

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Intensive Reading Interventions

Calvin is a fourth-grade boy with a learning disability in reading. He is struggling with decoding and word recognition as well as comprehension in grade-level text. Calvin received reading intervention in third grade to address his reading difficulties along with other students who had similar difficulties. However, the other students made significant progress toward grade-level goals, while Calvin's progress was insufficient to help him start closing the gap to grade-level expectations and successful reading. Calvin's teachers are concerned his slow progress means that he will continue to fall further behind. Calvin is in need of a more intensive intervention to help him be a successful reader. What can his teachers do to plan for a more intensive reading intervention that will help Calvin?

This book is intended for teachers and administrators who serve students with significant reading difficulties in the elementary grades, including students with learning disabilities in reading. Many students struggle to learn to read, and require research-based reading interventions to help them reach grade-level expectations in reading. Most of these students will respond to effective, data-based reading intervention that is designed to meet their reading needs. Yet some students—typically, students with the most severe reading difficulties—do not make adequate progress in standard reading interventions and require more intensive interventions in order to make sufficient growth in reading. These students can also learn to read! However, they may need specialized instruction provided in an intensive intervention to make significant progress. This book is designed with these students in mind. Identifying students with intensive needs and providing sufficiently intensive interventions for them is imperative for their success in reading and future academics. Although the information that we provide in this book can be helpful to teachers working with any student who is struggling to

learn to read, we present a particular focus on the ways in which teachers can intensify interventions for students for whom current reading interventions are not sufficient.

When elementary-age students struggle with learning to read, they are likely to experience further reading and learning difficulties in the upper grades (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996; McNamara, Scissons, & Gutknecht, 2011). Yet by providing intensive reading interventions in the elementary grades, educators can assist students with significant reading difficulties in accelerating their learning (Gersten et al., 2008; Torgesen et al., 2001; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Vellutino et al., 1996; Wanzek et al., 2018). The research base on effective reading interventions provides direction regarding how to adapt or intensify instruction through organizational features and/or instructional delivery that is more individualized and tailored to student needs in order to accelerate their reading (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Malone, 2017; Vaughn, Wanzek, Murray, & Roberts, 2012).

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTENSIVE READING INTERVENTIONS

What can we do to intensify reading interventions and help more students accelerate their learning? In this section, we briefly introduce several ways to intensify reading interventions at the elementary level. We describe organizational intensifications that should be considered at the outset of implementing an intensive intervention for a student. We then define several features of instructional delivery that can be used to intensify interventions in daily lessons and activities. These instructional delivery features provide a framework of intensification that we use in each of the subsequent chapters describing the implementation of intensive instruction in each area of reading intervention. Figure 1.1 provides a visual decision-making process for intensifying interventions for students who are not making sufficient progress in validated reading interventions. Below we provide an introduction to each of the intensifications categories.

Organizational Intensifications

Two common ways to intensify reading interventions are to provide students with more time in intervention and/or instruction in a smaller group. Students with reading difficulties who receive more time dedicated to effective instruction in their area of need increase their reading success (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006; Torgesen et al., 2001; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003). There are several ways to increase the amount of time during which students can receive reading intervention. For instance, the length of the intervention session can be increased (e.g., from 45 minutes to 60 minutes), or the number of sessions per week can be increased for students (e.g., from three times per week to daily intervention, or from one session per day to two sessions per day). When this time in intervention is increased, the intervention is intensified by using the additional time to provide additional instruction and practice. Of course, students with significant reading difficulties may also need a longer duration in the intervention to achieve grade-level expectations.

