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The Impact of a Literacy Program on Summer Reading Setback: Providing Access to Books and Project-Based Learning

Tiffany Gayle Robles

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THE IMPACT OF A LITERACY PROGRAM ON SUMMER READING SETBACK:
PROVIDING ACCESS TO BOOKS AND PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

by

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DEDICATION

To my husband Reagan, for always encouraging and supporting me in everything I do. And to my kids Macy, Tyler, and Blake, for always being mommy's number one fans.

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Thank you, Dr. Currin, my committee chair, for all the helpful suggestions, time, and energy you have invested into my dissertation and in me. Your commitment to your students is inspiring, and I appreciate your guidance and support. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. D'Amico, Dr. Tamim, and Dr. Smith, for your time, insights, and effort toward this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

This action research study examined the impact of a summer literacy program on summer reading setback. Gaining Ground is a summer intervention program designed primarily for economically disadvantaged students in Grades K–5. By granting access to self-selected books and implementing project-based curriculum, Gaining Ground aims to improve reading proficiency during the summer break. Faucet theory illuminated the challenge of reaching and maintaining proficiency over break, and constructivism and self-determination theory framed the program's efforts to resolve this problem.

As the curriculum director, I used mixed methods to assess Gaining Ground's impact. Quantitative methods revealed maintenance, improvement, or decline in student participants' reading proficiency as evident in their spring and fall test scores. Qualitative methods yielded additional insight through interviews with area teachers who facilitate Gaining Ground summer programming.

Overall findings indicate Gaining Ground positively influences the reading proficiency of low-SES students, consistent with the organizational mission to narrow the educational opportunity gap. The teachers' perspectives contextualized the quantitative results by revealing several themes: increased student autonomy; accessible opportunities; enhanced literacy skills; affirmation of family, culture, and community; and overall teacher satisfaction with the program. These insights can lead to additional program improvement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I began my education career as a second-grade teacher at a Title I school in 2010 and served as a classroom teacher for 8 years, welcoming opportunities to grow my knowledge and practice of providing literacy intervention to help struggling readers. I then moved into a language arts specialist position and was able to work with kindergarten through third-grade students with the goal of filling the gaps in their reading skills and ultimately helping them read on grade level. Next, I took on the role of instructional coach for a Title I elementary school, where I helped classroom teachers implement literacy practices that enabled them to grow readers in their classrooms.

For 6 of my years in a classroom, I was a looping teacher, teaching the same students in third grade whom I had in second grade. My second-grade students would set reading goals and work hard all year, and I would watch them make adequate growth. By the end of the school year, most students had achieved grade-level proficiency. We would celebrate their hard work and dedication, and I felt a sense of relief that they would no longer struggle with reading. As summer break rolled around, I would say goodbye to my students and look forward to seeing their success the next year. However, when the same students became my third graders in August, many had often regressed from their end-of-year reading level. I always encouraged my students to read during

the summer, so I often wondered why they returned in August significantly behind in reading compared to where they had finished in May.

As I noticed this phenomenon every year, I began to volunteer during the summer months with a group of colleagues who had started a mobile book truck, delivering books to students in our community. When Ellen DeGeneres gifted our librarian a book bus in 2014, we would load up books every week and go into the community during the summer to deliver books. Each summer the number of students increased, and in 2018 the concept of Gaining Ground Literacy began. The mission of our nonprofit is “to develop readers, thinkers and leaders by providing families with engaging literacy experiences and access to high-interest, culturally responsive books” (Gaining Ground, n.d., para. 1). Gaining Ground serves students from low-income families in two districts in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to them by the pseudonyms Swift Public Schools and Liberty Public Schools. My work as a teacher, reading specialist, and instructional coach took place in the Liberty district, and in both schools where I worked, approximately 95% of students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch.

Gaining Ground began as a way to get books to students through a free book fair and weekly book bus at two elementary sites. Currently, Gaining Ground serves six sites: five elementary and one middle school. The nonprofit provides a free book fair in May to each site, where each child chooses 10 free books to take home for the summer break. In addition, Gaining Ground maintains a weekly summer bus route to each neighborhood and apartment complex that

feeds into the school sites. Students can visit the book bus and choose new books to take home. In 2019, Gaining Ground began providing traditional summer tutoring to students attending those sites. In 2020, COVID-19 created some obstacles for summer programming, so Gaining Ground took a different approach by providing virtual summer tutoring. In 2021, Gaining Ground began taking a less traditional approach to summer school by slowly incorporating components of project-based learning (PBL) into the summer tutoring, and in 2022, launched a fully developed literacy-focused PBL curriculum and experience to students at all six sites.

As my interest in volunteering with the program grew, my role began to shift. Once I received my master's in Curriculum and Instruction, I became and currently serve as curriculum director, working with the executive director to create curriculum for the summer literacy camps and train teachers accordingly. I am passionate about Gaining Ground and providing literacy support for students in underserved communities during the summer months, but as we expanded to more schools and supported more students, I began to wonder whether it was working. As we grew our program and incorporated free choice of reading and project-based instruction, I wondered about the impact on student literacy or whether we should incorporate alternative components. In other words, if Gaining Ground seeks to close the reading gap for economically disadvantaged students, I needed to know whether we were accomplishing our mission or whether teachers in Tulsa still faced the challenge I once faced—students' returning to school at a lower reading proficiency than the prior spring.

Problem of Practice

My problem of practice was the lack of assessment of Gaining Ground's impact on student reading proficiency. This problem was significant because we need evidence of our impact on the community we serve if we expect to continue funding the organization. Gaining Ground is relatively new and just began summer programs in 2019. Local partners and organizations support our mission by covering the cost of 10 books for each student at the end of every school year; new high-quality, culturally relevant books each week that a student visits the book bus in their neighborhood; PBL summer literacy programs; and field trip opportunities. As Gaining Ground's components, services, and scope expanded, we needed impact data. My colleagues and I have long believed this program impacts students and their families in significant ways, but we needed more formal student data and teacher insight to make the program even more effective and impactful.

As Chapter 2 explains, providing access to books and facilitating PBL are effective means of increasing reading proficiency (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008; Buck Institute for Education, 2019; Duke, 2014; Leggett & Harrington, 2019; Sahin & Top, 2015). Therefore, Gaining Ground should be effective at reducing summer reading loss. Instead of sitting at desks, receiving direct instruction and reading remediation, Gaining Ground students have access to self-selected books and opportunities to learn through doing and creating. However, prior to this study, I lacked sufficient evidence of Gaining Ground's overall impact on economically disadvantaged students.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

According to Efron and Ravid (2019), action research is “an inquiry conducted by educators in their own settings in order to advance their practice” (p. 2). As an action researcher, I hoped to determine Gaining Ground’s impact on the students and community we serve. Through the cyclical nature of action research, I hoped to enhance the program by analyzing relevant data and sharing my findings, understanding that the findings could lead to new questions. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to determine Gaining Ground’s impact on summer reading setback, also known as summer slide or summer reading loss (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007; Nicholson & Tiru, 2019). Assessing and improving the program’s impact on the reading achievement of early childhood students could contribute to a broader aim of reducing the educational opportunity gap. As I elaborate in Chapter 2, the term *opportunity gap* is an intentional reframing of the achievement gap, the disparity of academic outcomes between students from differing socioeconomic groups. Attributing the different outcomes to different degrees of opportunity illustrates how the disparity is a systemic problem rather than an individual shortcoming.

Traditional summer school programming often falls short as an intervention during the summer break to alleviate summer reading loss (Cooper et al., 2000; Heyns, 1978), whereas Gaining Ground’s summer literacy program focuses on providing students with access to books and incorporating PBL. By assessing the impact of those efforts, my action research study could illuminate Gaining Ground’s effectiveness on reading proficiency during the summer

months to support the program's mission of closing the educational opportunity gap. The research questions I investigated are as follows:

1. How does Gaining Ground impact the reading proficiency of kindergarten through fourth-grade students?
2. What are teachers' perceptions on the impact of Gaining Ground?

The first question reflects my intention to determine the measurable impact of Gaining Ground on reading achievement after summer break. Mindful that action research is not conducive to causal claims (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I sought evidence of stable, increased, or decreased reading proficiency when students returned to school in the fall. In addition to actual reading proficiency data, I also intended to get the perspectives of the Gaining Ground teachers. I was most interested in kindergarten through third grade because the Oklahoma Reading Sufficiency Act (RSA), which I discuss in Chapter 2, applies to that age group and has bearing on Gaining Ground's funding, but I also examined fourth-grade scores. To answer the second question, I relied on teacher perspectives regarding Gaining Ground's impact on summer reading setback and the extent to which the organization is fulfilling its mission.

Theoretical Framework

Three theories framed my study: faucet theory, constructivist theory, and self-determination theory (SDT). Faucet theory reiterated the necessity for this action research by giving me a deeper understanding of summer reading loss. The other lenses framed the intervention Gaining Ground uses and thus facilitated my examination of the summer reading program.

Faucet Theory

Faucet theory (Entwisle et al., 2001) is one explanation for declines or plateaus in reading proficiency, as it illustrates the inequities in education and resources some students experience during the summer break, given that low-SES students make comparable gains during the school year in relation to middle-class and high-SES students. Examining this phenomenon, Entwisle et al. (2001) explained, “When school was not in session, the school resource faucet was turned off. In summers, economically challenged families could not make up for the resources the school had been providing” (para. 7). When underserved students begin the school year with a decline in their reading proficiency, they may spend the majority of the school year making up for the summer reading loss. If schools did not have to devote so much time to remediation, they could more readily close the educational opportunity gap. When students retain access to resources during the summer break, the faucet continues to flow and reading growth can continue to increase for all students.

Constructivist Theory

PBL aligns with constructivism, the theory that knowledge results from experience (i.e., learning by doing), which emphasizes the learner’s active role (Bell, 2020). According to Piaget, learners use schema to interpret new knowledge of their interactions with their environment (Jumaat et al., 2017). Therefore, the learning process is ongoing and continually evolving between the mind and environment. PBL incorporates a significant amount of student choice, autonomy, independent exploration time, and ownership in comparison to

traditional instruction. Research has shown that providing choices to students of all ages often increases their intrinsic motivation and collaboration skills (Kokotsaki et al., 2016). PBL threads constructivism throughout the learning process by providing opportunities for students to take a hands-on, student-centered approach and build new knowledge through interactions with others and their environment.

SDT

SDT posits that motivation is based on three components essential to learning: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (King & Howard, 2016). As De Smedt et al. (2020) explained,

the need for autonomy refers to a sense of initiative and ownership in one's actions. Second, the need for competence entails feelings of mastery and a sense that one can succeed. Finally, the need for relatedness refers to a sense of belonging and being related to significant others. (p. 3)

Individuals with control over these factors are more self-determined, so educators can apply SDT by encouraging student choice with a goal of enhancing intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2020) theorized that intrinsic motivation begins with one's interest and enjoyment and that people act on certain behaviors because of their engagement. Self-determined individuals are "self-propelled to act and thus [have] agency" (Brooks & Young, 2011, p. 49).

As I elaborate in Chapter 2, this theoretical framework aligns with my problem of practice and constituted the backbone of this study, guiding my

research approach. As an action researcher, I also gave careful consideration to my unique positionality. The following section describes how these insights gave way to the study design.

Positionality

As Bourke (2014) explained, “Positionality represents a space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet” (p. 3). In action research, positionality refers to a researcher’s insider or outsider status in relationship to the setting and participants in the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). My position as a curriculum director with Gaining Ground provided me with an insider relationship to the program. I work alongside the program director to write and develop the curriculum and experiences of the summer programs. I incorporate the PBL components into the curriculum and train the teachers on the programming. I work with the program director to schedule field trip experiences and establish community partner relationships. This insider position allows me to collaborate with other insiders in the summer program.

I also considered myself an outsider because of my recent transition to another state. I communicate with the program director often and drive to Tulsa monthly to help implement programming when online or phone communication is insufficient. However, I had to keep my distance in mind when interpreting findings. Because I am not in town for every day of summer programming, I had to rely on my participants’ perspectives.

The program director played an important role in this study, acting as a gatekeeper or bridge to the Gaining Ground teachers who shared their

perspectives. I also considered my position as the curriculum director. I had to be open to accepting responses that cast the curriculum in a negative light.

Moreover, as a researcher and a White, middle-class woman, I had to be especially conscientious of my outsider relationship with the students, most of whom are Hispanic and Black. I approached my research through a culturally responsive lens (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2006) and drew on my prior experience having worked with some of the children in a school setting. Likewise, I shared an insider and outsider relationship with the teacher participants, only some of whom had been my colleagues. Bourke (2014) posited that interpretation can combine how “the researcher accounts for the experiences” and how “participants make meaning of their experience” (p. 2). When analyzing the findings, I needed to be attentive to participants’ ideas and interpretations of the summer reading program.

Research Design

In addition to reflecting on my relationship with my participants, conducting action research gave me an opportunity “to grow professionally, become self-evaluative, and take responsibility for [my] own practice” (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 2). Action research is

an inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them. It is a reflective process, but it is different from isolated spontaneous reflection in that it is deliberately and systemically undertaken and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertion. (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 4)

Action research provided insight for my specific role as curriculum director at Gaining Ground and enabled me to make immediate changes as needed.

A mixed-methods approach was appropriate for my study. I used quantitative methods to determine students' reading growth, maintenance, or decline by looking at Gaining Ground participants' spring and fall reading scores (i.e., before and after the summer program). I analyzed individualized student results on the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR), a computer test the district uses to determine reading proficiency. These scores enabled me to answer my first research question by quantifying reading proficiency with measurable data. To answer my second research question, I used qualitative methods to analyze teachers' perceptions of Gaining Ground during their time teaching summer programming. I conducted interviews to capture participants' "experiences, opinions, feelings, knowledge, sensory, or demographic data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 136). Teachers' experiences, knowledge, and feelings provided insight on Gaining Ground's impact.

Context and Participants

I collected data only from Liberty Public Schools because of my previous teaching experience in that district. Gaining Ground serves two Liberty elementary schools, which I refer to by the pseudonyms Alma Elementary and Evergreen Elementary. For the quantitative data, I sought a purposeful sample of up to 80 students in kindergarten through fourth grade from the two sites. Approximately 95% of students at both Title I schools qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, and 66% of students are English learners. For the

qualitative data, I sought a manageable sample of teachers who facilitated Gaining Ground programming and taught in Liberty Public Schools. The seven educators who agreed to a one-on-one interview in August 2022 (i.e., upon completion of summer programming) provided valuable insight because of their familiarity with the students and schools.

I use the designation of low-SES to refer to the students most affected by the problem of practice. My participants and related research may use generalizing terms such as *poor* or *poverty*, which are considered pejorative (American Psychological Association, 2020). Low-SES in this study refers to the student's family's qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunch.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial part of the action research cycle that involves a “systematic and deliberate process that results in trustworthy and reliable findings” (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 166). Therefore, I engaged in a systematic process to gather findings and interpret them into new understandings, explanations, and conclusions. Specifically, when the 2022–2023 school year got underway, I compared students' fall reading scores to their spring scores to draw insight and conclusions from the summer program. I also reviewed my interview transcripts and aimed to “critically examine my assertions and interpretations to ensure their credibility” (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 184). I triangulated the different modes of data by cross-checking to validate my findings.

