIES

Elkonin Boxes

TAP IT OUT!

Tap It Out

Blending Drills

Daily Phoneme Routines

Activity: Modeling and using Elkonin Boxes

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Phonics Swapper	Silly Sound Story	Phonics Squares
Sound Map	Phonics Sound Mats	Phonics Cards
Build a Word Center	Shake-Up Phonics	Phonics Mats
Phonics Map	Sound Sorting	Spin & Read

Collaboration: What is your favorite activity to do in your class? Share with the table.

HOW DO WE KNOW THE KIDS HAVE IT?

Phonics Quick Checks

Activity: Share with a partner how you are currently teaching phonics with the curriculum you have?



WHY USE MULTI-SENSORY ACTIVITIES?

Engages more than one pathway in the brain.

Supports the diverse learning needs of students in the classroom.

Do you know how your students learn best? What is their learning style?

LEARNING STYLES

Visual	Auditory	Reading/Writing	Kinesthetic
Interpreting what you see	Listening to what you hear	Reading and writing	Using your hands

LEARNING STYLES CHECKLIST

1. I can see the words in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I can hear the words in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I can feel the words in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I can smell the words in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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96. I can act out the words in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>
97. I can draw the words in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>
98. I can write the words in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>
99. I can think of the words in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>
100. I can feel the words in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>

FIND OUT NOW!

Phonics

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Blends: onsets with Digraphs	Phonics: Letter Word Building	Phonics: Segmentation
Sound Writing: Tring	Dig Writing	Phonics: Phonics
Phonics: Onset Tapping	Phonics: Letter	Sound Writing with End Digraphs

Collaboration: What is your favorite activity to do in your class? Share with the table.

Vocabulary

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Interactive: Character	Word Tapping: Charts	Segmentation: Character Tapping
Sound Writing: Building Words	Phonics: Word Tapping	Interactive: Word Tapping
Sound Writing: Building Words	Interactive: Word Tapping	Word Tapping: Building Words

Activity: Pick an activity to try out at your table. Take turns being the "teacher."

Comprehension

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Story/Building: (onset)	Story/Building	Text for: Phonics
Phonics: Segmentation	Phonics: Word Building	Text for: Reading
Phonics: Onset Tapping	Phonics: Letter	Text for: Act

Activity: Act out the beginning, middle, and end of the passage the shared story on your table.

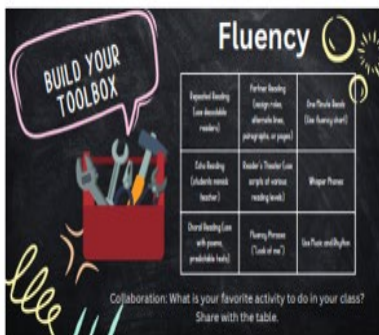
DO I HAVE TIME FOR THIS?

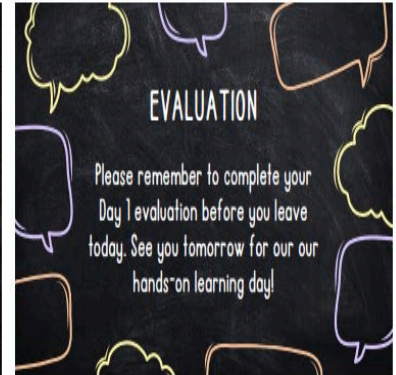
Activity: With a partner plan a weekly schedule to include 2-3 multisensory activities per day.

INTEGRATE	ALIGN	ADJUST
For each component you only need between 10-15 minutes to complete an activity.	Align the activities into the current scope and response that you have.	Using your quick checks and assessments adjust the activities based on student data and response.

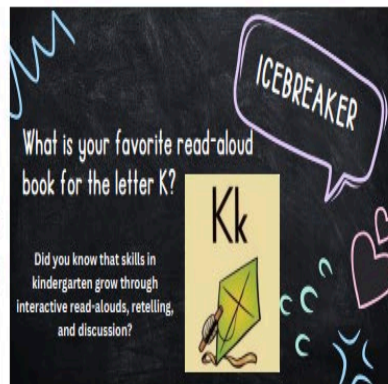
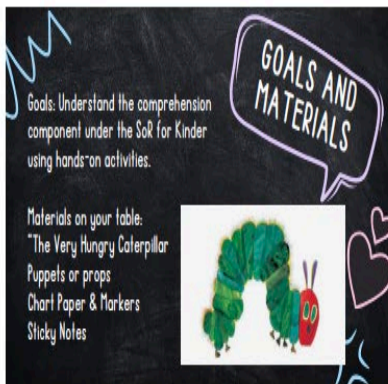
Let's Talk About It: What are your concerns?