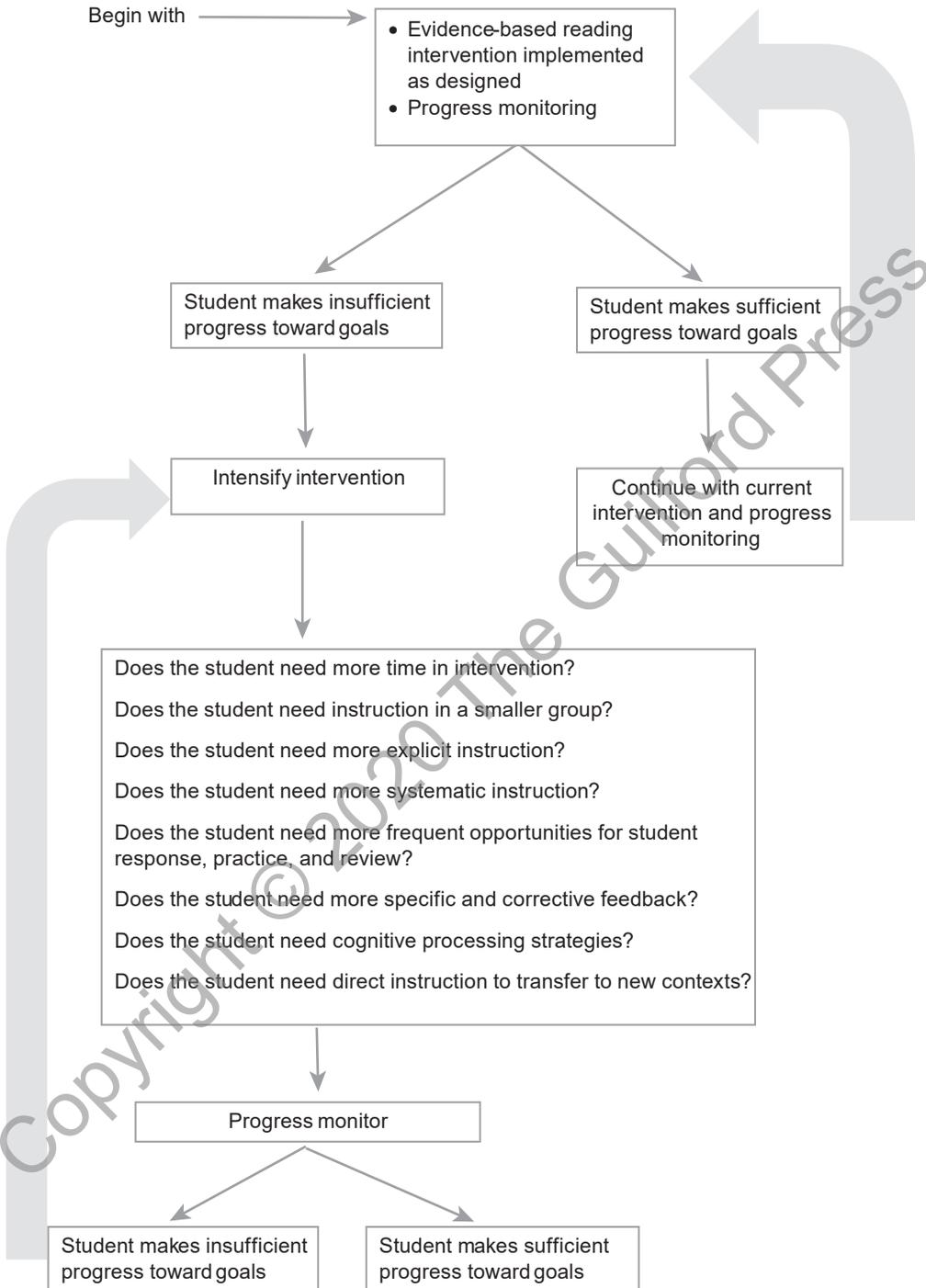


FIGURE 1.1. Intensive intervention decision-making process.

The research also suggests that decreasing the size of the instructional group for intervention can intensify instruction and accelerate student learning (Hong & Hong, 2009; Lou et al., 1996; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Kouzekanani, et al., 2003). For example, while a less intensive reading intervention may be provided to a group of five students with reading difficulties, a student who does not respond adequately to this instruction may accelerate his or her learning if the instructional group is reduced to three students. The smaller group intensifies the intervention by allowing for more homogeneity, so that the teacher can better target specific student needs. In addition, a student receiving intervention in a smaller group may increase his or her practice opportunities, and may receive more frequent feedback on his or her performance from the teacher.

An important characteristic of effective reading interventions is data-based decision-making (Gersten et al., 2008). Student progress is monitored frequently during an intensive intervention to allow (1) identification of student needs that may be further targeted in the intervention, and (2) examination of overall progress in the intervention, to determine whether the student is adequately accelerating his or her learning toward the goals. Decades of research demonstrate that teachers who monitor whether their instruction is effective for students can achieve significantly higher levels of student learning (Conte & Hintze, 2000; Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, & Allinder, 1991; Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005; Stecker, Lembke, & Foegen, 2008). Progress monitoring measures are sensitive to small changes in student reading achievement, allowing for frequent administration (e.g., weekly) and for decision-making within weeks rather than months or years. This ongoing decision-making helps teachers to adjust or intensify interventions to allow students to accelerate their achievement and meet learning goals.