The data I collected provided insight for the program director and me as we continue to develop the program and expand to other sites. The action

research cycle encourages critical evaluation as practitioners determine what adjustments to make within their own practice based on their findings (Efron & Ravid, 2019). As Chapter 5 explains, we will use the results to adapt the program components and continue to work toward relieving summer slide and decreasing the opportunity gap.

Significance

The difference in reading proficiency between low-SES and middle- to high-SES students is a national problem that deserves urgent action (Benson and Borman, 2010; Dolean et al., 2019). Within my sphere of influence, my goal as an action researcher was to determine the impact of Gaining Ground in order to reduce the educational opportunity gap in the community where I spent most of my teaching career. Beyond this local impact, the study may also provide insight for others who hope to examine similar programs, especially to identify and enhance successful components.

Additionally, although action research is not obligated to fill a gap in scholarship, this study may add to existing literature by demonstrating how providing low-SES students with access to books and engaging summer programming can be a successful intervention for summer reading loss. As this study documents, Gaining Ground's use of high-quality, diverse literature and project-based summer programming is instrumental in eliminating the summer slide for students in underserved communities in the Tulsa area. Applying these insights elsewhere could ensure even more students no longer have to play catch-up at the beginning of the school year to reach reading proficiency.

Key Terms

This section lists and defines terms that are relevant to this study.

- **Achievement Gap** – the disparity of academic outcomes between students in different socioeconomic groups.
- **Grade Level Equivalency (GLE)** – how a student’s test performance compares with that of other students in the nation. The grade level equivalency number is relative to a student’s grade level and month of schooling. For example, a GLE of 2.4 represents a student who is performing at a second-grade student level in the fourth month of the school year (Renaissance Place, 2021).
- **Low-Income** – a Department of Health and Human Services term referring to an individual whose family’s taxable income does not exceed 150% of the poverty level. In 2021, The federal poverty level for a family of four was \$26,500 (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).
- **Opportunity Gap** – the inequitable distribution of educational opportunities and resources for marginalized students, typically resulting in lower academic proficiency.
- **Project-Based Learning (PBL)** – a student-centered instructional approach that actively engages students in real-world projects to construct content knowledge and skills.
- **Reading Sufficiency Act (RSA)** – the Oklahoma law that intends to ensure all students are reading on grade level by the end of third grade (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2013).

- **Reading Proficiency** – the measure of reading ability and skill, often referred to as reading proficiently on grade level.
- **Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR)** – a computer-adaptive test that measures student achievement in reading.
- **Scaled Score** – a score on the STAR Assessment used to compare student performance over time and across grade. The measure is based on how students respond and the number and difficulty of questions.
- **Socioeconomic Status (SES)** – the measure of a person’s position according to factors such as education, occupation, and income.
- **Summer Reading Loss** – the decline in a child’s reading proficiency that can occur during the summer months when students are not in school.
- **Title I** – a federal program that gives schools funding based on student enrollment in the free and reduced-price lunch program.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is an essential skill that every child should have the opportunity to develop, yet as I noted in Chapter 1, students from marginalized backgrounds often lose reading skills over summer break. During the school year, students can make similar gains in reading regardless of their SES (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Atteberry & McEachin, 2020; Entwisle et al., 2001; Hayes & Grether, 1983; Heyns, 1978; Kim, 2004), whereas summertime setbacks contribute to a reading achievement gap that may be hard to overcome. According to recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 65% of fourth graders scored below proficient on their reading assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Gaining Ground aims to reduce summer reading setback; however, because we had yet to collect streamlined assessments on the impact our PBL-based summer literacy program has on students' reading achievement and engagement, I conducted this action research study. To improve my practice as curriculum director, I explored the following questions:

1. How does Gaining Ground impact the reading proficiency of kindergarten through fourth-grade students?
2. What are teachers' perceptions on the impact of Gaining Ground?

This chapter provides a literature base for reference throughout the study, derived from University of South Carolina online library resources, peer-reviewed journals, articles, books, websites, and dissertations. Taylor & Francis Online, JSTOR, and EBSCO were the primary online databases I used.

The chapter begins by elaborating on my theoretical framework. Next, I provide additional background on the immediate problem of practice before delving into broader conversations on the importance of reading and the achievement discrepancy between students from low-SES households and students from middle- to high-SES households due to disparate access to books and resources. After reviewing research on interventions that provide access to books and summer opportunities in an effort to narrow the opportunity gap in literacy, the chapter expands on the purpose and design of PBL, a central feature of Gaining Ground.

Theoretical Framework

This action research study is grounded in faucet theory, constructivism, and SDT. Faucet theory underlines the need to ensure Gaining Ground is succeeding, while constructivism and SDT are foundational to Gaining Ground programming and thus framed my interpretations as a researcher.

Faucet Theory

Faucet theory explains the phenomenon that occurs during summer break for disadvantaged students (Entwistle et al., 2001). Although the quantity of books and experiences vary by location, during the school year, students have access to books, meals, experiences, and more, such that one study found “poor and

middle-class children make comparable achievement gains during the school year” (Entwisle et al., 2001, para. 10). However, summer setbacks in reading skills harm disadvantaged students because the school resource faucet is turned off (Entwisle et al., 2001). Families in underserved communities cannot provide the same resources or opportunities in summer as more affluent families, which results in their children losing reading skills throughout the summer (Kim, 2004; McDaniel et al., 2017; O’Connell, 2020). Thus, faucet theory articulates an influencing factor in this action research study because of the impact summer reading setback has on students from low-SES families.

Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory suggesting that learning occurs when students take an active role in constructing their own knowledge (Scholnik et al., 2006). Constructivist classrooms, therefore, are student-centered and incorporate student choice, enabling students to make meaning from their personal experiences (Ertmer & Newby, 2008; García et al., 2011). This approach makes learning an active and creative process as opposed to a passive process whereby students acquire meaning. Constructivism has an extensive history with many branches, although Dewey is often credited for pioneering constructivist principles in the early 1900s, especially the belief that education should be experience-driven (Jumaat et al., 2017).

Another individual credited with conceptualizing constructivist theory is Piaget, who observed children through play and noted that learning occurs when individuals interact with various objects in their environment (Phillips, 1995).

Piaget used the terms *accommodation* and *assimilation* to describe the developmental learning process, suggesting, “learners use their cognitive structures to interpret the environment. In doing so, they assimilate new information into their existing cognitive schemas, understanding the information only to the extent allowed by the existing schemas” (as cited in Schcolnik et al., 2006, p. 13). An individual’s schema grows through each interaction, assimilating new information, which makes learning an ongoing and continuing process.

Jumaat et al. (2017) explained the constructivist belief that “students build knowledge by asking questions, investigating, interacting with others and reflecting on the experiences” (p. 2). Vygotsky incorporated the social components to establish a branch of constructivist theory known as *social constructivism*, which emphasizes learners’ need for interaction with people and surrounding objects. These interactions facilitate the potential for learning (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Sanders & Welk, 2005; Schcolnik et al., 2006). As I discuss later in the chapter, PBL is rooted in constructivist theory and undergirds Gaining Ground’s summer curriculum.

SDT

Deci and Ryan (1985) are credited with developing SDT, which, as Prigmore et al. (2016) explained, encourages releasing control in educational settings to increase students’ motivation by recognizing their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Student choice, therefore, can impact reading achievement. Highlighting motivation as an essential factor for student reading proficiency and success, Guthrie et al. (2006) explained, “When students

are engaged in reading, they comprehend better and have stronger reading outcomes” (p. 232). Encouraging students to self-select books promotes ownership of the reading process, which leads to reading growth (Kragler & Nolley, 1996). In addition to enhancing interest and excitement, providing students with a choice enables students to develop strategies for self-selecting their books, reinforcing the likelihood of their becoming intrinsically motivated readers (Fisher & Frey, 2018). As Allington and Gabriel (2012) found, “Students read more, understand more, and are more likely to continue reading when they have the opportunity to choose what they read” (p. 13). Student choice motivates students to read not only at school but also outside of school.

Contextualizing the Problem of Practice

Academic losses over summer break have been a documented phenomenon for the past century (Cooper et al., 1996). This section of my literature review explores that scholarly history of efforts to alleviate summer reading loss, including summer school’s progression from a seasonal break to a time of remediation for struggling students. Next, I provide background on Oklahoma’s efforts to raise reading proficiency through the RSA.

Summer School

Summer school has been a common intervention for alleviating the problem of summer reading setback. Federal and state policies usually focus on “the remediation of reading difficulties and the development of reading comprehension skills through a highly prescriptive curriculum” (Kim, 2004, p. 3). However, a summer break from schooling originally began with the intention of

helping agriculture and farming families (Cooper et al., 1996). As society industrialized, the summer break remained. When pressure to produce well-educated students who could compete with other countries increased (Heyns, 1978), policies encouraged a focus on rigorous standards and objectives. Summers became a time to remediate students who were not performing proficiently in reading during the school year (Denton, 2002).

Oklahoma RSA

Oklahoma passed the RSA in 1997 (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2013) in an effort to improve reading proficiency in kindergarten through third grade. Since then, Oklahoma has passed several amendments to the act, with the most substantial impact occurring in 2011, when an amendment banning social promotion—based on age rather than academic achievement—effectively “require[d] schools to retain students who do not pass a reading test and do not meet other criteria for exemptions by the end of the third grade” (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2013, para. 1). The amendment went into effect during the 2014–2015 school year. According to the RSA (2011), each district should promote reading intervention in Grades K–3 and prevent retention of third-grade students by offering “intensive accelerated reading instruction to third-grade students who failed to meet standards for promotion to fourth grade and to kindergarten through third-grade students who are exhibiting a reading deficiency” (p. 16). Each year, districts allocate funding for students identified as susceptible to reading difficulty at the beginning of the year, and in 2021, 46.5% of all kindergarten through third-grade students in the state of Oklahoma were

considered at-risk (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2020).

Additionally, of the students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch, 42.7% did not meet adequate RSA reading criteria, and 54.1% of Black students and 45.6% of Hispanic students did not demonstrate reading proficiency.

Related Research

This section focuses on existing research that underscores the need to resolve my problem of practice. I begin with a discussion of how opportunities and resources or lack thereof impact student achievement. Next, I explore the educational opportunity gap's role in summer reading setback before turning to studies on potential solutions for summer learning loss.

Reading Achievement and the Opportunity Gap

Reading is fundamental in creating opportunities and opening doors; by enabling people to connect, communicate, and learn from one another, it empowers learners to achieve their goals. However, multiple factors and circumstances can complicate the process of learning to read, contributing to persistent achievement gaps. In fact, the very term *achievement gap* causes complications, perpetuating stereotypes and relying on biased tests (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013; Peterson et al., 2016). Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that focusing on the achievement gap prioritizes short-term solutions, rather than addressing the long-term, underlying problem of U.S. schools' educational debt to minoritized students. Moreover, Charest (2019) questioned constant efforts to increase academic success and instead urged more attention to "ways to make our schools and communities more democratic, more equitable,

more just, more inviting and intelligible to outsiders, and more sustainable” (p. 21). Acknowledging this disparity, I use the term *opportunity gap* throughout this study, unless I am referring to literature that uses the term *achievement gap*.

The NAEP defines the achievement gap as “when one group of students (e.g., students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019, para. 1). When referencing the opportunity gap’s impact on students, Benson and Borman (2010) posited, “by the time students in the United States enter high school, socially disadvantaged students and students from minority race/ethnic groups lag substantially behind their more advantaged and majority counterparts in fundamental reading skills” (p. 1339). Over a decade later, this nationwide gap continues to expand.

Federal mandates to ensure reading proficiency have focused on students from underserved communities and high-poverty backgrounds because the educational opportunity gap between low-income and affluent students has long been a source of alarm for educators and policymakers (Mraz & Rasinski, 2007). Despite such reform efforts, the 2019 NAEP showed a decline in fourth-grade reading proficiency and a clear gap: 21% of students eligible for subsidized lunch programs scored at or above the proficient level, whereas 51% of students who did not qualify for subsidies scored at or above the proficient level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Other variables can affect reading proficiency, such as letter naming and phonemic awareness, but the strong correlation between students from low-SES backgrounds and low reading

proficiency is undeniable (Dolean et al., 2019). In addition, Compton-Lilly and Delbridge (2019) also explained other challenges that impact low-SES students' school performance and literacy skills: nutritional needs, living in dangerous neighborhoods, disparate access to health care, and a lack of resources supporting early literacy learning.

Beyond the academic concerns, some research suggests a strong correlation between reading difficulties and delinquency (Christle & Yell, 2008; Fantuzzo et al., 2019; Maguin & Loeber, 1996; Metsala et al., 2017). A meta-analysis by Maguin and Loeber (1996) found that "poor academic skills, particularly in reading, do not directly cause delinquency and incarceration; yet youths with poor academic skills are disproportionately found in the criminal justice system" (p. 150). Those findings bear out in more recent research, as well. According to Metsala et al. (2017), a lack of early literacy skills is associated with behavior problems for youth. Similarly, Fantuzzo et al. (2019) claimed, "problems in early reading have been linked to negative academic and life outcomes including later academic problems, high school dropout, and juvenile justice involvement" (p. 326).

To examine the long-term effects of summer learning differences between students from varying socioeconomic levels, Alexander et al. (2007) analyzed achievement scores from a longitudinal study that followed 790 students from first grade to beyond high school. They concluded that during the academic school year, low-SES students were able to keep up academically with their wealthier peers. However, in the early years of schooling, the summer breaks

caused low-SES students to fall behind academically year after year. In contrast, Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003) demonstrated that the reading achievement of high-SES children can stay the same or even slightly increase. Xu and De Arment (2016) attested that a child's SES within their first 5 years "remains a strong predictor of the child's probability for achievement throughout the school-aged years and beyond" (p. 89). A student's opportunities to access texts and other resources are vital to combatting these trends.

Text Access and Choice

One factor that contributes to the opportunity gap in literacy is the disparate access to text for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Allington et al., 2010; Constantino, 2005; Evans et al., 2010; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Sawyer et al., 2018 Schacter & Jo, 2005). Evans et al. (2010) reported that children who grow up in homes with at least 20 books attain 3 years more schooling compared to children who have little access to books at home. According to Neuman and Celano's (2001) cornerstone study of four low- and middle-income communities, "Differences in access could influence the degree of familiarity with book language and the cognitive behaviors associated with reading, helping to explain the substantial educational differences among low- and middle-income children in beginning formal instruction" (p. 11). In addition to having fewer books at home, children from low-income communities also have less opportunity to visit places with books, such as libraries. Neuman and Celano (2001) found, "Low-income communities had smaller overall collections, fewer books per child, and more limited nighttime hours than those in middle-income

communities” (p. 22), while a more recent study by Neuman and Moland (2016) found that middle-income neighborhoods had 18 times more books for sale than low-income neighborhoods, which they referred to as book deserts.

