REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Why I Chose These Components and Strategies

I intentionally integrated **word recognition, vocabulary, and fluency** to support comprehension because my literacy mind map from Part 4a demonstrated how these components interconnect in a branching pattern. As shown in the mind map, word recognition builds automaticity for fluency, Connection A, which then enables comprehension when paired with strong vocabulary knowledge. Tompkins et al. (2021) confirm on page 136 that automaticity in recognizing familiar words allows students to read texts fluently without conscious effort, freeing cognitive resources for understanding meaning.

I selected second third grade specifically because the Michigan Department of Education (n.d.) standards require that students at this level read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension and know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words. This developmental stage represents the critical transition from learning to read to reading to learn, making integrated literacy instruction essential.

The community helpers theme provides culturally relevant, real-world context. As my mind map illustrates through Connection C, vocabulary knowledge supports the meaning-making process that Tompkins et al. (2021) describe as "a creative, multifaceted process in which students engage with, and think about, the text" (p. 221). Community helpers appear across all cultures and neighborhoods, making this theme universally accessible while honoring diversity.

Addressing Diverse Learning Needs

This lesson addresses diverse K-3 learners through focused differentiation strategies. For struggling readers, I provide small group re-teaching with below-level materials, visual vocabulary cards, and extended time. As the Michigan Department of Education (n.d.) standards emphasize, third graders must read grade-level text with purpose and understanding, and my intervention strategies scaffold students toward this benchmark.

For English language learners, visual vocabulary with pictures, sentence frames , such as "The _____ helps to protect our community by _____", and partner work provide language development opportunities. Tompkins et al. (2021) on pages 184-185 emphasize that academic vocabulary instruction has a powerful impact on learning. The kinesthetic motions for vocabulary words provide additional memory support through multiple modalities.

For advanced learners, enrichment includes creating original community helper stories and serving as peer tutors during partner reading. This allows them to apply vocabulary in creative contexts while supporting classmates, a practice that benefits both tutor and tutee.

The 45-minute timeframe necessitated focused choices. Rather than offering multiple intervention and enrichment options, I selected the most impactful strategies that directly support the learning objectives. The pre-assessment informs which students need intervention versus enrichment, allowing efficient grouping decisions.

Adaptation and Extension in Real Classroom

In a real classroom, I would use formative assessment data to adapt instruction dynamically. If the pre-assessment reveals strong CVC decoding skills, I would reduce the warm-up time and allocate more minutes to vocabulary depth and comprehension strategies. Conversely, if many students struggle with multisyllabic words, I would extend word recognition instruction and potentially split the lesson across two days to ensure mastery before moving to fluency practice.

Extension activities could include:

1. **Class Book Project:** Students collaboratively create a Community Helpers in Our Neighborhood book, with each student contributing one page using target vocabulary
2. **Community Helper Interviews:** Invite real community helpers to visit, allowing students to apply vocabulary in authentic conversations and develop interview questions that demonstrate comprehension
3. **Cross-Curricular Connection:** Link to social studies unit on communities and neighborhoods, reinforcing vocabulary across content areas
4. **Repeated Reading Protocols:** Implement fluency-building routines over multiple days
5. **Digital Fluency Recording:** Use platforms like Seesaw for students to record fluent readings and receive feedback, strengthening home-school connections

The Michigan Department of Education (n.d.) standards support this integrated approach, requiring that students "read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression" (p. 17). These extensions provide additional practice toward this standard while maintaining engagement through varied formats.

How the Literacy Mind Map Informed Lesson Design

The mind map from Part 4a served as my instructional blueprint, directly shaping the lesson sequence. The map's visual representation of connections, particularly the portions labeled A, B, C, and D, clarified how skills build upon each other rather than existing in isolation.

Connection A (Word Recognition → Fluency): This informed my decision to begin with the CVC warm-up before moving to fluency practice. The mind map showed that word recognition automaticity must precede fluent reading. Tompkins et al. (2021) on page 136 support this sequence, explaining that reading fluently relies on word recognition.

Connection D (Vocabulary → Word Recognition): This revealed why vocabulary pre-teaching was essential before reading. By introducing multisyllabic vocabulary words, protect, assist, emergency, community, after the phonics warm-up, students could apply their decoding skills to meaningful academic words. This connection between phonics instruction and vocabulary development creates a reinforcing cycle where word analysis skills help students independently tackle new academic vocabulary.

Connection B (Fluency → Comprehension): This determined the placement of partner reading before story mapping. The mind map illustrated that fluent reading must occur before deep comprehension work. As Tompkins et al. (2021) on pages 136-145 explain, fluency involves reading or writing accurately, quickly, and with expression, and this fluent processing allows cognitive resources to focus on meaning-making rather than decoding.

Connection C (Comprehension → Vocabulary): this shaped the story mapping requirement that students incorporate target vocabulary words. The mind map showed vocabulary as critical for comprehension, supporting the Tompkins et al. (2021) definition on page 221 that comprehension is a creative, multifaceted process requiring background knowledge including word meanings.

The mind map's visual design, four components arranged around a central balanced literacy instruction hub, reinforced that effective K-3 teaching integrates all elements simultaneously. The Michigan Department of Education (n.d.) standards on page 17 reflect this integration, requiring that students develop word analysis skills through fluency, while simultaneously building fluency and comprehension. As noted in the mind map's Connection Index, these four components work together to make balanced literacy instruction in K-3 through their overlapping and interconnected nature.

The classroom examples I included in the mind map, word sorts, paired reading, word webs, and story maps, became some of the actual instructional activities in this lesson. This demonstrates how the mind map functioned not just as a theoretical tool but as a practical planning guide, transforming research-based principles into concrete classroom practices.

References

Michigan Department of Education. (n.d.). *Reading standards: Foundational skills (K–5)*. https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/Literacy/Content-Standards/ELA_Standards.pdf?rev=0f76588bc2bd48f89165484fa35d2b31

Tompkins, G. E., Rodgers, E., & Rodgers, A. (2021). *Literacy for the 21st century* (8th ed.).
Pearson Education (US). https://reader.yuzu.com/books/9780135893401

Link to Mind Map:

https://warrendsteinacker-max.github.io/secm-map/