Day 2



MY TURN:

- Model Read-Aloud
- Introduce Sentence Frames

YOUR TURN:

- Pick a Different Story
- Make Sentence Frames
- Read Story and Use Sentence Frames

THINK ALOUD & ORAL LANGUAGE SUPPORT

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Stations

Retell Mats/Cards	Comprehension Stems
Mini Graphic Organizers	Discussion Prompt Cards
Prompt for Stories in Unit 1	Sentence Stem Cards

DAY 2

LET'S TRY IT OUT

1st GRADE Comprehension

Goals: Understand how to build reading comprehension in students using explicit, evidence-based strategies supported by the SoR.

GOALS AND MATERIALS



ICEBREAKER

What is a comprehension strength you've seen in your students this year?

MY TURN:

- Model Read-Aloud with Intentional Questioning
- Use Story Map and BME Chart

YOUR TURN:

- Together, practice guiding students through retelling using transition words.

RETELL & SUMMARIZE: TEXT STRUCTURE

MY TURN:

- Use tier 2 words from read-aloud.
- Teach vocabulary using context clues, visuals, and sentence frames.

YOUR TURN:

- Create and present a vocabulary mini-lesson using a shared text

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

MY TURN:

- Model how to listen/respond using structured sentence stems
- Model "Turn and Talk" using comprehension prompts.

YOUR TURN:

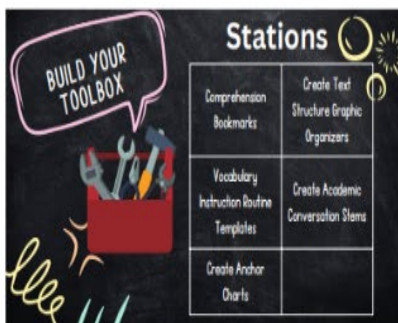
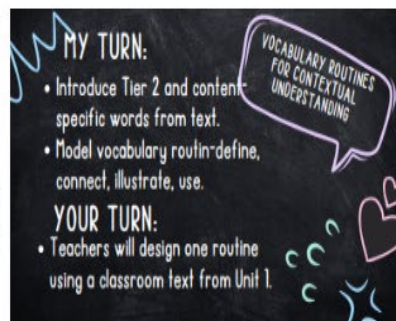
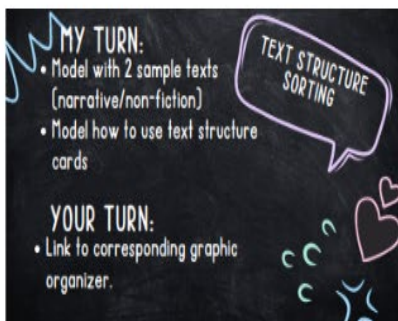
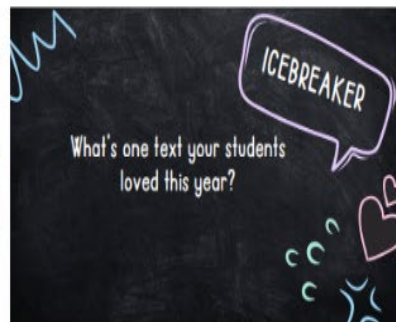
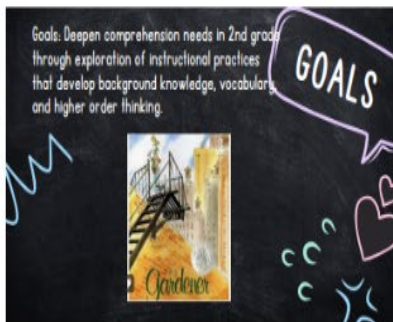
- Create pocket chart discussion stems, "I agree with ___ because ___."

COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Stations

Make Question Stems	Create Graphic Organizers
Create Sentence Frames for Oral Comprehension	Create Sentence Frames for Written Comprehension
Create Text Posters	



Goals: Learn how to incorporate fluency practice in small group and whole group time to build accuracy, rate, and expression

GOALS



ICEBREAKER

What does fluency look like in your classroom?

MY TURN:

- Model using a decodable book with focus shifts (accuracy, expression)

YOUR TURN:

- Small group practice: you will use decodable texts and practice coaching one another.

REPEATED READING WITH DECODABLE TEXTS

MY TURN:

- Model a poem with choral reading
- Model a poem with echo reading

YOUR TURN:

- Work with a partner to create a fluency chart and plan a mini-lesson.

CHORAL AND ECHO READING

MY TURN:

- Model how whisper phones promote self-monitoring

YOUR TURN:

- Work with a partner and use whisper phones for simple phrases or books.

WHISPER PHONES

MY TURN:

- Model fluency with character voice using puppets

YOUR TURN:

- Take turns reading with different emotions or character voices.

PUPPETS AND EXPRESSION

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Stations

Create Fluency Phrase Cards	Create Choral Reading Charts
Create Echo Reading Charts	Create Tracking Sheets
Create Anchor Charts	Create Puppets and Whisper Phones

DAY 2

LET'S TRY IT OUT

1st Grade Fluency

GOALS

Goals: Understand how fluency can be engaged through hands-on activities and identify characteristics of fluent first-grade readers.

ICEBREAKER

What does fluency sound like in your classroom?

REPEATED READING WITH DECODABLE TEXTS

MY TURN:

- Model using a decodable passage read multiple times for different focus.

YOUR TURN:

- With a partner, practice timed, repeated reads with feedback.

CHORAL AND ECHO READING

MY TURN:

- Model a poem with choral reading
- Model a poem with echo reading

YOUR TURN:

- Work with a partner to create a mini fluency poem chart.
- Discuss how to use each method.

READER'S THEATER FOR PROSODY

MY TURN:

- Assign roles for scripts
- Allow short practice of assigned passages

YOUR TURN:

- You will rotate roles to try to read with expression and character voice.

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Stations

Create Phrase Strips	Create Poetry Charts
Create Script Excerpts	Create Good Setting Sheets
Create WCPM Trackers	Create Whisper Phones

DAY 2

LET'S TRY IT OUT

2nd Grade Fluency

GOALS

Goals: Identify developmentally appropriate fluency targets for students under the Science of Reading.

ICEBREAKER

What is your go-to fluency activity?

TIMED REPEATED READINGS WITH SELF-MONITORING

MY TURN:

- Model an instructional-level text for repeated timed reading.
- Model using highlighters to mark phrasing or errors.

YOUR TURN:

- Practice tracking WCPM and graphing data with a partner.

MY TURN:

- Discuss benefits of rehearsal and repeated reading.
- Model emphasizing phrasing and expressions.

YOUR TURN:

- You will read and perform a short script in small groups.

READER'S THEATER WITH ROLE PLAY

MY TURN:

- Introduce phrases grouped by punctuation.
- Model using expression cards (excited, curious).

YOUR TURN:

- In pairs practice using expression cards and construct sentence.

FLUENCY PHRASES WITH PURPOSE

MY TURN:

- Model echo reading with attention to tone and pacing.

YOUR TURN:

- In pairs, rotate roles reading aloud and listening for prosody.
- Use whisper phones to reinforce self-awareness.

ECHO AND PARTNER READ

FLUENCY CENTERS AND INDEPENDENT PRACTICE ROUTINES

- Set up fluency stations: Timed reads, phrasing practice, character reading, WCPM tracker.
- Teachers will rotate through and then plan their own classroom setup.

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Stations

Create Fluency Phrase Cards	Create/Find Reader's Theater Passages
Create Expression Rubrics	Create Fluency Task Cards for Centers
Create WCPM Trackers	Create Whisper Phones

DAY 2

LET'S TRY IT OUT

Kindergarten Vocabulary

GOALS

Goals: Understand how vocabulary supports comprehension and oral language development.