Providing children access to books is imperative for motivating them to read. Research shows that providing access to books is statistically significant in increasing reading achievement during the summer break (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008). Simply put, if students do not have books to read, they are less likely to engage in voluntary reading, limiting literacy development (Krashen, 2013). Likewise, as Fisher and Frey (2018) asserted, “To raise the volume of reading outside the school day, students must have access to texts” (p. 91). Therefore, expanding access to books during the summer months can minimize summer reading loss (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008).

Limited access to books at home can also influence parent–child interactions. Reading aloud, especially at home, provides children an “opportunity to learn about the world, acquire more sophisticated vocabulary beyond their everyday language, and understand how decontextualized language works” (Bridges, 2013, p. 22). If students lack access to books at home for rich, engaging read-alouds, they can miss out on these experiences.

Not only do students need access to books, but they also need access to books of interest, which increase the likelihood of reading. Students who can self-select books become more motivated to read and experience increased excitement about reading (Fisher & Frey, 2018). An increase in intrinsic motivation can also yield additional time spent reading, which leads to an

improvement in reading achievement (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Allred & Cena, 2020; Brozo & Flynt 2008; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004). Therefore, in efforts to narrow the opportunity gap, choice is “crucial for engaging struggling or reluctant readers or for improving reading achievement” (Allred & Cena, 2020, p. 33).

Access to Resources and Experiences

The opportunity gap also manifests in a student’s access to resources and experiences, especially in the summer (Entwisle et al., 2001; Nicholson & Tiru, 2019). Students from middle- or high-SES backgrounds may engage in “summer activities that lack formal curricula but support informal learning and engagement such as membership on sports teams, extracurricular classes, and visits to parks, libraries, museums, and the like” (Xu & De Arment, 2016, p. 90). Low-SES students may not have opportunities such as attending day camps, taking swimming lessons, traveling, visiting local parks, and playing organized sports. Summer programs for students from low-income households should include activities that provide similar experiences.

Summer Reading Setback

Opportunities to read and interact with text are fundamental for creating proficient readers, yet according to faucet theory, during the summer, the faucet is turned off for students from lower-SES communities, resulting in inequitable resources and opportunities (Entwisle et al., 2001). This opportunity gap results in summer reading setback, which is also known as summer reading loss or summer slide, “when students return to school after summer vacation with diminished reading skills, presumably from a lack of adequate reading practice”

(Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003, p. 69). During summer, “student learning decreases or does not improve for many students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds as well as racial and ethnic minorities, particularly males, and this loss has cumulative negative effects over time and generations” (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2020, p. 211).

The number of studies that show the negative impact of summer break on low-SES students’ reading proficiency is alarming (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2008; Entwisle et al., 2001; Hayes & Grether 1983; Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2020; Lenhoff et al., 2020; McCombs et al., 2014; McGill-Franzen et al., 2016). As McGill-Franzen et al. (2016) claimed, “summer slide in achievement really exists, and it disproportionately affects children from low-income families” (p. 585). This negative impact can have a lifelong influence on students if interventions are not implemented during the summer break.

Summer reading setback is so prevalent a phenomenon that researchers have worked for more than a century to resolve it. Cooper et al. (1996) noted that the earliest study to examine the more general concept of summer learning loss was conducted in 1906 and emphasized the regression of students’ math skills, followed by more research on academic loss in reading and mathematics throughout the 20th century. In the 1970s, the research base became substantial and focused more on connections to students’ SES, owing to Heyns’s (1978) pioneering work. In a comprehensive study, Heyns followed approximately 1,000 sixth and seventh graders in Atlanta Public Schools for 2 years, including summers, and studied their academic achievement scores from spring to fall to

measure the effects of summer learning or loss. Heyns found that students from different socioeconomic backgrounds make similar gains during the school year. However, students from low-SES backgrounds lose academic skills over the summer break. Another component of Heyns' research determined that reading activity consistently correlated to reading gains during the summertime, including a strong correlation between summer reading gains and the number of books read and the frequency of leisure reading. Heyns (1978) concluded, "the single summer activity that is most strongly related to summer learning is reading" (p. 161), suggesting programs like Gaining Ground that provide underserved students with better access to books and opportunities to read during the summer break can combat summer academic loss.

Other researchers have sought to explain the connection between reading proficiency and summer. Hayes and Grether (1983) studied 600,000 New York City students to investigate the effects of school breaks on reading and discovered variable impact based on SES, attributing 80% of the achievement difference by sixth grade to summer reading loss. By the 1990s, Cooper et al. (1996) completed a meta-analysis of 39 research studies that examined the effects of summer vacation on reading achievement for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Their findings confirmed prior studies, indicating that low-SES students, in comparison to middle- and high-SES students, have a significant loss in reading skills over the summer break. They posited that the achievement gap occurring from summer setback is 3 months on average.

Moving into the current century, one study analyzed the effects of providing text to economically disadvantaged students in Grades 1 and 2 over a 3-year period (Allington et al. 2010). Students from 17 elementary schools were able to self-select 12 books to take home at the end of each school year. A scaled-score assessment of students who received the books compared to the control group indicated the positive influence that providing low-SES students access to books has on their reading achievement.

A consistent theme throughout scholarship on summer reading setback is that “summer vacation periods seem to reliably produce differences in reading achievement among economically advantaged and disadvantaged children” (Allington et al., 2010, p. 414). As scholars brought national attention to summer reading loss, they endorsed compensatory federal programs, such as Title I, part of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act that provides funding for schools with a high number of students from low-income households and also supports summer programs to narrow the opportunity gap.

However, some researchers have cautioned against traditional summer school models that only include explicit phonological awareness and phonics remediation (McGill Franzen et al., 2016). A current trend in education highlights the science of reading for increasing reading proficiency (Goodwin & Jimenez, 2021). The science of reading framework emphasizes structured literacy instruction that includes intensive phonemic awareness and phonetic decoding training, along with repeated practice of reading controlled text. Despite some support for this intensive and explicit remediation for reading, my study examines

alternative approaches to summer reading interventions, more in line with Gaining Ground's activities. The next section provides scholarly support for such alternatives to traditional summer school.

Summer Reading Intervention

In the past 50 years, scholars from a variety of perspectives have applied different approaches to research potential interventions for limiting summer reading loss, including providing access to books and summer programming. Much of this literature draws on Heyns's (1978) pioneering work. For example, Kim (2004) sought to determine the impact of reading books during the summer on students' fall reading proficiency and also examined the impact of providing access to books on summer reading volume. Data from 18 socioeconomically diverse elementary schools led Kim to conclude that students with more access to books and who read more books over the summer had higher fall reading achievement scores.

Furthering Kim's previous research, Kim and Quinn (2013) conducted a meta-analysis on students in 41 kindergarten through eighth-grade classrooms and noted any interventions occurring at home to eliminate summer reading setback. They found that book-reading activities at home and research-based summer reading instruction improved students' reading outcomes. They also found that low-SES students experience significant benefits from summer school, underscoring the value of programs that provide books for reading at home and incorporate research-based practices.

Schacter and Jo (2005) studied the effects of a summer day camp on 72 first-grade students, with a control group of 90 students. The 7-week intervention consisted of 2 hours of daily reading instruction, with the remainder of each day involving summer camp activities. The reading curriculum emphasized phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension skills. Children in the intervention group achieved significantly higher on measures of decoding, further suggesting that summer interventions can help low-SES students gain reading skills.

To that end, Denton et al. (2010) examined a kindergarten summer school reading program in four high-poverty schools. Students were assigned to a treatment group or a control group for 20 days. The intervention for the treatment group focused on phonological awareness and comprehension as compared to the traditional summer school provided to the control group. Pre- and post-intervention assessments revealed that students who attended the experimental, more intensive summer reading program made significantly higher gains in reading and listening comprehension, yet the researchers found no statistical difference in oral reading fluency and vocabulary.

In a similar study, Johnston et al. (2015) examined the effects of a 3-week summer reading program on students from low-SES backgrounds. The program, which aimed to reduce summer reading setback, was comprised of 3-hour sessions using evidence-based activities to improve reading fluency and comprehension. Participants included 13 students from second through seventh grade, and a pre- and post-intervention test of their oral reading fluency and

reading comprehension showed a positive effect, as compared to non-participants who showed a summer reading decline. The study illustrates the value of explicit evidence-based intervention strategies in summer programs to lessen the decline in summer reading.

McEachin et al. (2018) reviewed summer learning programs and determined the components likely to produce gains. One feature of note was small class sizes—fewer than 20 students. Another component was the program’s alignment to student needs. In addition, the researchers found a need to include qualified teachers providing high-quality instruction and efforts to maximize participation and attendance. Finally, they recommended programs should have an adequate duration, running at least 5 weeks.

Nicholson and Tiru (2019) studied the impact of a summer school intervention program for students from low-income families. The participants included 72 students: 36 who participated in the summer reading program and 36 in the control group. The summer program lasted 3 weeks and provided explicit reading interventions targeted to the needs of each student. Using pre- and post-intervention data in search of improvements in students’ phonemic awareness, reading, and spelling, the researchers found that the intervention helped students make gains in reading accuracy and decoding skills, but students had no growth in reading comprehension. Nicholson and Tiru found that the summer slide for students from low-income families calculated to 5.8 months of reading loss. Their study, focused on explicit teaching of skills by incorporating decoding and

phonological awareness skills, showed success at improving struggling readers' summer development.

Finally, Bell et al. (2019) compared two approaches to combatting summer reading loss: tutoring and access to books. To determine which method was more successful at narrowing the summer reading setback for low-SES students, they enlisted 100 students aged 6–14 who were reading one grade level below their peers and 89% of whom received free or reduced-price lunch. Students from both treatment groups significantly increased their reading achievement; however, the students provided with access to books had a more significant gain in reading fluency, while neither group gained in reading comprehension.

Other studies have found that a traditional summer school model fails to produce results for students from low-income households (Cooper et al., 2000; Heyns, 1978). One meta-analysis revealed that middle-class students often benefit more from summer school than low-SES students (Cooper et al., 2000). Poor attendance, due to inconsistent transportation or low engagement, can also impede the impact of summer school (Schacter & Jo, 2005). An additional barrier to the success of summer school is that due to federal or local laws, it may not be fully funded until after third grade, at which point struggling readers may already have too much to overcome in a short summer program. Finally, traditional summer school may use curriculum that is not research-based and does not incorporate high-quality practices (Pipho, 1999).

While methods for summer school vary, many of these studies offer evidence that providing students in underserved communities with access to

books or other effective summer reading interventions can combat summer reading loss. These interventions focus on narrowing the educational opportunity gap. Therefore, as this action research study sought to verify, Gaining Ground's summer reading program should be a successful intervention, especially with its emphasis on PBL.

PBL

As I shared in Chapter 1, a primary component of Gaining Ground's solution to summer learning loss is PBL, a teaching method in which students learn by active engagement in personally meaningful and authentic real-world projects (Buck Institute for Education, 2017; Jumaat et al., 2017). A type of hands-on learning, PBL enables students to build skills and knowledge by working through a variety of activities (Tamim & Grant, 2013). Responding to a complex question, problem, or challenge, students exhibit "active participation and deep learning" (Makgato, 2012, p. 1399) in the process of working toward a final project or product. Through questioning and discovery, among other cognitive processes, they make meaning from their experiences.

In addition to the broader benefits of PBL (Buck Institute for Education, 2019; Sahin & Top, 2015), in the context of this study, PBL is a "more effective, compelling, and invigorating way to teach students to read and write" (Duke, 2014, p. 11). Leggett and Harrington (2019) noted project-based instruction's positive impact on academic achievement, "both when comparing against standardized achievement tests, as well as a student's ability to demonstrate their depth of understanding" (p. 6). To elaborate on PBL's potential, the

following sections describe its essential elements and review research on the effect of and barriers to PBL.

Essential Elements

PBL is grounded in three constructivist principles: “learning is context-specific, learners are involved actively in the learning process[,] and they achieve their goals through social interactions and the sharing of knowledge” (Kokotsaki et al., 2016, p. 267). To reflect these principles, programs should attend to seven essential elements of project design: (a) a challenging problem or question; (b) sustained inquiry; (c) authenticity, incorporating real-world scenarios that relate to students’ lives; (d) student voice and choice; (e) reflection on successes, approaches, and obstacles; (f) critique and revision, giving students two-way experience with peer feedback; and (g) a public product, extending the learning beyond the classroom setting (Buck Institute for Education, 2019). Confirming the value of sustained inquiry and a public product, Duke (2016) insisted a project-based unit should involve students’ working “for a purpose beyond satisfying a school requirement—to build something, to create something, to respond to a question they have, to solve a real problem, or to address a real need” (p. 11).

Similarly, Katz and Chard (1992) suggested students’ involvement in the project-based work typically leads to feelings of enjoyment, confidence, enthusiasm, and self-satisfaction. Achieving these outcomes depends on successful design and implementation, including “the teacher’s ability to effectively scaffold students’ learning, motivate, support and guide them along the way” (Kokotsaki et al., 2016, p. 272). Therefore, in the context of this study,

facilitating engagement and incorporating literacy are essential to providing high-quality learning experiences.

Facilitating Engagement

PBL allows students to make sense of their own questions through human collaboration and the use of authentic resources (Duke et al., 2021; Hertzog, 2007), which typically results in deeper engagement, both because students have more freedom and experience more challenges (Kokotsaki et al., 2016). PBL's emphasis on student choice and autonomy, drawing on principles of SDT (De Smedt et al., 2020), leads to students' being more intrinsically motivated. When students can connect content to their lives, projects become "a fun privilege," whereby students "develop ownership" and "truly take responsibility for their learning" (Sahin & Top, 2015, p. 30). When students are engaged in their learning, they are more likely to make academic growth.

Incorporating Literacy

Although PBL has a wide range of academic applications, this action research study focuses specifically on literacy. Duke (2016) suggested PBL is conducive to literacy instruction because "projects often involve a great deal of reading and writing" (p. 5). Moreover, Purcell-Gates et al. (2007) found that when students read and write for authentic, specific purposes beyond mastery of a standard, they are more likely to experience growth. More recently, "calls for reform in literacy education emphasize meaningful uses of literacy tools of reading, writing, and oral language, as well as meaningful engagement in disciplinary practices" (Fitzgerald, 2020, p. 577). PBL demands such exemplary

literacy instruction because the assignments are authentic, student-directed, and challenging (Parsons et al., 2010). Students can actively construct knowledge while the teacher scaffolds their learning throughout the process and through meaningful interactions with text. PBL also supports reading comprehension by encouraging inquiry, exploration, and analysis (Chu et al., 2011).

Research on PBL

Many studies on PBL look beyond the elementary school level. Revelle et al. (2020) countered this perception that it “can only be used successfully with older students and/or gifted students,” citing promising “studies involving students from as early as first grade and with varying ability levels” (p. 698). Given the context of my study, this section examines research on the effects of implementing literacy through PBL in the elementary classroom.

Halvorsen et al. (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study on teaching social studies and literacy through PBL to determine if using such an approach would narrow the achievement gap between low-SES students and their more affluent peers. The participants included four teachers from low-SES settings and two teachers from high-SES settings and their students. Teachers in the low-SES schools implemented two project-based units using social studies and literacy standards. Students in the low-SES schools performed statistically equivalent to students in the high-SES schools in social studies and reading, suggesting PBL can, in fact, narrow the educational opportunity gap.