Instructional Delivery Intensifications

Reading interventions can also be intensified in the way they are delivered by teachers. Initial and ongoing assessment provides key information on the reading components that a particular student requires in intervention instruction (e.g., phonological awareness, reading comprehension), but a student with intensive needs may require very detailed delivery of that instruction in order to accelerate learning in the area(s) of need and overall reading achievement. In this book, we describe intensive instruction that is explicit and systematic; includes frequent opportunities for student response, practice, and review; provides specific and corrective feedback; embeds cognitive processes; and teaches for transfer to other contexts. These instructional delivery areas are dynamic in that they can be used to further intensify interventions as needed for a specific student. For example, an intensive intervention lesson can be delivered in a more explicit way (e.g., providing more overt instruction or modeling of the skill or task) to help one student, or a group of students, and can be delivered in an even more explicit way to intensify the intervention further for another student or group of students. To provide teachers and administrators with the tools to adjust instructional delivery to meet student needs, we first describe intensive, research-based instruction for targeted reading components in each chapter and provide sample activities addressing the key components

of instruction. We then provide examples of ways to further intensify each activity for students who continue to struggle with the master concepts despite the initial intensive efforts. Students with intensive intervention needs can accelerate their reading achievement and learn to read, but they require a knowledgeable teacher who can adapt the delivery of instruction on a daily basis to meet their needs. Below we describe each of the instructional delivery categories that we use to intensify reading interventions.

Explicit Instruction

Lessons can be intensified by increasing the explicitness of instruction. Explicit instruction refers to providing overt instruction for new reading practices or tasks. Students with learning difficulties can improve their outcomes when they are provided with explicit instruction showing them how to perform the reading practices (Gersten et al., 2008; Swanson, 2000). When teachers directly present and model new practices step-by-step for students, they are using explicit instruction. Lessons can be intensified by including additional models for students, or by presenting the material in more overt or concrete ways to help students better understand how to perform the new reading practice. For example, though many students may be able to learn to identify the main idea of a passage by learning how to identify the most important aspects of the passage, a student in need of more explicit instruction may need concrete ways to identify the important aspects (e.g., going through the passage explicitly to see which character is discussed most prominently). Explicit instruction is used during initial instruction of new practices or strategies.

Systematic Instruction

Lessons can also be intensified by making the instruction more systematic. Systematic instruction refers to teaching complex practices in small, manageable steps. When students with intensive needs receive instruction that is both explicit and systematic, they can accelerate their learning (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2007; Swanson, Hoskyn, & Lee, 1999; Torgesen, 2002). Some students may require a task or practice to be broken into smaller steps in order to make learning the task manageable for them. This systematic approach can include providing supports or scaffolds for students when they are initially learning a task, to control the level of difficulty as they learn the process. As students gain facility, these supports can be gradually removed in a step-by-step fashion to allow students to master the task or practice independently. Thus, we can increase the intensity of the intervention for students by breaking a task or practice into smaller steps, further sequencing the instruction from easier to more difficult, providing step-by-step strategies for students to follow, and/or providing temporary supports for students to successfully complete the task or practice. For example, the main idea instruction mentioned above may be more systematic by providing students with a three-step strategy for identifying the main idea and then teaching one step at a time to mastery.

Frequent Opportunities for Student Response

Student engagement and practice are key to learning new and challenging tasks or practices. Another way to increase the intensity of an intervention is to provide additional opportunities for students to get deliberate practice with the tasks or practices they are trying to master. Increasing responses for students who have intensive intervention needs also provides teachers with additional opportunities to monitor student learning and understanding in order to make appropriate adjustments to the level of explicit and systematic instruction that students may need.

Specific and Corrective Feedback

Students require specific feedback on their practice attempts to master new tasks or practices effectively and efficiently. Specific and corrective feedback allows students to identify successful practice attempts, or to quickly correct misunderstandings before inaccurate learning occurs. Feedback is one of the most powerful tools teachers have to assist students in maintaining a high success rate in their practice attempts, leading to accelerated learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback is most valuable when it is specific and precise regarding what students have done correctly and what students need to do differently to complete the task successfully. Teachers can intensify reading lessons by increasing the specificity and amount of feedback that a student receives.