ICEBREAKER

What's a fun word your students have loved this year?

MY TURN:

- Model choosing 3-5 tier 1 and 2 words to pre-teach from a picture book.
- Model using visuals, gestures, and student friendly definitions.

YOUR TURN:

- Practice picking vocabulary from the selection of books at the table.

VOCABULARY THROUGH READ-ALOUNDS

ROTATIONS:

- Vocabulary memory match
- Draw and label a vocabulary word
- Act It Out
- Vocabulary sorting mats

WORD PLAY CENTERS

MY TURN:

- Model using sentence frames to promote academic talk

YOUR TURN:

- Partner Activity: Create oral prompts for weekly vocabulary.
- Use puppets for added engagement.

ORAL LANGUAGE & SENTENCE FRAMES

MY TURN:

- Model word webs: word, definition, illustration, use in a sentence.

YOUR TURN:

- Complete a map for your word and display it.

VISUAL WORD MAPPING

MY TURN:

- Model weekly vocabulary journals
- Discuss word walls.

YOUR TURN:

- Discuss how to embed vocabulary into transitions, routines, and songs.

VOCABULARY JOURNALS & CLASSROOM ROUTINES

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Stations	
Create Picture-Based Vocabulary Cards	Create Sentence Frames
Create Oral Response Prompts	Create Word Webs
Create Sorting Mats	Create Games

DAY 2

LET'S TRY IT OUT

1st Grade Vocabulary

GOALS

Goals: Deepen understanding of vocabulary's role in comprehension and language development.

ICEBREAKER

What word do your students overuse?

MY TURN:

- Model choosing 3-5 tier 2 words to pre-teach from a read-aloud.
- Model teaching word meaning using visuals, motion, and student-friendly definitions.

YOUR TURN:

- Work together to plan a vocabulary read-aloud mini-lesson.

VOCABULARY FROM READ-ALOUNDS

WORD MAPPING STRATEGIES

MY TURN:

- Introduce mapping templates
- Model how to use templates.

YOUR TURN:

- Teachers will practice filling out word maps.

SENTENCE FRAMES & ORAL PRACTICE

MY TURN:

- Model how to embed vocabulary in academic talk.

YOUR TURN:

- Practice using frames.
- Use partner cards or table tents to support routines.

CENTER BASED WORD PLAY

ROTATIONS:

- Vocabulary Bingo
- Match the word to picture and sentence
- Word sorting by category or function
- Build-a-sentence with word cards

CLASSROOM VOCABULARY ROUTINES

MY TURN:

- Together, we will create a shared work wall and vocabulary journal.

YOUR TURN:

- Brainstorm quick-win routines for transitions or morning meetings.

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Stations

Create Word Mapping Templates	Create Word Wall Headings/Cards
Create Picture Supported Word Cards	Create Sentence Starters
Create Oral Language Cues	Create Printable Center Games

DAY 2

LET'S TRY IT OUT

2nd Grade Vocabulary

GOALS

Goals: Learn and apply multisensory, structured vocabulary instructional strategies that align with the SoR.

ICEBREAKER

What's a word your students recently struggled with?

TEXT-BASED VOCABULARY ROUTINES

MY TURN:

- Model choosing Tier 2 words from a read-aloud.
- Model explicit instruction using visuals, examples/non-examples, and student-friendly definitions.

YOUR TURN:

- Teachers will prep a vocabulary lesson using a mentor text.

MY TURN:

- Model using the Frayer Model and Four-Square template

YOUR TURN:

- Teachers will complete sample maps for content-area and literacy words.

WORD MAPPING FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

ROTATIONS:

- Vocabulary Sorts
- Vocabulary Bingo
- Build-A-Sentence

VOCABULARY CENTERS

MY TURN:

- Discuss "Word of the Week," vocabulary journal, and student-led word collections.

YOUR TURN:

- Share quick routines: morning message, transitions, exit tickets.

CLASSROOM ROUTINES & WORD LEARNING CULTURE

BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

Vocabulary Lesson Planning Template	Word Mapping Organizers
Oral Language Stems	Create Printable Word Cards
Vocabulary Notebook Starters	Create Printable Center Games

Stations



VERTICAL PLANNING SESSION 1

VERTICAL PLANNING GOALS

We are here to help during your vertical planning time.