Parsons et al. (2010) conducted a teacher research study on project-based instruction at a Title I site, where 86% of the student body qualified for free

or reduced-price lunch. Acknowledging that teachers at high-poverty schools typically feel pressure to simplify instruction in order to raise student test scores, the authors provided professional development on high-level literacy instruction through PBL, involving the teachers as active participants. From interviews conducted to determine the effect of teachers' dispositions on project-based literacy instruction, four themes emerged regarding what went well: student engagement, student learning, student collaboration, and student independence. The authors also identified four obstacles: time, resources, classroom management, and teacher restraint.

Chu et al. (2011) conducted a mixed-methods study on the impact of PBL and collaborative teaching on reading ability and attitudes, using pre- and post-intervention literacy scores and surveys. The results showed not only an improvement in students' attitudes toward reading but also a statistically significant increase in informational and literacy reading performance. The study's findings illustrate the principle of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1993) that when students have better perceptions of their reading abilities, they are more likely to make learning gains.

Duke (2020) studied the impact of PBL on second graders' social studies and literacy learning and motivation. The study included 48 second-grade teachers and their students from 20 high-poverty elementary schools, chosen based on having at least 65% of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, with the average being 80%. Teachers in the experimental group taught four PBL units on social studies and informational reading and writing. The

control group continued to teach a state curriculum that included a social studies reading textbook. The experimental group scored significantly higher than the comparison group for informational reading and social studies. The researchers noted no statistically significant difference between the two groups for informational writing and motivation.

As discussed, PBL has proven to be an effective method of helping students make sense of what they are learning. It also provides opportunities for students to be autonomous in their learning (Becerra-Posada et al., 2022). Regarding the educational opportunity gap, research also suggests low-SES students need access to engaging instruction that promotes critical thinking, such as PBL (Kingston, 2018). To meet that need, programs like Gaining Ground must be aware of and seek to overcome the barriers associated with PBL.

Barriers to PBL

Although PBL is a highly successful tool that engages learners and deepens their critical thinking skills (Buck Institute of Education, 2019), it has some limitations and drawbacks. Teachers sometimes face obstacles in using PBL that include time, resources, classroom management, teacher restraint, and integration of content (Alves et al., 2016; Fitzgerald, 2020; Hertzog, 2007; Parsons et al., 2010). Finding time to implement a unit can be a barrier, beyond finding time to plan a PBL unit (Hertzog, 2007; Parsons et al., 2010). A lack of resources and materials can be another challenge, given the emphasis on student choice (Parsons et al., 2010). In other words, fulfilling students' vision for a project can be challenging. A third obstacle is classroom management. As

opposed to students' being passive receivers of information, PBL grants students more autonomy and freedom as they construct new meaning. Consequently, teachers may struggle to maintain control of the classroom while working with groups and individuals, hence an additional barrier of teacher restraint (Parsons et al., 2010). Teachers must give up some control in PBL to allow students to take control of their learning. Relatedly, teachers have expressed concern with finding ways to integrate all disciplinary content into a project (Alves et al., 2016). Despite these barriers and challenges, overwhelming evidence supports PBL's potential to stimulate literacy growth.

Summary

Because reading is a fundamental skill that opens doors of opportunity, every child should learn how to read proficiently regardless of their SES. However, this chapter described a persistent reading gap between low-SES students and their more affluent peers, suggesting a need for more equitable learning experiences. Research attributes the reading proficiency gap, in part, to summer break, citing lack of access to books and other enrichment, along with traditional summer school approaches. Likewise, research has shown that providing students with books can reduce summer reading loss—and that students thrive in PBL environments. Gaining Ground endeavors to live up to these principles, combining access to books with literacy-embedded PBL to address the summer reading setback that affects low-SES students. As the following chapter explains, I designed this action research study to assess the impact of those efforts on reading proficiency.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

As stated in Chapters 1 and 2, the purpose of this action research study was to determine the impact of Gaining Ground on summer reading setback. The nonprofit organization's commitment to the Tulsa, Oklahoma community is "to develop readers, thinkers and leaders by providing families with engaging literacy experiences and access to high-interest, culturally responsive books" (Gaining Ground, n.d., para. 1). As the curriculum director, I use PBL to design summer programming in an effort to help students maintain their reading skills from school year to school year. Recognizing a need to assess whether the program is functioning as designed, I turned to action research to examine participating students' reading proficiency and collaborate with Gaining Ground teachers to reflect on changes that might improve our organization. This chapter describes the study's research design, setting and participants, and procedures for data collection and analysis.

Research Design and Research Questions

Action research provides researchers an opportunity to study the work they do and use their findings to contribute directly and immediately to their practices (Efron & Ravid, 2019). Through a mixed-methods action research study, I aimed to improve Gaining Ground by determining its existing impact on summer reading setback. My research questions were as follows:

1. How does Gaining Ground impact the reading proficiency of kindergarten through fourth-grade students?

2. What are teachers' perceptions on the impact of Gaining Ground?

I used a convergent mixed-methods approach to construct a more comprehensive explanation of Gaining Ground's impact. The principal goal of quantitative research is to find measurable results that are concrete and accurate (McCarthy et al., 2017), so my numerical data illustrate students' reading proficiency before and after the summer program. Qualitative research is "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6), and thus provided insight into how "broader structural, historical, and cultural conditions influence people's perspectives, experiences, and choices" (Aurini et al; 2022, p. 6). My qualitative data provided insight into teacher perceptions of and experiences with Gaining Ground and the conditions impacting student reading proficiency.

Setting and Participants

Participants in action research are those people "who affect or are affected by the issue under investigation" (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 67). The participants in this study included students enrolled in Gaining Ground's summer literacy program and teachers who taught in the summer program.

Population

Gaining Ground serves six schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma, one of which is a middle school, across two districts: Swift Public Schools and Liberty Public

Schools. The five elementary schools encompass kindergarten through fifth grade. Characteristic of Title I schools, approximately 95% of students at all sites qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. All students who participated in Gaining Ground summer programming qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

As described in Chapter 1, Gaining Ground provides free book fairs for every student at each site. Approximately 4,200 students received free books in May of 2022. During the summer break, the Gaining Ground book bus distributed books to the Tulsa community, serving approximately 250 kids per week. Gaining Ground also provided summer programming for all six school sites. For the summer of 2022, 188 students and 35 teachers participated. All 35 teachers served at the same school site where they worked during the school year.

Sampling Plan

The population of an action research study is dependent on the context of the study (Efron & Ravid, 2019); therefore, this study sampled from the population of teachers who facilitated Gaining Ground summer programming and the students who experienced it. I used nonprobability purposeful sampling, which is common in action research, because it includes making strategic choices about where, how, and with whom to conduct research (Aurini et al., 2022). As mentioned in Chapter 1, I focused on kindergarten through fourth grade, which the majority of Gaining Ground's funding targets in response to the Oklahoma RSA governing third-grade retention based on reading proficiency. Due to my insider status as a former employee of Liberty Public Schools, I chose to gather data from students and teachers only in that district, excluding Swift

Public Schools from my sample. Liberty's two participating elementary sites have similar demographics. At Alma Elementary, 40 students and six teachers participated in Gaining Ground, and at Evergreen Elementary, eight teachers served 55 students.

The Students

Students are encouraged to participate in the Gaining Ground summer reading program based on classroom teacher recommendations. The criteria for those recommendations include students who are behind grade-level expectations in reading proficiency and could benefit from additional reading support in the summer. Of the 188 students Gaining Ground served in the summer of 2022, I wanted a sample of the 95 student participants who attended the Alma and Evergreen sites in Liberty Public Schools. Following district policy, I sought de-identified STAR reading scores for all of those students. To protect their identity, I intended to analyze the data holistically.

The Teachers

When summer programming ended, I sent a letter to the 14 teachers from the two sites to invite their participation in a one-on-one interview via Microsoft Teams (Appendix A). I assured them the study would involve little to no risk, and as promised, I am protecting their identity by using pseudonyms. All the prospective teacher participants from Liberty Public Schools were women, and I sought a sample of 5–10, which I deemed large enough to yield meaningful findings but small enough for an action researcher to manage. If all 14 teachers had responded, my intention was to narrow down the number of interviews by

inviting those who had previously taught with Gaining Ground. Of the 14 teachers, seven volunteered for the study by responding to my invitation. Chapter 4 introduces them in more detail.

Intervention

Because of my interest in Gaining Ground's impact, my study treated the summer program itself as an intervention. Gaining Ground combines two approaches to combat summer reading setback. The first is a focus on access to books and student choice. At the end of each school year, Gaining Ground provides each student at participating elementary and middle schools with 10 free books. Students choose from among new, high-quality, culturally relevant books. Once summer begins, the Gaining Ground book bus travels to the students' community weekly, and students are able to get new books to take home. The summer book bus operates for 10 weeks. Students involved in summer programs also have the opportunity to visit the book bus weekly at their elementary school site or in their neighborhood. Gaining Ground also encourages family literacy through weekly prizes for reading response cards and Facebook communication.

The second opportunity that Gaining Ground provides is the summer literacy program. The time frame of the program has varied as the organization has continued to expand, but the Summer 2022 program lasted throughout the 4 weeks of June, for 16 sessions, and aimed to enhance students' literacy through purposeful, authentic PBL centered on art and the community. As the overview and lesson plans in Appendix B illustrate, students practiced literacy skills as

they studied art, music, and movement to answer the question, “How does art impact me and my community?” The daily program consisted of PBL time, literacy time, and arts experiences. Students also participated in one field trip and one artist visit each week. These components tied into the overall unit by supporting students toward completion of their final project: a community arts showcase in downtown Tulsa, Oklahoma. The students invited community members and families to an outdoor exhibit of a chosen piece or performance of art. Class sizes are small, with 10 or fewer students per certified teacher. The summer program also encourages family connections by sending home a weekly book and activity for each student enrolled in the program.

Data Collection Methods

Efron and Ravid (2019) asserted that the process of choosing data collection methods occurs “by contemplating your research question, deciding what information you need to collect in order to answer this question, and determining what kinds of strategies will be most effective in providing this information” (p. 72). Based on my research questions, to glean the most impactful information, I chose a convergent mixed-methods approach. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, quantitative data in the form of STAR scores aligned with my first research question, whereas qualitative data in the form of interview transcripts yielded answers to my second research question. Interview transcripts also shed additional light on the focus of my first research question by providing more insight on any increase in students’ reading proficiency.

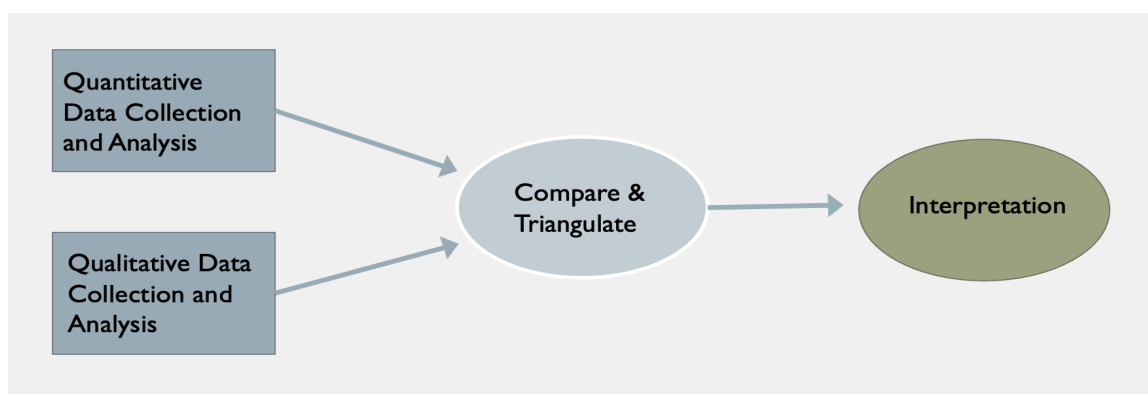


Figure 3.1 *Convergent Mixed-Methods Approach*

STAR Scores

The STAR, according to the Oklahoma State Department of Education's 2020 RSA Report, serves as a screening assessment for 345 of the 498 districts in the state. As a computer-adaptive test, the STAR adjusts the difficulty of each child's test by presenting choices for each question based on the student's previous response. Every student in Liberty Public Schools takes the STAR online at minimum three times a year: at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the school year. The STAR assessment is administered by a student's classroom teacher. Students in kindergarten and first grade take the STAR Early Literacy Assessment, whereas students in second through fifth grade take the STAR Reading Assessment. The STAR Early Literacy Assessment consists of 27 questions, while the STAR Reading Assessment consists of 34 questions. Both instruments detail each student's reading proficiency and skills.

There are many numerical components tied to each assessment. As a teacher working for Liberty Public Schools, I observed my students' scaled scores and grade level equivalency (GLE). These scores represent the difficulty of the questions and the number of correct answers and are useful for comparing

a student's performance over time and across grades. The scaled score provides a benchmark number for each grade level for the fall and spring, relative to the state expectation within the Oklahoma RSA. The scaled score uses the same range for all students, which enables comparing student reading performance across grade levels. The number is specific to the STAR, so those who are unfamiliar with the scale may not recognize the implications of each score.

The GLE, on the other hand, is a norm-referenced score that represents a student's test performance in comparison with other students on a national level (Renaissance Place, 2021). For example, a second-grade student with a GLE of 2.4 would be performing as well as typical second graders during their fourth month of school. For this reason, I wanted to collect the 2021–2022 end-of-year STAR scaled score and GLE and 2022–2023 beginning-of-year scaled score and GLE for my student sample. Comparing the sets of scaled scores would reveal loss, maintenance, or growth of reading proficiency from spring to fall, and comparing GLEs would provide insight into amount of growth if applicable.

Teacher Interviews

Interviews provided me with insight on the teachers' perceptions during the summer programming. Interviews are opportunities to probe participants' thoughts, experiences, and perceptions (Aurini et al., 2022). As my invitation letter indicates (Appendix A), each interview, scheduled at the participant's convenience, occurred via Microsoft Teams and ranged from 25–45 minutes. The semi-structured protocol left room for flexibility based on the teachers' responses, and most questions were open-ended to encourage honest dialogue

about their perceptions on Gaining Ground (Appendix C). With participants' consent, I videorecorded each interview in August 2022 and used Microsoft Teams to generate a word-for-word transcript. I also took notes throughout the interview. To maintain confidentiality, I stored the teacher interview data on my password-protected computer. Once I applied pseudonyms to the transcripts and ensured their accuracy, I deleted the recordings.