Cognitive Processing Strategies

Students with intensive reading intervention needs may have difficulties with some of the cognitive processes that relate to learning to read. For example, a student's self-regulation or executive functioning may affect his or her attention, memory, or implementation of new reading practices (Jacob & Parkinson, 2015; Robertson, 2000; Swanson, Zheng, & Jerman, 2009). Although teaching these processes in isolation has not been found to be fruitful, reading interventions can be intensified if cognitive processing strategies are embedded within the reading instruction. In this way, students can learn to manage the processes within the academic tasks where they need to be applied. These intensifications can be done by embedding instruction to help students (1) set learning goals in reading, (2) monitor progress toward those goals, (3) provide themselves with feedback as they complete tasks, (4) link effort and practice to learning and progressing in their reading ability, (5) talk themselves through tasks or strategies, and through persisting with tasks and inhibiting distractions, and (6) implement strategies to assist with memory load (e.g., graphic organizers, mnemonics).

Teaching for Transfer

Students with intensive intervention needs may learn many new tasks and practices using the intensifications mentioned above. They may, however, have particular difficulty transferring learning from one task to another (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker,

2001). For example, a student may master identifying an individual sound in a word when it is at the beginning of the word (e.g., “What is the first sound in *fan*?”), but may have difficulty transferring that knowledge to identifying an individual sound in a word when it is at the end of the word (e.g., “What is the last sound in *off*?”). Alternatively, a student may master identifying the main idea in a narrative reading, but may have difficulty transferring that knowledge to identifying the main idea in an informational text. Thus, planning to teach specifically for transfer is a way to intensify reading interventions and accelerate learning. Students with intensive intervention needs will need explicit and systematic instruction in new tasks and practices, with plenty of response and feedback opportunities in a variety of contexts. If teachers notice particular difficulty with students successfully performing a task in one context but not remembering how to perform the task at other times, then intensifying the intervention through planned transfer instruction and practice may be warranted.

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS FOR INTENSIVE READING INTERVENTIONS

Students with intensive reading intervention needs in the elementary grades may demonstrate insufficient response to generally effective, evidence-based reading instruction provided in the grade-level classroom, as well as small-group reading intervention. Many schools implement a response-to-intervention (RTI) or multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to match the intensity of instruction to student learning needs (Zirkel & Thomas, 2010). RTI and MTSS models ensure that core classroom reading instruction uses evidence-based techniques that are proven to help students learn to read effectively and efficiently. Sometimes this classroom instruction is referred to as Tier 1 instruction. If a student does not respond sufficiently to this effective classroom instruction, the student is provided with supplemental reading intervention. The intervention is provided in addition to the classroom instruction, typically in a small group, and continues to use evidence-based practices, but allows the student more targeted instruction in any area(s) of difficulty in order to accelerate the student’s learning. Sometimes this supplemental intervention is referred to as Tier 2 instruction. Nearly all students will be able to get on track with reading through evidence-based core classroom instruction and supplemental intervention. If many students in a grade level are struggling with meeting reading expectations after receiving core or supplemental instruction, the problem is likely to be in the validity of the instruction or the fidelity of the implementation, and not a sign of a need for very intensive interventions for many students. Thus, if the core and supplemental instruction are well implemented, using evidence-based practices, there will likely be only a few students who may continue to struggle with reading despite this effective instruction. These are students with intensive reading intervention needs. Intensive reading interventions are sometimes referred to as Tier 3 interventions. Students with intensive needs may also have reading disabilities, including dyslexia.

Student reading achievement can be monitored throughout the RTI/MTSS process to determine which students have intensive needs. In the elementary grades, screening measures are often given to all students three times per year (fall, winter, spring) to monitor student reading growth in core classroom instruction. Of course, informal measures given frequently by teachers as part of the reading instruction can also provide valuable information about student needs. Screening measures should allow a standardized, objective, and quick (a few minutes) check on each student's overall reading performance. These measures should have established grade-level benchmarks to help educators and administrators determine whether a student is on track in his or her reading development, or whether the student may need intervention.

Students who are identified as needing intervention can then be monitored more frequently (weekly or biweekly) with standardized, objective, quick measures to determine whether the prescribed intervention results in the student accelerating his or her learning toward grade-level goals. Again, informal measures given as part of the intervention instruction can also provide teachers with valuable information about student reading strengths and weaknesses. When these progress monitoring measures indicate that a student is not making sufficient progress to meet reading goals, a change in intervention is needed. Simple changes to instruction (e.g., content emphasis, practice opportunities) may be made to accelerate learning. Nonetheless, when a student continues to demonstrate slow progress over time in a generally effective intervention, despite most students succeeding with the instruction, he or she may have intensive needs. Students with intensive needs may demonstrate difficulties in only one area of reading (e.g., fluency), or they may demonstrate difficulties in multiple areas of reading (e.g., word recognition, fluency, and comprehension).