Ensure Instructional Alignment Across Grade Levels	Support Consistent Language and Instruction Strategies	Collaboratively Plan for Intervention and Enrichment
--	--	--

Let's Talk About It: What are your concerns?

VERTICAL PLANNING SESSION 2

VERTICAL PLANNING GOALS

We are here to help during your vertical planning time.

Ensure Instructional Alignment Across Grade Levels	Support Consistent Language and Instruction Strategies	Collaboratively Plan for Intervention and Enrichment
--	--	--

Let's Talk About It: What are your concerns?

Day 3

EVALUATION

Please remember to complete your Day 2 evaluation before you leave today. See you tomorrow for our final day!

DAY 3 OF YOUR LEARNING

FROM UNDERSTANDING TO IMPLEMENTATION

CORE ELEMENTS IN PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

1. Phonemic Awareness
2. Systematic Phonics
3. Fluency Development
4. Vocabulary Instruction
5. Comprehension Strategy Instruction

PHONEMIC AWARENESS

1. Quick, daily oral routines (5-7 minutes)
2. Blending, segmenting, isolating, and deleting sounds
3. Use manipulatives, hand motions, and Elkonin boxes.

Now what: embed into morning meetings or centers.

FLUENCY

1. Repeated reading of decodable texts
2. Model phrasing, expression, and accuracy
3. Use choral, echo, and partner reading strategies.

Now what: Build fluency folders and chart WCPM weekly.

VOCABULARY

1. Teach Tier 1 & Tier 2 words explicitly with visuals, actions, and student-friendly definitions.
2. Use read-alouds, anchor texts, and content-based vocabulary walls.

Now what: Select 3-5 words per week, integrate into routines and center.

COMPREHENSION

1. Focus on oral language, narrative structure, and listening comprehension.
2. Use interactive read-alouds with think-alouds and question stems.

Now what: Use comprehension sentence frames and graphic organizers.

SAMPLE LITERACY BLOCK

- 15 min Phonemic Awareness
- 30 min Phonics & Decoding
- 20 min Small Groups/Independent Centers
- 15 min Fluency Practice
- 20 min Vocabulary/Comprehension Read-Aloud

QUICK-WIN ACTION STEPS

1. Identify one area to strengthen this month.
2. Review current materials and match to SoR-aligned routines.
3. Start small- add one structured routine to your week.

REFLECT

What will be your first "now what" step to bring the SoR to life in your classroom?

WHY COLLABORATION MATTERS

Collaboration allows teachers to transform good ideas into great instruction.

It Matters Because...

- Aligns instruction across grade level classrooms
- Promotes consistent, evidence-based literacy practices.
- Reduces planning load and increases support among peers.

For Collaborative Planning to be Successful, You Need...

1. Clear Goals and Standards
2. Shared Use of SoR-Aligned Resources
3. Focused Data Review
4. Defined Roles and Norms
5. Scheduled Time to Reflect and Adjust

What does it look like...

Review upcoming literacy standards and focus skills. Choose aligned decodable texts and read-alouds. Plan instructional routines (phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension). Assign roles for small groups or center prep.

Your Resources:

Heggerty

foundation
Whole Language Basics

WIT & WISDOM

Collaboration in Centers

- Team-created centers= consistent expectations and rigor.
- Share tasks: one teacher makes fluency folders, another preps vocabulary.
- Use common anchor charts or routines across rooms.

REFLECT

What's one thing you can add or adjust to strengthen collaboration?



Appendix B: Project Evaluation Documents

Diving Deeper in the “How” of the Science of Reading PD- Daily Evaluation

Name _____ Grade Teaching _____

This evaluation is for (Check one):

____ Day 1: Building Your Strategy Toolbox

____ Day 2: Let’s Try it Out/Vertical Planning

____ Day 3: I Understand the How...Now What?

Please rate today’s PD using the scale below regarding your experience building your understanding with a SoR toolbox.