Stages of Data Collection

To assess the impact of Gaining Ground's Summer 2022 programming, I followed a systematic data collection procedure. First, I submitted my protocol to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and after receiving an exemption, I sought local approval from the Liberty Public Schools IRB for access to their reading scores. When the district approved my request, I received the spring and fall STAR scores for students from Liberty Public Schools who participated in Gaining Ground summer programming. I began teacher interviews in August 2022, when summer programming was complete. I wanted to collect and analyze the data within a 6-week time frame (i.e., July) to ensure the teachers' perspectives on the summer would still be fresh while allowing time for the fall test scores to emerge. However, due to the timing of my IRB approval, I was unable to begin collecting teacher interview data until August.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure participant safety and data security, I submitted all necessary forms and instruments to the University of South Carolina's IRB and to Liberty Public Schools. These processes demonstrated my efforts to protect participants

by maintaining student anonymity and teacher confidentiality. As curriculum director for Gaining Ground and having worked at some of the elementary sites with some of the Gaining Ground teachers, I was mindful of my position and relationships as I engaged in the interview process. Again, participation in the study was voluntary, as teacher participants responded to the interview invitation. I did not use any identifying information in my dissertation and deleted original data upon completion of analysis. The quantitative data were de-identified, yet I further protected participants by storing the test scores on my password-protected computer and deleting the raw data upon completion of my analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis plays a crucial role in the trustworthiness and reliability of action research (Efron & Ravid, 2019). As with my approach to data collection, I engaged in a multi-step analysis process. I compared and analyzed the assessment scores to determine if students increased, maintained, or lost reading proficiency over the summer months. Then, by converging quantitative and qualitative analysis, I anticipated transforming my interpretations into new understandings of Gaining Ground's impact on summer reading setback. Juxtaposing the results from the STAR Reading Assessment and my findings from the teacher interviews enabled me to observe and interpret any trends across the data sets. To achieve trustworthy results, I aimed to "critically examine my assertions and interpretations to ensure their credibility" (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 184). Finally, I triangulated the different modes of data by cross-checking the test scores with the teachers' accounts.

STAR Analysis

To answer my first research question by analyzing students' end-of-year (i.e., Spring 2022) and beginning-of-year (i.e., Fall 2022) STAR scores, I created a table to calculate change—positive, neutral, and negative—and note the amount of change. I determined the number of students for each category: students who grew, maintained, or lost reading proficiency. This analysis highlighted whether students who participated in Gaining Ground summer programming lost, maintained, or grew in their reading proficiency over the summer. If a student maintained or increased their reading proficiency from the summer months, I considered the impact that Gaining Ground has on summer reading proficiency to be positive. However, if the student decreased reading proficiency during the summer months, I considered the impact of Gaining Ground to be limited or negative. As a practitioner, I recognized the scope of my study could not account for all factors impacting students' reading proficiency scores, but I gained insight from correlation, even as I stopped short of making causal claims.

Interview Analysis

Qualitative data analysis “involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 202). To analyze the transcripts from the one-on-one teacher interviews, I started by taking note of data that seemed relevant, important, or interesting to this study through the process of coding. To make meaning and answer my second

research question, I used thematic inductive analysis, a process whereby researchers “begin with detailed bits or segments of data, cluster data units that seem to go together, then ‘name’ the cluster” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 210). To gain insight from the patterns that emerged as I coded the teacher interviews, I printed all seven transcripts, read through each interview while making note of my initial impressions, and engaged in multiple re-readings to label words and phrases that resonated across multiple interviews. I then transferred these words and phrases into a spreadsheet, organized by code, and grouped codes to create categories. With each piece of data, I also highlighted information that seemed to be reoccurring. This constant comparative method of coding enabled me to combine the codes into more comprehensive categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, I sorted these categories into common themes, striving for names that were responsive to my purpose, mutually exclusive, exhaustive, and conceptually congruent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Reviewing the themes that emerged during the interviews aided in answering both research questions. For Question 1, I triangulated the teachers’ perceptions with the quantitative data by determining whether they observed any changes in students’ literacy skills, juxtaposing interview responses with test scores to look for overall corroboration. For Question 2, I focused squarely on the themes pertaining to teachers’ perceptions of Gaining Ground’s impact.

Summary

This chapter explained the methods I used to collect and analyze data conducive to assessing Gaining Ground’s impact. The action research cycle

encourages critical evaluation as practitioners determine what adjustments to make in their practice (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As Chapter 4 reveals, the research design resulted in insights that can inform continued development and expansion of the summer literacy program, thereby improving our organization's ability to work toward relieving summer slide and decreasing the opportunity gap.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Reading is a fundamental skill that can pave the way for academic success and personal advancement. A child's socioeconomic status should not determine their reading proficiency, yet students from under-resourced neighborhoods are adversely affected during summer break, as though a faucet has been turned off (Entwisle et al., 2001). To combat this regression in reading skills, Gaining Ground offers books of choice and project-based programming to underserved students during the summer to maintain or increase their reading proficiency. As curriculum director, I support Gaining Ground's mission to narrow the educational opportunity gap by providing these summer interventions. Recognizing a lack of feedback on and formal assessment of our efforts as a problem of practice, I conducted this action research study. To continue funding Gaining Ground and retaining teachers, we need data to give us a clear picture of our impact and inform changes we can make to improve the program moving forward. Therefore, I proposed the following questions:

1. How does Gaining Ground impact the reading proficiency of students in kindergarten through fourth grade?
2. What are teachers' perceptions on the impact of Gaining Ground?

As the findings in this chapter illustrate, this study yielded valuable information and enhanced my understanding of my work as curriculum director. In addition to

gathering feedback as to whether the interventions we provide successfully impact reading proficiency, I also gained insight into how teachers perceive the program and what adjustments we can make to maximize our impact.

Three theories framed my mixed-methods study: faucet theory, constructivism, and SDT. Faucet theory contextualized the need to understand Gaining Ground's impact, while constructivism and SDT provided a foundation for and continues to inform Gaining Ground's practices. Therefore, as I analyzed my data, I anticipated emerging themes that connected with constructivist theory and SDT, providing evidence of Gaining Ground's practices working as intended. After an overview of my research procedure, this chapter presents the findings by research question, culminating in a discussion of the emerging themes.

Procedure

As I explained in Chapter 3, a mixed-methods approach was appropriate for answering my research questions. Action research is “purposeful, deliberate, organized, and systematic” (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 90), yielding data that can confirm practitioners' insights and validate their intuition. I wanted a quantitative data set—from the STAR Reading Assessment—to have a numerical representation of Gaining Ground's impact on reading proficiency, yet as I reflected on what kinds of data would facilitate deeper insights and intuitive understandings of my work, I saw the need to incorporate a qualitative component. I value the teachers who implement the Gaining Ground curriculum. To determine the curriculum's impact, I needed insight from the teachers, which I achieved by conducting interviews. In sum, a mixed-methods approach helped

me get a better understanding of student reading proficiency and teacher perceptions of the program, ultimately resulting in a clearer overall view that informed the action plan in Chapter 5.

Once I obtained university and district approval, I began collecting data. The scope of the study focused on Gaining Ground's 4-week summer programming during June 2022, although data collection extended into the fall. Table 4.1 presents the data sources and participants. Of the communities Gaining Ground serves, I chose to collect data from Liberty Public Schools because of my insider status from having previously worked in that district.

Table 4.1 *Data Sources*

Source	Participants
STAR Reading Assessment	79 K–4 students from Liberty Public Schools
Interviews	7 teachers from Liberty Public Schools

STAR Reading Assessment

As mentioned in Chapter 3, students are required to take the STAR Reading Assessment at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. After the district administered the Fall 2022 STAR assessment, I received de-identified scores for 79 students in Grades K–4 from the two sites via email. The sample size differs from the total number of students who participated in Gaining Ground summer programs for Liberty Public Schools due to the transient population. The 79 students whose scores I received had completed the spring and fall assessments, administered in May and August, which served as pre and post measures of students' proficiency in relation to Gaining Ground's summer

programming. These scores included grade, school site, spring scaled score and GLE, and fall scaled score and GLE.

Teacher Interviews

As mentioned in Chapter 3, when summer programming ended, I emailed the 14 teachers from the two sites to request their participation in an interview. Seven teachers responded and agreed (Table 4.2). I interviewed each of them in August 2022 via Microsoft Teams, which generated automatic transcripts. Interviews ranged from 25–45 minutes and were semi-structured, allowing the teachers to elaborate as needed in response to my protocol (Appendix C).

Table 4.2 *Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Grade	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Site
Ann	2	F	White	29	Evergreen
Ashley	2	F	Hispanic	3	Evergreen
Libby	4	F	Black/Hispanic	3	Alma
Tara	4	F	White	7	Alma
Farrah	2	F	White/Native American	5.5	Alma
Sophia	1	F	White	2	Evergreen
Shuri	4	F	Black/Hispanic	8	Evergreen

Member checking occurs when a researcher invites participants' feedback on emergent findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Xerri, 2018). Asking a participant to review the researcher's interpretation of their interview and offer suggestions that better capture their perspectives enhances a study's quality. Therefore, I reached out to the seven participants after the interviews, provided a brief recap of their responses, and gave them an opportunity to choose their pseudonym. Through this follow-up communication, they also provided the other information

that appears in Table 4.2: grade, gender, racial/ethnic identity, and years of teaching experience. All seven participants felt comfortable with my summary of our conversation and reiterated their willingness to contribute to the study. Only two participants chose their pseudonym; I supplied the rest.

Presentation and Interpretation of the Data

For an action researcher, data analysis is a “systematic and deliberate process” for generating “new understandings, assertions, explanations, and conclusions” (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 166). In a cyclical fashion, these findings prompt reflection on a plan of action and implications for future action research. Following the convergent approach discussed in Chapter 3, I considered commonalities or connections across both sets of data to achieve my research aim. Therefore, this section presents the data by source, offering some initial insights in response to my research questions.

STAR Results

To explore Gaining Ground’s impact on students’ reading proficiency, I examined Spring and Fall 2022 STAR scores. With such quantitative data, researchers generate “numerical findings by looking for trends, presenting the data visually, studying relationships between variables, and comparing groups on selected characteristics” (Efron & Ravid, 2019, p. 189). When comparing students’ STAR scores, I examined the data set as a whole before breaking it into categories in search of additional insight.

I began by focusing on the STAR scaled scores. Having taught in Liberty Public Schools, I was familiar with this type of data. Juxtaposing the spring and

fall scores, I highlighted increasing scores in green, decreasing scores in red, and maintained scores in yellow. This process of comparing pre and post measures enabled me to approximate the impact of Gaining Ground on summer slide, although many extenuating factors influenced these scores, as I elaborate in Chapter 5. After examining the full data set, I broke it down by site and grade, looking specifically at scores for K–1 students and students in Grades 2–4. I also used the data to analyze the GLE scores to determine students’ growth. The organization of this section follows this linear process.

STAR Scaled Scores for Both Sites

Table 4.3 shows the STAR scaled score data for both sites. Of the 79 students in my sample, 56% demonstrated increased reading proficiency on the STAR following Gaining Ground’s Summer 2022 program. Although no students’ scores remained the same, 44% of students decreased in their reading proficiency. Figure 4.1 illustrates this outcome as a pie chart.

Table 4.3 *STAR Scaled Score Changes for Both Sites*

Change	Students	
	<i>n</i>	%
increased	44	56%
decreased	35	44%
maintained	0	0%
Total	79	100%

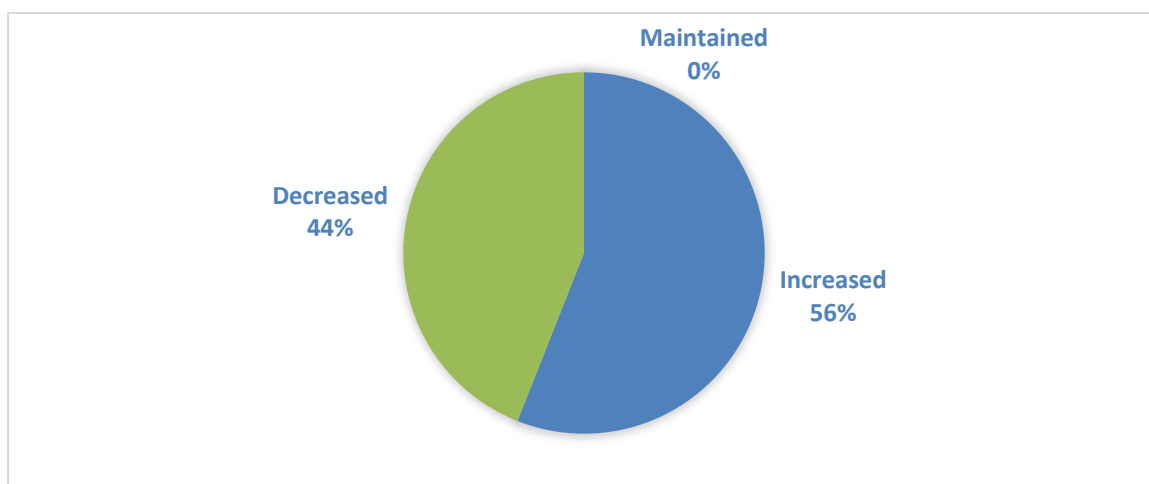


Figure 4.1 Overall Change in Reading Proficiency for Both Sites

STAR Scaled Scores for Alma Elementary

Table 4.4 presents the results from Alma Elementary. Of the 27 Alma students in my sample, 74% demonstrated increased reading proficiency after Gaining Ground's Summer 2022 program according to the STAR, whereas 26% of students decreased in their reading proficiency. There were no students who maintained reading proficiency. Figure 4.2 depicts this overall change for Alma in pie chart format.

Table 4.4 STAR Scaled Score Changes for Alma Elementary

Change	Students	
	<i>n</i>	%
increased	20	74%
decreased	7	26%
maintained	0	0%
Total	27	100%

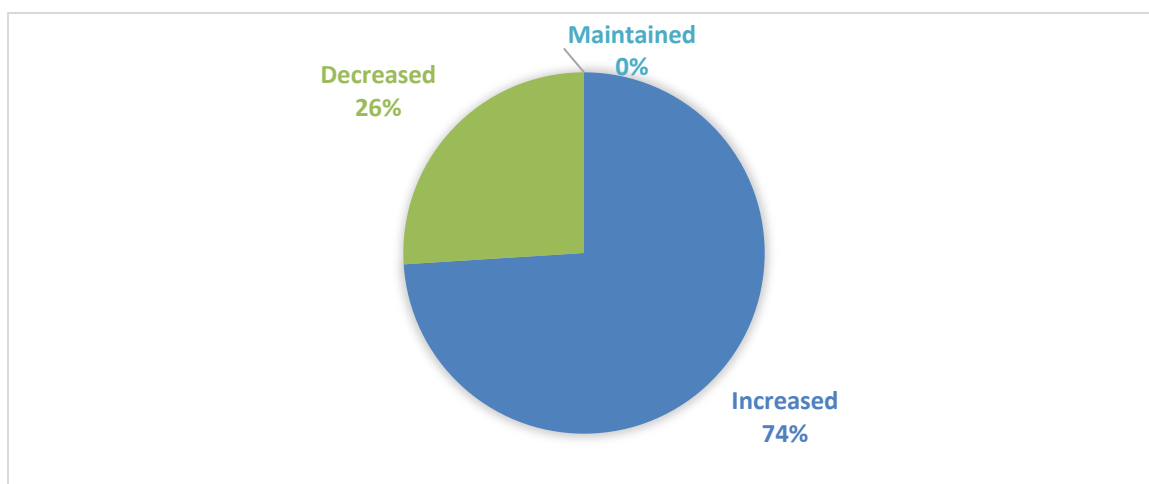


Figure 4.2 *Change in Reading Proficiency for Alma Elementary*

STAR Scaled Scores for Evergreen Elementary

Table 4.5 presents the results from Evergreen Elementary. Of the 52 students in my sample, 46% demonstrated increased reading proficiency after participating in Gaining Ground's Summer 2022 program, while 54% of students demonstrated decreased reading proficiency. Figure 4.3 shows this overall change in reading proficiency as a pie chart.