In the upper-elementary grades, some students may not have responded adequately to previous interventions in earlier grades, but may not have yet received intensive intervention to meet their needs. These students may show reading growth that is several years behind their current grade level. Assuming that a lack of access to targeted, evidence-based instruction is not the cause of their problems, these students are likely in need of intensive intervention in order to accelerate their learning and close the large gap with their grade-level expectations. Using a combination of student data and evidence-based instruction will help educators identify students who are in need of intensive interventions.

DATA-BASED INDIVIDUALIZATION PROCESS

Once a student is identified as needing intensive intervention, the intervention needs to be planned to meet the student's specific needs. A data-based individualization process can assist with this planning and implementation. First, the available data for the student should be examined to identify possible hypotheses for the student's continuing difficulties. Any additional data (e.g., a diagnostic assessment) that are needed to generate these hypotheses can also be collected. Some schools implement instructional decision-making teams of educators to regularly discuss student data and generate

hypotheses for students in need of intensive interventions. These teams, sometimes called RTI or MTSS teams, can include general educators, special educators, administrators, reading specialists, speech/language pathologists, school psychologists, and so on. Data that may be helpful in generating hypotheses about student difficulties include the student's previous and current instructional context (e.g., What instruction or intervention has been implemented?; For how much time is the student receiving intervention?; In what size instructional group has the student received instruction?), and informal and formal data demonstrating the types of problems the student exhibits during reading (e.g., fluency, reading irregular words in text, segmenting sounds in words), as well as any student strengths (e.g., decoding regular words, reading text when teacher prompts/reminds student of the strategies). The team can then use these data to make hypotheses regarding the student's continued difficulties. For example, a team may hypothesize that the student requires more explicit instruction and practice in irregular word reading. Based on this hypothesis, a recommendation to intensify the lesson with a greater amount of time spent in irregular word instruction, more explicit instruction in learning the words, and increased opportunities to practice irregular words in isolation and in text can be planned in the intervention.

Once a hypothesis and general plan for intensification are made, the teacher who will implement the intensive intervention can plan to incorporate the recommended intensifications in the daily lessons. In the example above, the teacher would examine the validated, evidence-based reading intervention program and then plan the intensifications (spending more time on irregular word instruction and identifying ways to make the instruction more explicit and places to increase the response opportunities for the student to practice irregular words in isolation and in text). The teacher will implement these intensifications each day of the intervention while continuing to monitor the student's progress in reading. The teacher may make simple adjustments to these intensifications, based on the progress that the student demonstrates during daily lessons and in the progress monitoring data. After several weeks of instruction (e.g., 6–8 weeks), the team may revisit the student's data to determine whether the intensified intervention is working. If the student is showing accelerated learning with a trend toward the reading goal, the team may recommend that the intervention continue as is. In this case, it appears that the hypothesis was validated and that the intervention is working for the student. If the student is showing accelerated learning, but not at a rate that will allow him or her to meet the reading goal, the team may make further suggestions for intensifications within the current hypothesis, or they may generate additional hypotheses using the data. The intervention is then further intensified, according to these hypotheses, and implemented. If the student is not showing accelerated learning, the team may use the additional data available (or may collect further data) to generate a new or additional hypothesis, as it appears that the current hypothesis and intervention are not providing the student with what he or she needs to accelerate his or her learning.

Figure 1.2 provides data from our student, Calvin, who required three changes in intensification before accelerating learning adequately toward his goal. An initial instructional plan for Calvin's intensive intervention was planned based on his needs.