1-My toolbox is not ready

2- I have some tools in my toolbox

3- My toolbox is full but I need support

4- I can share my toolbox with others

1. Content Presented	1	2	3	4
2. Explanation of Resources	1	2	3	4
3. Delivery of Presentations	1	2	3	4
4. Workshops and Practice Activities	1	2	3	4
5. Vertical/Team Planning/Conversations	1	2	3	4

Do you have a better understanding of the “how” of the SoR? (Select one) Yes or No

Why or why not? _____

Will you incorporate any of today’s strategies into your reading instruction? Yes or No

Why or why not? _____

What are you most likely to implement from today’s PD? _____

What are you least likely to implement from today’s PD? _____

Diving Deeper in the “How” of the Science of Reading PD- Overall Evaluation

Name _____ Grade Teaching _____

Please rate the sessions based on how well your “toolbox” was developed to help with your SoR instruction in the classroom.

1-My toolbox is not ready	2- I have some tools in my toolbox				
3- My toolbox is full but I need support	4- I can share my toolbox with others				
Day 1: Building Your Strategy Toolbox	1	2	3	4	
Day 2: Let’s Try it Out/Vertical Planning	1	2	3	4	
Day 3: I Understand the How...Now What?	1	2	3	4	
Day 3: Q&A	1	2	3	4	

Which session(s) did you find the most helpful and why? _____

Which session(s) did you find the least helpful and why? _____

Did this PD improve your understanding of the “how” of the SoR? Yes No

Why or why not? _____

What aspects of the SoR do you feel like you need more support with?

Please share any suggestions for how this PD can be improved.

Diving Deeper in the “How” of the Science of Reading PD- 1 Month Follow Up

Name _____ Grade Teaching _____

Please share using the scale below how you have implemented the strategies from the PD you attended on the SoR.

	1- Did not use	2- Used, but did not continue	3- Consistent in usage
Use of Curriculum with Fidelity	1	2	3
Enhanced SoR Strategies	1	2	3
Team Collaboration	1	2	3
Fluency Strategies	1	2	3
Vocabulary Strategies	1	2	3
Comprehension Strategies	1	2	3
Use of Decodables	1	2	3
Support of Academic Coach	1	2	3

Which items gained for your toolbox had the most impact on your instruction of the SoR?

Which items gained for your toolbox had the least impact on your instruction of the SoR?

What strategies would you like more support for implementing into your classroom?

Diving Deeper in the “How” of the Science of Reading PD- End of Year Follow Up

Name _____ Grade Teaching _____

Please share using the scale below how you have implemented the strategies from the PD you attended on the SoR.

	1- Did not use	2- Used, but did not continue	3- Consistent in usage
Use of Curriculum with Fidelity	1	2	3
Enhanced SoR Strategies	1	2	3
Team Collaboration	1	2	3
Fluency Strategies	1	2	3
Vocabulary Strategies	1	2	3
Comprehension Strategies	1	2	3
Use of Decodables	1	2	3
Support of Academic Coach	1	2	3

Which items gained for your toolbox had the most impact on your instruction of the SoR?

Which items gained for your toolbox had the least impact on your instruction of the SoR?

What strategies would you like more support or additional PD on for the next school year?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me what your understanding is regarding the SoR.
2. What are your school's expectations for using the SoR within the five components of reading?
3. Where are you currently in the implementation of SoR within your classroom?
4. Describe a new strategy that you have used within your classroom for one of the "big" five components (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension).
5. Why is the strategy you described important under SoR?
6. What have you done with the strategy you described that has made it successful within your classroom?
7. Describe a strategy that has been unsuccessful within your classroom. Why do you believe you lacked success within this strategy?
8. What are your school's expectations on transitioning to the new strategies for the components of the SoR? What resources has the school provided you?
9. Describe what a lesson looks like when you teach phonics.
10. What resources do you believe are still needed to help make your lessons more successful?
11. How has your school helped you to implement the new strategies for the components of SoR?
12. Describe to me the impact the transition from balanced literacy to the SoR has had on you professionally.

13. How are you benefiting from collaboration with other teachers on your team, as you work within these new strategies for the components of the SoR?
14. In your everyday teaching, what strategies and components of SoR do you feel have been the most difficult to transition to?
15. How could your school help to make the transition less difficult in those areas?
16. If you were designing professional development, which areas would you focus on to make the practice easier for teachers?