Table 4.5 *STAR Scaled Score Changes for Evergreen Elementary*

Change	Students	
	<i>n</i>	%
increased	24	46%
decreased	28	54%
maintained	0	0%
Total	52	100%

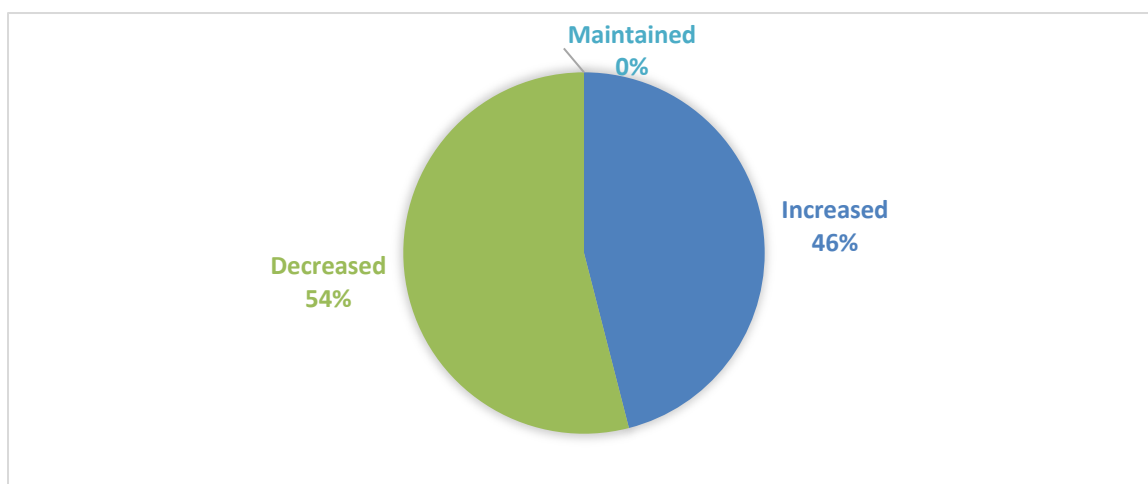


Figure 4.3 *Change in Reading Proficiency for Evergreen Elementary*

Considering the scaled score results from both sites, I concluded Alma Elementary students demonstrated more growth in reading proficiency compared to Evergreen Elementary students. Whereas 74% of Alma participants experienced an increase from spring to fall, only 46% of Evergreen students did. Reflecting on the difference in scores at the two elementary schools is important because the different quantitative outcomes could be due to a number of variables at each site, such as class size, teachers' training experience, attendance, implementation of curriculum, language differences, and students' age. Chapter 5 further discusses the differences to offer some recommendations.

STAR Scaled Scores for K–1 Students

As I analyzed the data, new wonderings emerged, prompting me to categorize the reading scores by grade level bands for additional interpretation. First, I isolated the scores for students who were in kindergarten and first grade in the Spring of 2022, reasoning that students in younger grades may need more explicit reading intervention. I wanted to determine if this type of reading

intervention was effective for emerging readers. As Table 4.6 shows, 35% of these Gaining Ground participants demonstrated increased reading proficiency according to the STAR, whereas 65% decreased in reading proficiency. Figure 4.4 presents this outcome as a pie chart.

Table 4.6 *STAR Scaled Score Changes for Grade K–1*

Change	Students	
	<i>n</i>	%
increased	6	35%
decreased	11	65%
maintained	0	0%
Total	17	100%

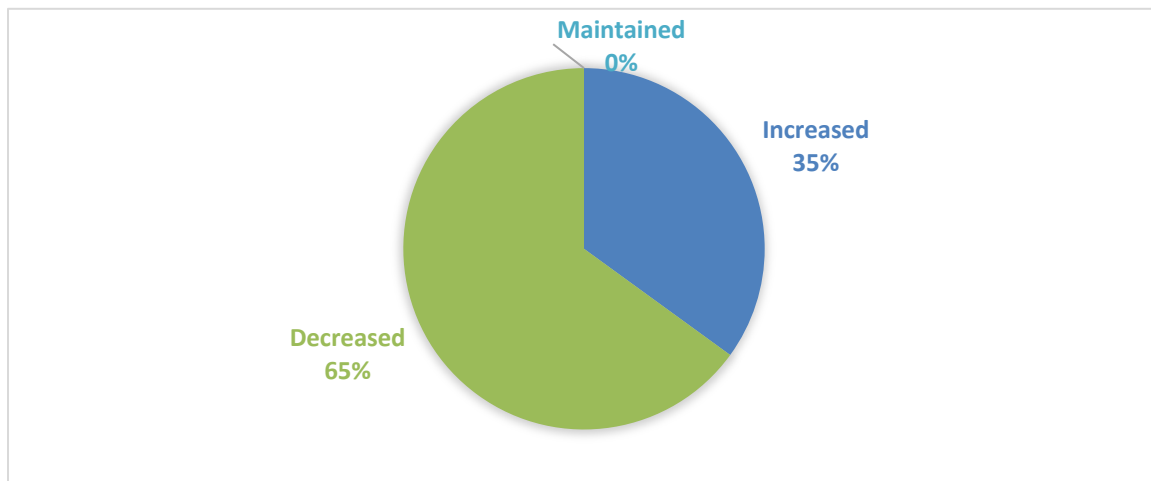


Figure 4.4 *Change in Reading Proficiency for K–1 Students*

STAR Scaled Scores for Students in Grades 2–4

Table 4.7 presents the findings for students who were in second through fourth grade in the Spring 2022 semester. Of these 62 Gaining Ground

participants, 61% demonstrated increased reading proficiency according to the STAR, whereas 39% decreased in reading proficiency. Categorizing the data by grade shows the percentage of students in Grades 2–4 who experienced growth in reading proficiency was almost double that of students in kindergarten and first grade. Figure 4.5 provides a pie chart of this data.

Table 4.7 *STAR Scaled Score Changes for Grades 2–4*

Change	Students	
	<i>n</i>	%
increased	38	61%
decreased	24	39%
maintained	0	0%
Total	62	100%

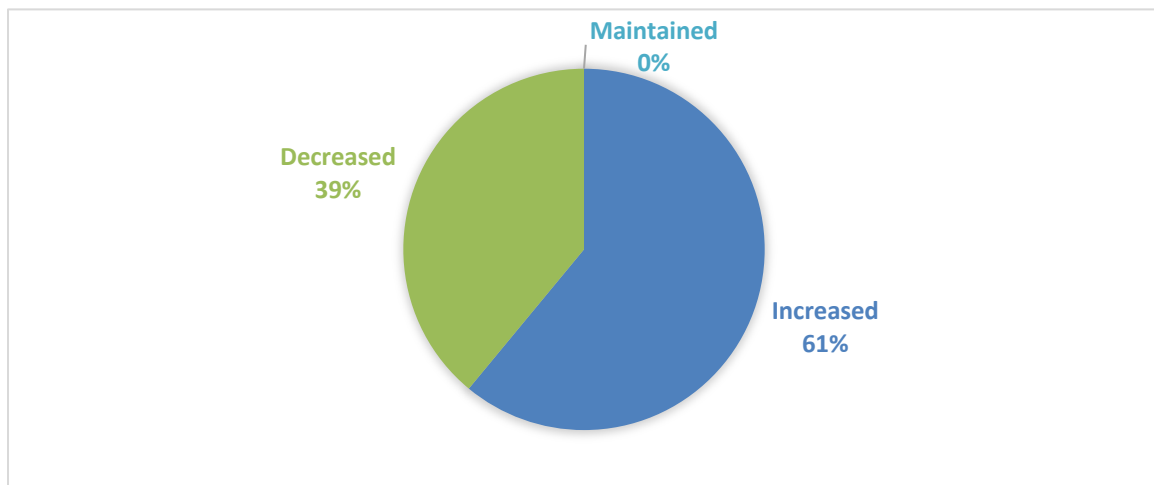


Figure 4.5 *Change in Reading Proficiency for Second–Fourth Graders*

When examining these changes in reading proficiency by age group, I noticed students in Grades 2–4 made more significant gains in reading

proficiency than students in kindergarten and first grade. Specifically, 35% of K–1 students increased their reading proficiency, while 61% of students in Grades 2–4 increased their. Chapter 5 elaborates on my interpretation of this trend.

GLE Data

In addition to the STAR scaled scores, I also had access to the GLE, a numerical score that contextualizes students' reading proficiency by grade level. For example, a student with a 2.3 GLE score on the STAR would be considered on par with the third month of second grade. To compare the GLE data, I analyzed the scores from Spring 2022 to Fall 2022 to determine if a student increased, decreased, or maintained their GLE. As Table 4.8 shows, 49% of students increased in GLE, and 5% of students stayed the same, while the GLE score for 46% of students decreased from Spring 2022 to Fall 2022. Figure 4.6 represents this change in reading proficiency by GLE as a pie chart.

Table 4.8 *STAR GLE Changes*

Change	Students	
	<i>n</i>	%
increased	39	49%
decreased	36	46%
maintained	4	5%
Total	79	100%

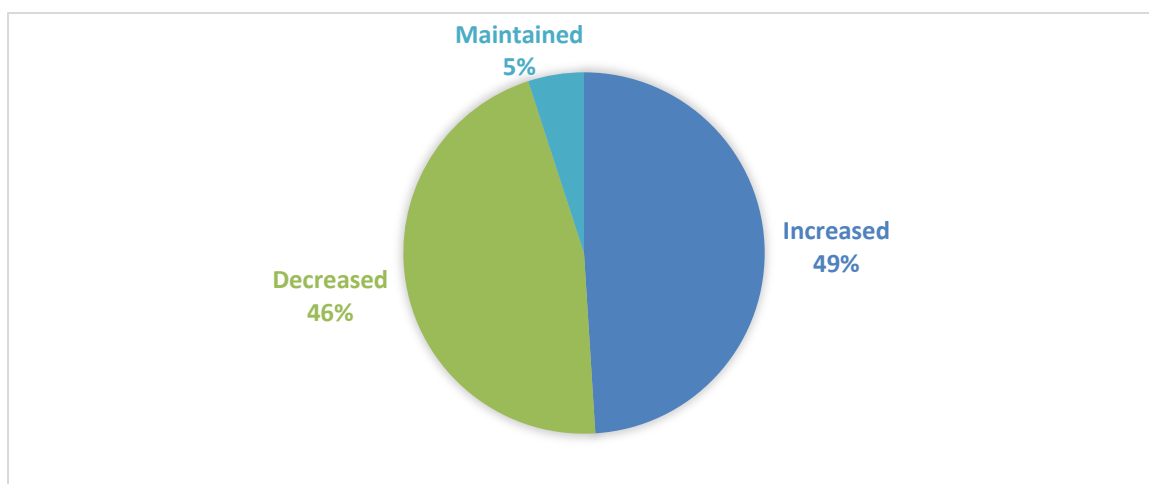


Figure 4.6 *Change in Reading Proficiency by GLE*

These GLE scores are relatively consistent with the scaled scores, which showed 56% of students across both sites increased in reading proficiency (Table 4.3). The scaled score is a more precise score with less variability compared to the GLE. However, the GLE scores also show that four students maintained their grade equivalency in reading.

I further explored the data by determining the amount of advancement in reading proficiency each student made if their score increased—in other words, their growth after participating in Gaining Ground programming. I averaged the scores of the 43 students who maintained or increased in GLE. I included students who maintained with the students who increased because the goal of Gaining Ground is to stop the decline in summer reading setback. If students maintained their scores, then they did not decline, which indicates a successful intervention. The scores that grew ranged from .1 (1 month) to 1.8 (1 year and 8 months), resulting in an overall average of 4.6 months' growth in reading proficiency over summer break.

Overall, in response to Research Question 1, my quantitative data revealed 56% of my student sample earned scaled scores in Fall 2022 reflecting increased reading proficiency since Spring 2022 after participating in Gaining Ground summer programming. Further, the 43 students (54%) whose GLE increased or remained the same demonstrated an average of 4.6 months of growth in reading proficiency. Although action research is not conducive to causal claims, these outcomes suggest Gaining Ground had an overall positive impact on students' reading proficiency. Chapter 5 elaborates on the implications of this outcome in terms of Gaining Ground's continual improvement efforts.

Interview Findings

As Chapter 3 explained, I turned to qualitative data to answer Research Question 2, regarding teachers' perceptions on the impact of Gaining Ground. To make sense of the interview transcripts, I engaged in constant comparative coding (Giles et al., 2016). Viewing the data through the lens of my theoretical framework, I sought evidence that teachers recognized the purposeful design of Gaining Ground curriculum. As a result of this approach, five themes emerged, including one with sub-themes:

- Student Autonomy
 - Purpose
 - Engagement
 - Choice
- Affirmation of Family, Culture, and Community
- Increase in Literacy Skills

- Access to Opportunities
- Teacher Satisfaction

The sub-themes of student autonomy initially appeared to me as standalone themes. As I progressed through my analysis, I saw their interconnection and applied Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) guidance that themes should be mutually exclusive by grouping them under the main theme of student autonomy. Despite these efforts to establish boundaries between themes, I recognized the five themes that emerged closely related to one another and to the three theories that framed this study. Figure 4.7 illustrates these interrelationships.

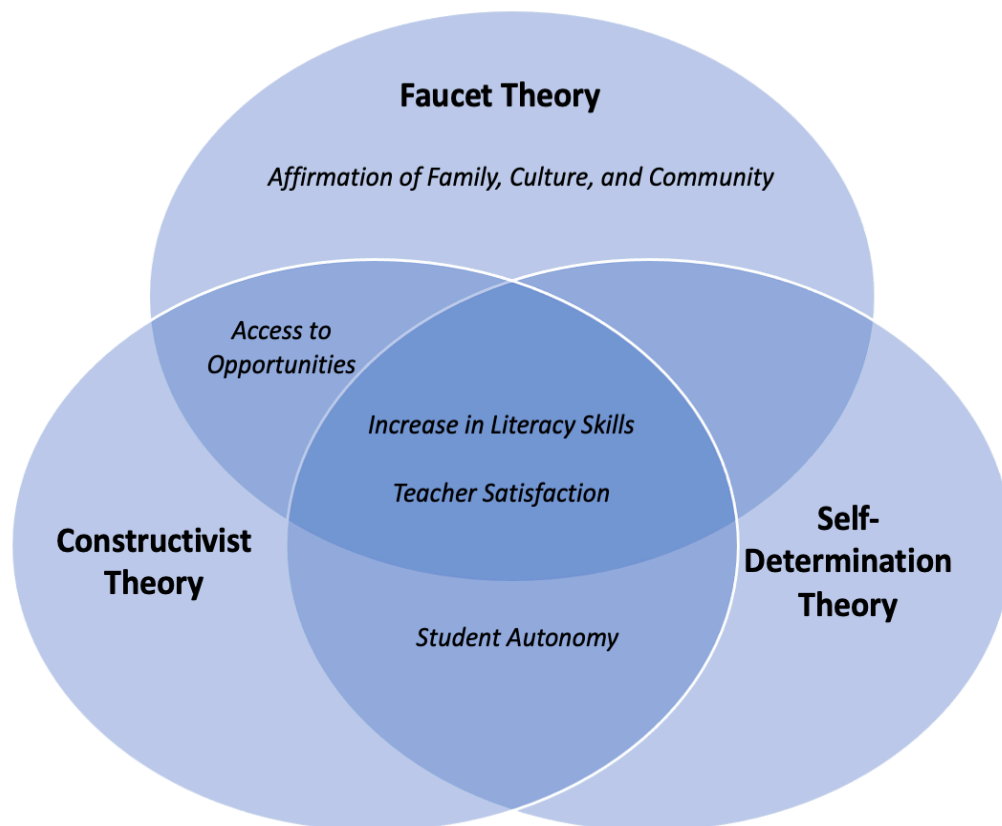


Figure 4.7 *Emerging Themes Corresponding to My Theoretical Framework*

The rest of this section elaborates on each theme and sub-theme. I define them and illustrate their salience by providing supporting evidence in the form of quotations from multiple teacher participants. Their perceptions of Gaining Ground served as valuable feedback for me as a practitioner, informing the action plan I present in Chapter 5.