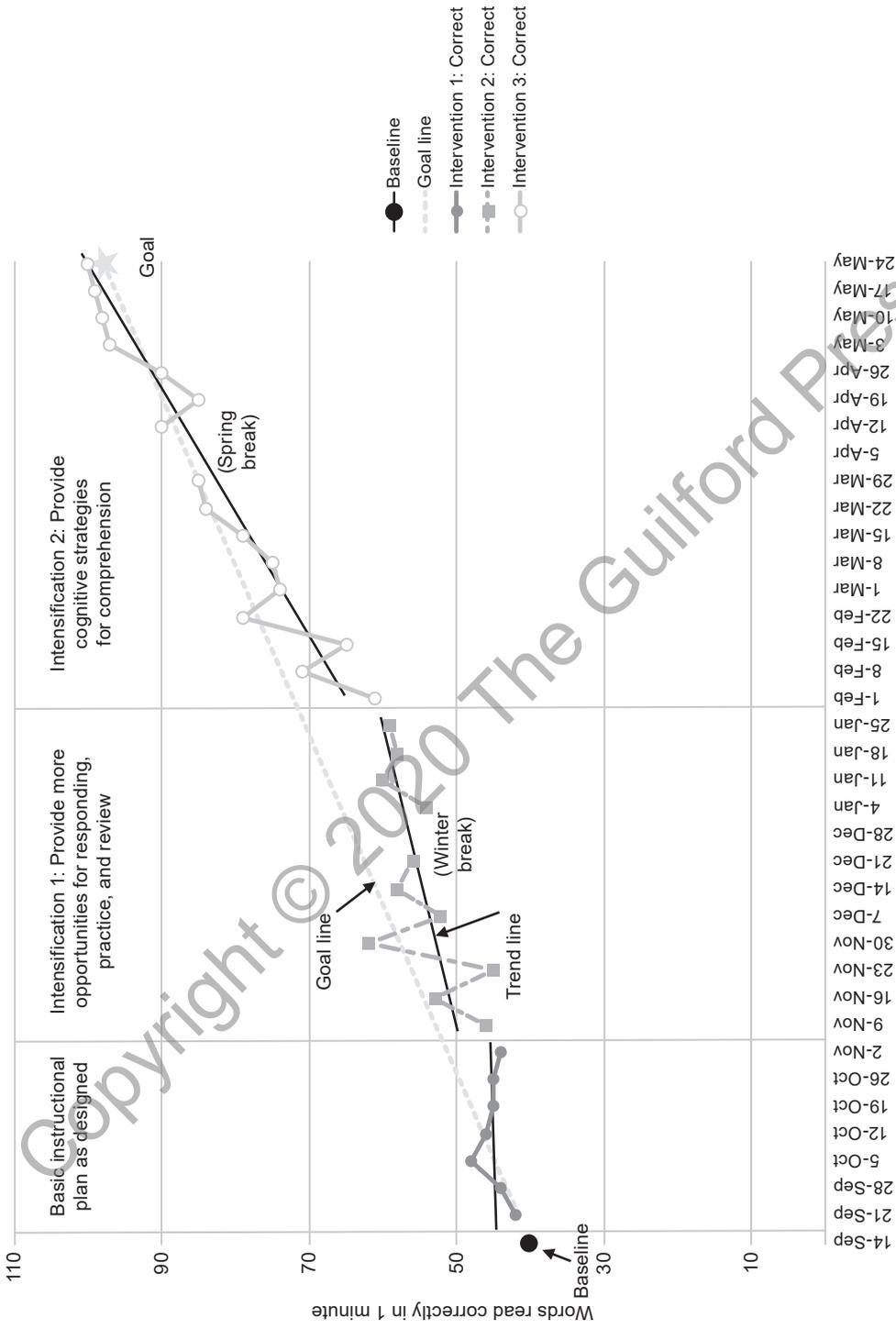


FIGURE 1.2. Calvin's progress monitoring graph.

When his data demonstrated learning below his goal line, the intervention was further intensified by including more frequent opportunities for response and practice in the area of fluency instruction. As this intervention change was implemented, student progress monitoring continued and showed some accelerated learning, but again not at a rate that would allow Calvin to meet his goal. Thus, the intervention was again intensified by including cognitive processing strategies embedded in the reading intervention. At this point, progress monitoring data demonstrated accelerated learning toward the goal. Nevertheless, Calvin's teachers will continue to monitor his progress and will provide additional intensifications if needed later. We discuss Calvin's data, decision-making, and intensifications further in Chapter 8.

THE CHAPTERS IN THIS BOOK

In the following chapters, we provide information on the content and delivery of intensive interventions in each of the components of reading with which students may demonstrate intensive needs. To help educators make important decisions regarding intensive intervention, each chapter first provides an overview of the research on instruction in the identified reading component, and of the essential elements of intensive intervention for students struggling in the component. We then provide specific examples of activities utilizing the research-based instruction discussed in the chapter. Intensifying interventions is a dynamic process of determining a specific student's needs for learning (e.g., some students require more intense feedback than others do). Thus, for each activity we provide examples of further intensifying the activity to meet particular student needs, using the intensification categories introduced in this first chapter.