

CHILDREN'S READING REIMAGINED

Changing society by **improving children's reading ability.**



FACTUAL EVIDENCE

- Reading difficulties are associated with:
 - higher dropout rates
 - higher imprisonment rates
 - poorer health
 - higher risk of mental health problems (e.g., depression, anxiety)
 - more frequent use of the welfare system
- Reading difficulties in Alberta have doubled over the last 15 years. School divisions in AB requested funding for 32.6% of their students who are reading below grade level in 2022.
- COVID-19 amplified reading problems particularly early grades.
- 75% of children who do not overcome their reading difficulties by Grade 3 will not read at grade level later.

A successful recipe

- Ongoing training of teachers in our schools.
- Use of norm-referenced assessments to screen and monitor student progress.
- Delivery of evidence-based small group pull-out interventions for children who struggle in reading.

The successful example of two school divisions:

- Fort Vermilion School Division is the fastest growing school division for reading in Alberta. If they can do it in Fort Vermilion (8 hours North of Edmonton), schools in Edmonton-Calgary can do it too.
- The greater St. Albert Catholic School Division saw improvement in children's reading scores even during the pandemic.

Early reading intervention

Approximately 20% of children will experience some degree of reading difficulties and will need additional support. Of these children, 5% will continue to experience reading problems even after receiving effective intervention.

The key features of early intervention are:

- Intensive
- Systematic
- Provide ample practice opportunities
- Provide immediate feedback

Our earlier reading intervention with Grade 1 children followed until Grade 3 showed that we can almost eliminate reading difficulties. Of the **290 children** who received intervention in Grade 1, **only 3** continued to experience reading difficulties in Grade 3.

Collaborators

Greater St. Albert Catholic School Division:

Ms. Cathy Giesbrecht

Fort Vermilion School Division:

Mr. Mike McMann

Black Gold School Division:

Mr. Bill Romanchuk

Lakeland Catholic School Division:

Ms. Pamela Guilbault

LEAD

Dr. George Georgiou, University of Alberta
georgiou@ualberta.ca 780.492.8247

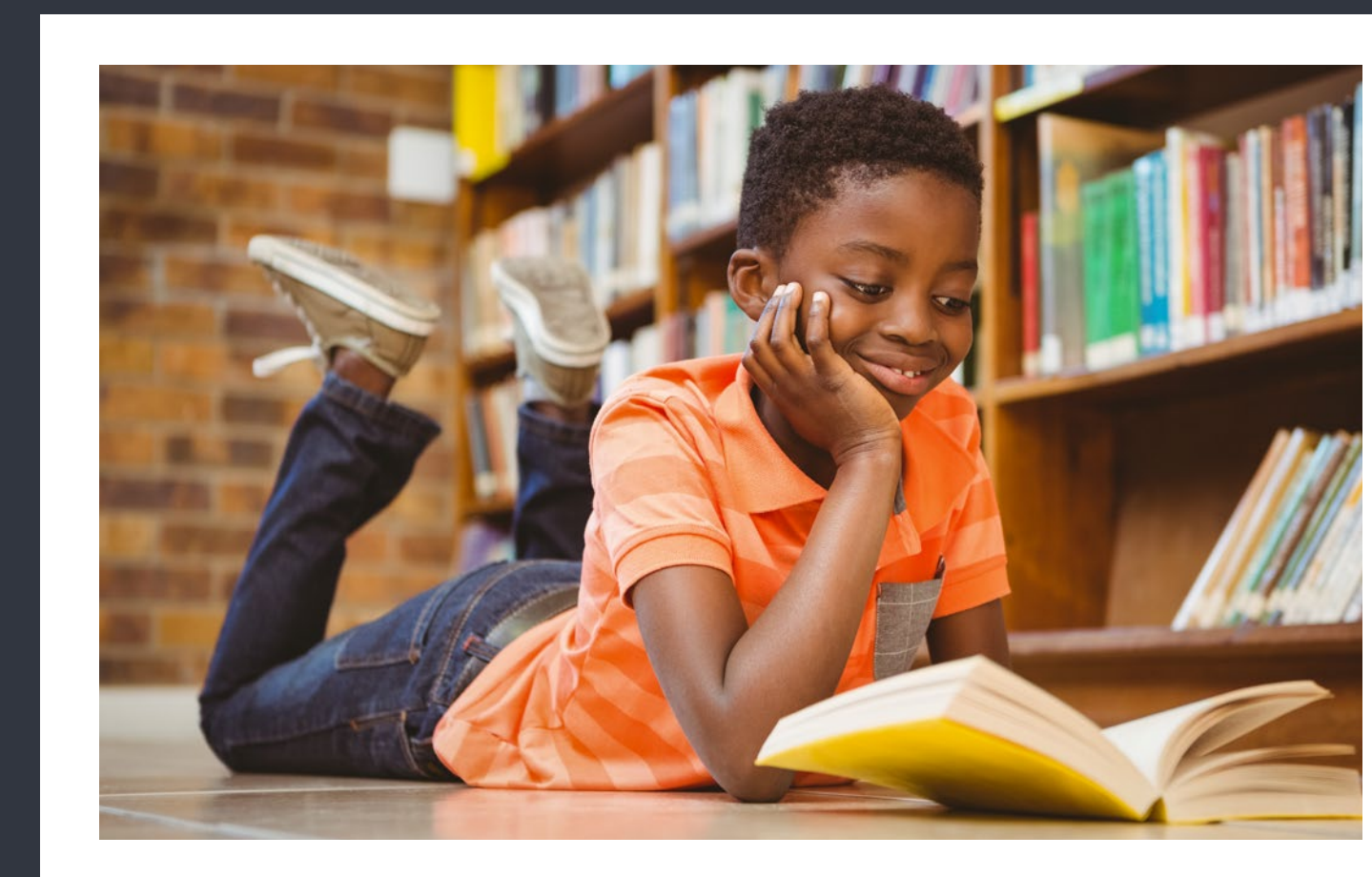
EXTERNAL COLLABORATORS

Drs. Rauno Parrila (Australian Catholic University) and **Robert Savage** (York University)

Project Manager: **Ms. Kristy Dunn**

Funded by: **Alberta Education** (RPP-2021-0010)

DESIRED OUTCOME: ELIMINATE READING DIFFICULTIES TO HAVE HAPPY CHILDREN AND A PROSPEROUS SOCIETY.



Evidence-based early reading intervention can reduce reading difficulties to the bare minimum and protect children against the negative effects of any pandemic.

What did our intervention include?

We contrasted two intervention conditions.

Condition 1: Included 3 minutes of phonological awareness activities, 10 minutes of phonics instruction, 5 minutes of mispronunciation correction, and 10 minutes of shared book reading.

Condition 2: Included 3 minutes of phonological awareness activities, 10 minutes of phonics instruction, 5 minutes of morphology instruction, and 10 minutes of shared book reading.

Our participants

- 1410 children from four schools divisions were initially screened in September by their 85 classroom teachers.
- 273 children were identified as struggling, received parental consent and received intervention.
- 60 trained interventionists (classroom teachers and Educational Assistants).
- The intervention was delivered in small groups (2-4 children per group), 4 times a week, 30 minutes each time.
- Children received a total of 60 lessons.

The Results

- 80.4% of the children who received intervention improved over time.
- **The improvement was equal to 1.5 years and was achieved with 4.5 months of instruction.**

- Both intervention conditions produced equally large effects.
- The effects of the intervention were maintained even when the intervention was discontinued.
- The effect sizes of our intervention were 3 times larger than the reported effect sizes for early reading intervention in meta-analytic studies.

The good news

- The children who did not improve in this intervention project are now part of a follow-up intervention project. They will receive another round of more intensive intervention.
- We created a group of highly-trained interventionists within each school division.
- We shared our reading intervention with Alberta Education, who, in turn, shared it with all schools in Alberta. We have been hearing that school divisions that used our program have achieved similar effects.
- Our intervention is now used across the whole country of Belize to address their literacy crisis.

The not so good news

- Many school divisions in Alberta continue to use ineffective programs to address reading difficulties even when information is shared with them showing that the program they use is ineffective.

- Screening in reading and mathematics has been mandated in Alberta for Grades 1-3. Screening should be mandated for all grade levels, particularly in Kindergarten (the best year to prevent reading difficulties).
- Faculties of Education around the province continue to offer only one mandatory course on literacy. This is not enough to produce teachers who know how to identify and remediate reading difficulties.
- One of the school divisions did not join the new project as they did not have money to provide intervention to their struggling students again.

Next steps

- We hope to see our effective reading intervention program used in as many school divisions as possible.
- We work closely with Alberta Education to improve practices across our schools. We hope to develop and share an intervention program also for upper grade students.
- We will disseminate our findings in top-tier journals and present at local, national and international conferences.

Moving Forward – What do we need?

From the University:

1. Create a clinic at the University of Alberta to diagnose and remediate reading difficulties.
2. Increase courses in the Faculty of Education on reading difficulties and make these courses mandatory.
3. We need a Canada Research Chair Position in Reading Disabilities.

From our Community Partners:

1. Donate money for reading research. This is money worth spending.
2. Advocate for more effective practices in our school divisions. We have the "know how". Make sure it is applied across Alberta.



United Way

Alberta Capital Region



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Chancellor and Senate

Office of the Vice-President
(Research and Innovation)