Theme 1: Student Autonomy

Multiple teachers cited students' involvement during the summer program, stating that students took ownership of their learning and were deeply engaged. To the teachers, students seemed motivated to engage in the learning because they felt a sense of autonomy. As I mentioned, before I recognized the overarching theme of student autonomy, engagement, purpose, and choice initially emerged as independent themes. These three concepts are rooted in constructivism and self-determination, reflecting the influence of my theoretical framework in my curriculum design and data analysis—and, more importantly, suggesting Gaining Ground is enacting its mission.

Engagement. According to the teachers, students who participated in Gaining Ground were consistently engaged in the learning components of the day. Teachers described the excitement students displayed during read-alouds or discussions and when working toward the final project. Students excitedly asked questions and were deeply invested in the hands-on learning. For example, Farrah revealed that she had taught one of her summer students during the prior school year and recalled the student's consistent behavior problems. She confided, "I was worried about how that was going to go and

whether or not she would want to be actually engaged because she has a very much too cool for school mentality.” During Gaining Ground summer programming, the student actively participated and was eager to work through the PBL components. To Farrah’s surprise, “the entire time she was wanting to show everyone her project and actively wanting to do more and more projects and even work on things during lunch.”

Teachers also gave specific examples to suggest why students were deeply engaged. In their view, reading aloud provided opportunities for students to listen to diverse and interesting topics related to the unit. They also attributed the engagement to students’ ability to create art and work on their project often throughout the summer with the end goal of sharing their project. Tara described fourth-grade students as “excited to share their projects,” suggesting, “It’s different when you are sharing your learning with people from, like, all over Tulsa, and I think that was the most exciting thing for them.” Tara’s response further explains the reasoning behind students’ engagement every day.

Students in younger grades were engaged in the program as well. Sophia, who taught first grade, was pleased with the students’ interest and engagement, knowing learners that age have an “attention span . . . like nothing.” She shared, “It was great to have a project-based [approach] because their attention span was longer because they were doing something that was exciting for them, and they didn’t even know they were learning.” Table 4.9 presents similar sentiments across multiple teacher interviews, some of which offer a rationale for the students’ engagement.

Table 4.9 *Perceptions of Student Engagement*

Teacher	Quote
Tara	“They were really engaged in creating the art pieces and just actually making things and showing each other and planning. They always wanted to come back the next day and keep working on [the project].”
Sophia	“[PBL] made them excited to be there, and so they were more willing to learn . . . If you walk into a normal summer school kids’ brains are already turned off because they know they are just going to sit and read and do math, but by putting the project-based learning . . . it made them engaged each day.”
Ashley	“Students were much more engaged and excited about coming to school just because they weren’t just sitting and doing reading and math . . . They were able to do all the fun art and music projects and field trips.”
Shuri	“There was a lot of engagement and a higher interest of coming to school every day . . . It’s not just doing worksheets. It was more like, ‘Where are we going today? Or who are we learning about today? What kind of art?’ They had a lot of questions and excitement around summer school.”
Farrah	“I don’t feel like there was a time where they weren’t fully engaged—like, there was never a time where they were like, ‘I’m bored’ or ‘I don’t want to do this.’ They were consistently wanting to learn about the artists.”

Purpose. Reinforcing the teachers’ perceptions of students’ engagement, multiple interviewees felt that students came in daily with a clear focus for what they were going to accomplish, and they cited the guiding question from the PBL curriculum, “How do the arts impact me and my community?” (Appendix B), as a driving factor in students’ understanding of the task. According to the teachers, students took ownership of their learning and were able to recognize the impact they were making as they constructed their project. Tara described how her students positioned themselves as leaders to help younger students learn a

dance for the final project. Not only did they help the younger class practice the dance, but they also asked the students to reflect on what parts were difficult.

Student purpose reinforced student ownership of their learning. Libby explained, “I feel like students were able to own their own learning because, if they wanted to learn about a different artist, we could go explore that instead, or if they had a lot of questions about something, we could focus on that.” Students’ sense of purpose provided them opportunities to feel confident making choices in their learning, thus linking to the next sub-theme. Table 4.10 presents additional evidence of student purpose in the transcript data.

Table 4.10 *Perceptions of Students’ Sense of Purpose*

Teacher	Quote
Tara	<p>“They all wanted to be there. They knew we had a goal at the end to, like, share with our community and somehow impact our community from Day 1.”</p> <p>“I think they also kind of found a sense of self doing art for the summer.”</p>
Sophia	<p>“Our superintendent came by [during the showcase], and one of my students was so excited to share his impact on the community through his artwork... he was so proud that he had practiced his script and he was reading it and was able to explain what his project meant to him.”</p> <p>“[The process] was very impactful for them and they felt like their art piece was actually making a difference.”</p>
Libby	<p>“I feel like this [approach] tricked them into learning and it really just felt like it gave a bigger meaning for them.”</p>
Ashley	<p>“The kids really opened up because they knew at the end they had their final project that they had to work on . . . even the most quiet ones just, like, really opened up because we practiced for 2 days where they had their little script and went in front of the classroom with the little microphones to practice.”</p>

Choice. Further illustrating how these sub-themes overlap, the teachers attributed students’ engagement and sense of purpose in their learning to opportunities for choice, such as independent reading (Table 4.11). As Sophia explained, “They were wanting to read [the program] books. Those were their favorite to pick up and read . . . They loved reading them, and they didn’t really touch my books after I put all those books out.” In other words, freedom to choose also entailed choosing what not to read or do.

Table 4.11 *Perceptions of Students’ Opportunity to Choose*

Teacher	Quote
Ann	“They could read whatever they wanted to and had free access.”
Libby	<p>“[At] the AHHA museum, they saw all the different paintings and creations, and then they got to go upstairs and create . . . they were like, ‘Ohhh, it can be like whatever we want it to be or look however we want it to look. It doesn’t have to look one particular way.’”</p> <p>“They were able to own their learning because . . . if they wanted to learn about something different, then we could go explore that instead.”</p>
Farrah	“Doing the PBL approach, they were able to choose their own things and they were wanting to come back every day . . . so I think it made a huge difference rather than ‘Oh, this is what we have to do every day,’ like, they got to choose what they wanted to do.”

Because students enjoyed choosing their project and the direction they wanted to take the learning, teachers witnessed them taking ownership of making those choices for themselves, exhibiting autonomy that may not have been as evident in the prior school year. This ownership also motivated many students. Some teachers attributed the motivation to students’ opportunity to be creative and use their imagination. Tara mentioned, “They loved all the content.

Getting to try different things, even the kids who are like, nervous about certain things are very into at least exploring it and watching other kids do it.”

The connections among the three sub-themes were fluid, as some teachers mentioned engagement, purpose, and choice in a single statement. For example, Tara described students as “engaged and picking out books they loved and talking about their books.” These concepts feed into the larger theme of autonomy: students’ taking ownership of their learning.

Theme 2: Affirmation of Family, Culture, and Community

A second theme that emerged from the interviews was the summer program’s community impact. Teachers described Gaining Ground as supporting or affirming students’ families, cultures, and communities (Table 4.12). They drew connections to the program’s respect for the students’ personal lives.

Table 4.12 *Perceptions of Family, Cultural, and Community Connections*

Teacher	Quote
Ann	<p>“Some of the kids were Hispanic, so they would show us how to do a dance their family does.”</p> <p>“They included their families throughout.”</p>
Tara	<p>“One of [the books] was culturally specific to the Japanese culture, which is my culture, and they were super into that . . . and they were like, ‘Oh my gosh, let me tell you about [my culture].’”</p>
Sophia	<p>“I sent home the books with the little projects for the families to do. I know they really liked being able to show their families . . . I mean, some of their parents don’t speak English for the most part. Some of them speak no English, so they were getting that extra home learning as well.”</p>

Teachers cited connections students made to the diverse characters and cultures during read-alouds. Shuri described the curriculum as “engaging because the books weren’t just about one type of person or one type of race. It was multicultural, so that was great.” As Table 4.12 shows, Tara also had a cultural connection to the curriculum.

A few participants shared that students were so motivated about the learning that they would take things home to finish and share with their families. Tara “could tell they had talked to their families about it, which was a good bridge.” Teachers also referenced the connections to the community during the final showcase. Students were excited to present their art pieces to the community members and showcase their learning.

Theme 3: Increase in Literacy Skills

A third theme that emerged from analyzing the interview transcripts is the teachers’ awareness of an increase in students’ literacy skills. Many of the teachers specifically mentioned an increase in one or more of the four domains of language: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (WIDA, 2020). During the summer programming, teachers were not required to collect any formal assessment data unless requested by their school site administration. However, many teachers did take note of an increase in students’ literacy skills, specifically writing and speaking. Participants noted the daily writing component embedded in the PBL curriculum encouraged reluctant writers and improved student writing. They also reported that speaking skills increased due to students’ practicing their presentations. In relation to reading, Sophia, who did complete formal reading

assessments, found that many students increased their reading level. Teachers also saw an increase in engagement with the provided read-alouds that led to an increase in students' participation during collaborative discussions. Some participants also expressed that they felt as though students would not decrease in their reading proficiency over the summer break due to their participation in Gaining Ground summer programming.

Ann commented on her enjoyment related to being able to teach kids specific writing and speaking skills they needed to grow. After they wrote their scripts, she “really enjoyed having some time to help kids with their speaking and looking people in the eye, making sure they are standing up straight, speaking loud enough [and] could tell they got better at it the more they practiced.” Similarly, Tara specifically referred to an increase in quality of the students' collaborative discussions, as well as their speaking and listening skills. She explained, “they got super insightful to our read-alouds by the end of it, and we would spend probably 30 minutes just talking about our read-alouds with them leading the conversation.”

Teachers also observed students' increase in writing and reading skills during the 4-week program. Ashley explained, “I did notice a difference in their literacy skills, and when we redid our running records, students either stayed the same or at least went up one level . . . so I think the continued reading and read-alouds definitely supported that.” Libby affirmed, “The read-alouds helped them find the deeper themes, and they could practice this skill and got better at pulling out themes from the text and finding the evidence.” Sophia also explained, “all of

my students moved up [a STAR score] and definitely not down, and many even moved up reading levels.

Table 4.13 illustrates the teachers' sentiments toward the increase in literacy skills. This theme also gave me direct insight related to Research Question 1, reinforcing the quantitative results. I address this convergence later in the chapter.

Table 4.13 *Perceptions of Students' Increased Literacy Skills*

Teacher	Quote
Tara	<p>"You could see them like fully writing their ideas, and then sometimes they would start drawing a picture and then they would label it, and I even had my newcomer who was Spanish-speaking but by the end was writing full Spanish paragraphs . . . He was engaged in the writing."</p> <p>"I think they grew as writers and reflectors."</p>
Sophia	<p>"[Students] may not skip multiple reading levels [over the summer] . . . but they are reading every day at summer school and that is helping their reading skills and keeping them from the summer slide . . . I know that next [school] year you'll be able to tell who went to summer school."</p>
Ashley	<p>"They felt confident enough to say their script, and their speaking skills really grew."</p>
Libby	<p>"The independent reading part let me go around and listen to them read and teach to their skills, and I could track their progress as they grew."</p>

Theme 4: Access to Opportunities

A fourth theme that emerged from the interviews was Gaining Ground's impact on students' opportunities for new experiences. Participants felt that the field trips immersed the students in experiences that they normally could not access, especially during the summer break. Sophia stated, "the kids were really

able to connect to the field trips . . . and see the connection between what we had taught in our lessons and the field trip.”

As the evidence in Table 4.14 indicates, teachers credited the curriculum in contrast to students’ typical summer experiences. In other words, Gaining Ground granted them access to try new opportunities and experiences that they may not have ever had the option to try before. Students were able to find new passions, develop confidence, and learn to express themselves better because of the opportunities Gaining Ground provided.

Table 4.14 *Perceptions of Accessible Opportunities*

Teacher	Quote
Ann	“Kids could use their imagination . . . in the regular school year, they can’t be that creative.”
Tara	“They loved all the content. They loved getting to try different things—even the kids who are, like, nervous about certain things.”
Libby	“The field trips were really involved, and it helped immerse the kids into new experiences, like the art scene . . . I had a lot of students try new things, and I had a lot of students find new passions that they maybe wouldn’t have, like, tapped into otherwise.”
Ashley	“[Students] had the opportunities to express themselves through different art mediums or singing or dance, and being able to tell them, like, ‘You can express anger or joy or love, and you can tell a story through these different things,’”
Shuri	“The kids loved going downtown for the field trips. Some of them have never been downtown before, and so that was an eye-opening experience for them.”

Ann noted that because of these opportunities, a student who was more soft-spoken “blossomed as far as his self-confidence went, so it was really fun to . . . watch them come into their own, even if it was just 4 weeks.” Ashley detailed

that having the opportunity to be in this summer program “not only encouraged [students], but also made them a little more aware as far as their feelings and the emotional, social aspect of it.” She expanded, “Hopefully because of being in this program, they can find healthier ways to express themselves.”

Theme 5: Teacher Satisfaction

An unexpected theme that emerged from the interviews was the impact that Gaining Ground had on the teachers themselves. The semi-structured interview questions reflected my intention to focus on student impact, but teachers voluntarily commented on their overall enjoyment as participants in the program. Multiple participants attributed their enjoyment to the students’ enjoyment. Similarly, participants felt supported as teachers, which they noted trickled down to the students’ feeling supported as learners. Sophia explained how she felt supported by Gaining Ground and stated, “you know, if we needed anything, you guys got it for us. Like you all said, if you had to climb a mountain for us to make something happen, you’d get it.” She went on to explain, “so I think the kids felt that too—like they could do anything at summer school because they felt supported.”

Teachers commented on their enjoyment coming from seeing the students having an enjoyable experience. For example, Libby mentioned the PBL approach to reading intervention and the impact it had on students’ willingness to learn, which in turn made teaching her students more enjoyable. Table 4.15 presents similar sentiments across multiple interviews. Echoing Libby’s connection, some quotes expand on a rationale for the teacher’s satisfaction.

Table 4.15 *Teachers' Satisfaction*

Teacher	Quote
Ann	<p>"I loved it. I didn't think I was going to love it. In fact, I was like, 'I don't really want to do this this summer.' I had about had it with education, and then I went ahead and did it because I had committed to it, and I'm really glad I did it. I really enjoyed it. It was fun."</p> <p>"I had a great time, and I hope they'll let me do it next year."</p>
Sophia	<p>"This was my first year teaching summer school at [Liberty]. I taught summer school at [previous district] last year, and we didn't have a curriculum, so being able to have curriculum was amazing . . . I really enjoyed teaching summer school because I felt equipped to know what I was supposed to do . . . I loved being able to go on the field trips that tied to our curriculum."</p>
Ashley	<p>"We had front-loaded so much information as far as how art can tell a story and have meaning behind it, and they definitely embraced that and just took off with it. It was really good, and like, I teared up when we were practicing [their presentation] because of the way they were explaining their art. They wanted people to feel joy and friendship and love, and so, it was just really beautiful."</p>
Shuri	<p>"I liked all the different things the students got to do this summer. It wasn't just art—it was music and dance. I loved all the different aspects of it . . . and even my daughter, who was a part of the program, loved doing the dance part. Now she wants to be in dance classes."</p>

Convergent Analysis

The purpose of this action research study was to determine Gaining Ground's impact on summer reading setback to assist in narrowing the educational opportunity gap. Converging the quantitative results and qualitative findings suggests a positive impact both on reading proficiency and on teachers' perceptions. Research Question 1 primarily relates to the numerical impact on reading proficiency. As shown in Table 4.3, overall, 56% of Liberty Public School

students in my sample grew in their reading proficiency from Spring 2022 to Fall 2022 after participating in Gaining Ground summer programs. When analyzing the data, I also noted that Grades K–1 made less growth in reading proficiency compared to Grades 2–4. This discernment is particularly noteworthy because as we move forward with our programming, we may want to look at differentiating our intervention for those aged students. In the next chapter, I take a closer look at potential reasons behind positive or negative impact, including variables that could have impacted these scores.

Analysis of the teacher interviews also addressed Research Question 1, further supporting the claim that Gaining Ground has a positive impact on reading proficiency. Aligning with the theme that emerged, teachers noted the increase in literacy skills for students based on their observations, assessments, and collaboration with students. Participants noted an increase in reading, writing, and speaking. The reciprocity of these skills influences reading proficiency (Anderson & Briggs, 2011).

I posed Research Question 2 to investigate Liberty Public Schools teachers' perceptions of Gaining Ground's impact. Of the five themes that emerged, I was surprised to find abundant evidence of teacher satisfaction because the semi-structured interview questions focused on the program itself (Appendix C). I had intended to get most responses representative of students' opinions, yet teachers openly spoke to their satisfaction with the program.

Upon further analysis, I noticed the themes intertwined and overlapped. Portions of the transcripts often related to two or more themes. For example,

Tara explained that one of her students increased his writing skills and was engaged in the writing (Table 4.13). As Chapter 5 highlights, these connections correlate to the theories framing this study as detailed in Chapter 2, which also illuminated the theme of accessible opportunities. Describing students' access to new opportunities, the teacher participants observed how these opportunities sparked new passions for students, which reinforced their autonomy, further illustrating the fluidity among themes.

Mindful of my positionality, I must note the teachers' emphasis on the program's strengths could be due to my insider relationship with Gaining Ground and with some of the teachers. I did offer participants opportunities to give feedback on changes they would like to see. Few expressed a need for change, yet I reflect on how their responses can inform my next steps in Chapter 5.

Summary

This chapter presented the outcome of my mixed-methods action research study to assess the impact of Gaining Ground. Quantitative results for students in kindergarten through fourth grade suggest an overall positive impact on reading proficiency, with some variation among subsets of data. The qualitative data from interviews with teachers yielded five themes regarding their perceptions of the summer program's impact. Overall, the data suggest Gaining Ground is accomplishing its aim for a positive impact on summer reading setback. In the following and final chapter, I continue the action research process by reflecting on the implications of these findings and articulating additional action steps for professional improvement.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

Although everyone deserves to be literate, many U.S. students do not meet grade-level expectations for reading proficiency (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), in part due to summer reading setback (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2020; Lenhoff et al., 2020). This action research study evaluated the impact of my organization's effort to address this concern. Gaining Ground is a nonprofit in Tulsa, Oklahoma that offers families access to culturally responsive books and engaging literacy experiences. As the curriculum director, I aim to help students remain or become more proficient readers from one academic year to the next through a summer program that implements project-based literacy interventions. To assess whether the program is functioning as intended, I examined the reading proficiency of participating students and sought insight from Gaining Ground teachers.

This chapter concludes the study by juxtaposing the outcomes with existing literature, further contextualizing the findings within the theoretical framework that grounded the research. I apply these insights by proposing recommendations for fellow practitioners and describing my own future plans, as well as detailing action steps I have already implemented at the time of this writing. Lastly, I reflect on the methodology of this action research study and make corresponding recommendations for future research.

Connection to Existing Literature

Three theories grounded this action research study: faucet theory, constructivist theory, and SDT. The first lens illuminated the problem of summer setback, yet research suggested traditional summer school fails to produce results for students from low-SES backgrounds (Cooper et al., 2000; Heyns, 1978). Gaining Ground's summer program, guided by the other two lenses, does not fit the traditional summer school model. The overlapping themes that emerged from my data analysis, as noted in Chapter 4, reflect that intentional design in ways that are consistent with the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2.

Gaining Ground's approach exhibits principles of constructivism and SDT by prioritizing PBL and access to books of choice. As De Smedt et al. (2020) mentioned, PBL should emphasize student autonomy. Confirming Gaining Ground's successful use of PBL, the themes of student purpose, engagement, and choice emerged during data analysis. Programming that lets students take ownership of their learning is more likely to increase reading proficiency (Becerra-Posada et al., 2022).

Whereas traditional summer school can be a boring experience (Schacter & Jo, 2005), Gaining Ground endeavors to provide exciting programs characterized by new experiences. In contrast to the traditional summer school models described in Chapter 2, I found evidence of an increase in opportunities for students. Existing scholarship suggests providing access to such resources and experiences can close the opportunity gap between marginalized students

and their more advantaged peers (Entwisle et al., 2001; Nicholson & Tiru, 2019; Xu & De Arment, 2016).

As Bridges (2013) explained, access to books at home is a crucial factor in parent–child interactions involving reading. As teachers confirmed, the opportunities for students to take books home or showcase their final project impacted the learners’ at-home interactions. This positive relation between the program and students’ homelife may reinforce families’ support of Gaining Ground programs and lead to more opportunities for family connections. Limited access to books at home can also influence parent–child interactions. Reading aloud, especially at home, provides children an “opportunity to learn about the world, acquire more sophisticated vocabulary beyond their everyday language, and understand how decontextualized language works” (Bridges, 2013, p. 22). If students lack access to books at home for rich, engaging read-alouds, they can miss out on these experiences.

Project-based curriculum and providing students with access to self-selected books has been shown to increase reading skills (Duke, 2020; Fisher & Frye, 2018), as discussed in Chapter 2. Scholars also emphasize the value of student self-selection of books (Allred & Cena, 2020). Allington & McGill-Franzen (2008) further argued that providing access to books is statistically significant in increasing reading achievement during the summer break.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, research suggests that PBL not only increases student autonomy but improves literacy skills (Duke, 2020; Leggett and Harrington, 2019). This impact was evident in my interview data. Teachers

described witnessing students' writing and reading skills increase over the course of the program. They also observed an increase in high-quality discussion marked by conversational skills and reflection. These findings acknowledge the impact of PBL on literacy skills as well as the impact on student's ownership of learning. A study by Parsons et al. (2010), as described in Chapter 2, discussed the implementation of project-based instruction at a Title I site during the school year. Their research suggested the emergence of the following themes: student engagement, student learning, student collaboration, and student independence. These themes resemble the sub-themes that emerged in my study.

Although action research is not obligated to address a gap in scholarship, such connections to existing literature can reinforce the value of Gaining Ground's mission, which could be instrumental in meeting the funding needs of our nonprofit. Moreover, placing my findings in conversation with prior studies may offer insight for fellow practitioners. To that end, the following section provides recommendations for practice based on my study.

Recommendations for Practice

The reading crisis, particularly for students from low-SES communities, is much wider than the scope of this study (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Summer reading programs aim to increase reading proficiency for students by implementing various reading interventions. Although summer literacy interventions can vary from program to program (Kim, 2004), my findings suggest providing access to books of choice and PBL can be successful. Based

on the STAR data and teachers' perceptions, I recommend programs adopt these approaches.

From the STAR data, I determined that 56% of students increased reading proficiency from Spring 2022 to Fall 2022. As a practitioner, I was initially disheartened by this indication that slightly more than half of the students made growth, whereas approximately half (44%) of the students declined. Upon further reflection, I recollected that most students from low-SES backgrounds regress during the summertime (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2020; McGill-Franzen et al., 2016). Therefore, that 56% of Gaining Ground students experienced growth suggests the intervention's positive impact.

I attribute this success to the program's key components: providing access to books and project-based curriculum. The teacher interviews reinforced the success of this intervention approach for improving students' reading proficiency. Specifically, they cited student engagement, their satisfaction, and family connections—elements any summer school program would like to see—as contributing to the program's positive and impactful climate. Therefore, I recommend implementing these practices into summer literacy interventions to help combat summer reading setback.

As action research, this study was limited to my context (Efron & Ravid, 2019). Consequently, rather than make broad, generalizable claims based on the results, I encourage other practitioners to apply these recommendations in a manner that suits their contexts. Likewise, the next section describes my intention to take my own advice by detailing my implementation plan.

Implementation Plan

Action research can “empower teachers and teacher groups to carry out, reflect on and implement innovations, . . . further develop[ing] their professional practice on a long-term basis” (Rauch et al., 2022, p. 632). As illustrated in Figure 5.1, action research is cyclical in nature, leading the way for a long-term commitment to professional learning. Designing an implementation plan encourages taking action based on the study’s results.

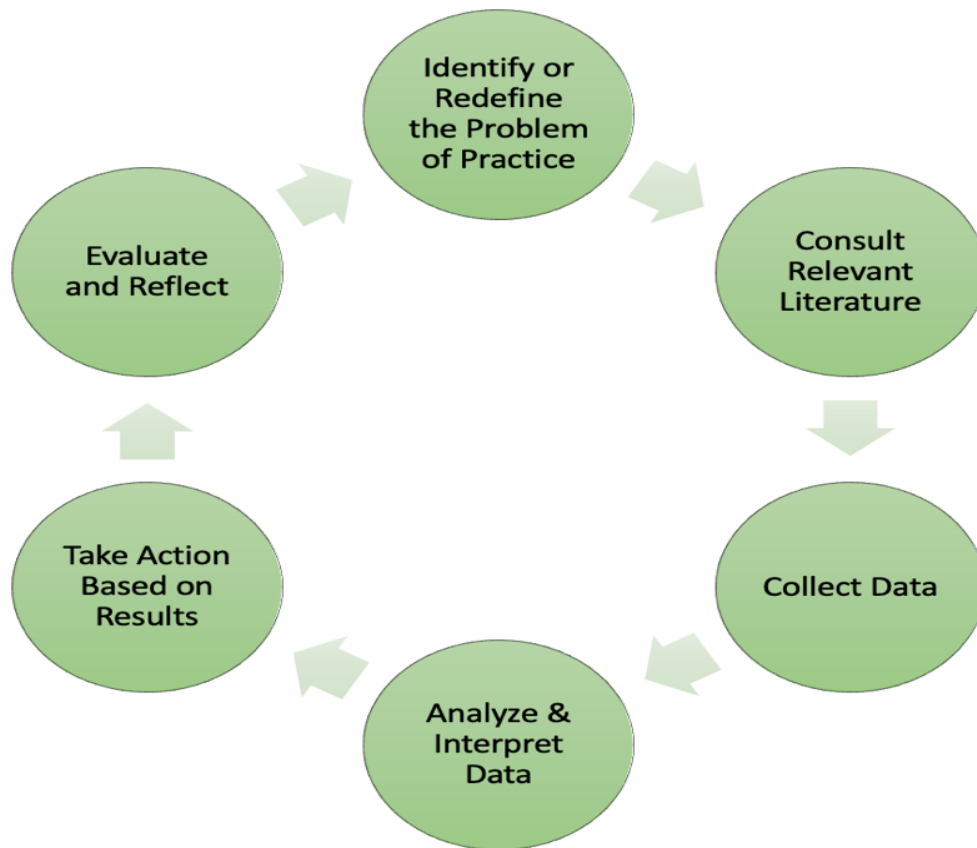


Figure 5.1 *The Action Research Cycle*

In line with my recommendations for practice, there are many steps Gaining Ground should take, including some already in motion. For Summer 2023 programming, the organization implemented two key changes based on my

findings: extending teacher training and hiring a literacy specialist to work with teachers. I intend to incorporate two additional steps: deepening K–1 literacy practices embedded into the curriculum and creating a consistent tracking system for the book bus.

Extended Teacher Training

As I began this action research study, the importance of teacher training became very evident. There was a need for more robust professional development before programming began and ongoing support throughout the program. This realization influenced my data collection, specifically the choice to gather teachers' perspectives on Gaining Ground's impact to gain insight into how teachers experienced the curriculum and program.

In 2022, Gaining Ground summer programs involved 188 students and 35 teachers at six sites. For 2023, we expanded to serve 480 students with 49 teachers at seven sites. As the program grows, the need for teacher training increases. Of the 35 teachers who taught Summer 2022 programs, 31 returned for 2023. This 89% teacher retention rate aligns with the theme of teacher satisfaction in my data. As noted in Chapter 4, Ann had been teaching for 29 years and expressed being fed up with education and the classroom before the 2022 program started. Describing how much she enjoyed the program, she articulated her hope to participate the following summer. Indeed, Ann is among the Gaining Ground teachers returning for the 2023 summer. Given high rates of teacher attrition (Madigan & Kim, 2021), the program's impact on teacher retention is important.

To keep teachers satisfied, Gaining Ground must ensure they are adequately trained to feel successful when implementing summer programming. In 2023, training intentionally included interactive learning opportunities that were relevant to the students, following Matherson and Windle's (2017) guidance. We also revamped the training by allowing time for teacher-driven inquiry. Teacher leaders were able to model components of the unit to a group of teachers and lead them in discussion. These changes reflect our aim to create a sustainable training model so teachers continue learning throughout the program.

Extended teacher training may also reduce the marginal differences between the two sites in Liberty Public Schools. As noted, the two sites had significant disparities in the number of students who increased reading proficiency over the summer break. Without knowing which of many variables may account for this difference, we reasoned providing additional support for teachers could yield more equitable results for students. Teacher training could only provide so much support before programming began, which led us to adding a literacy specialist.

Literacy Specialist

To further increase Gaining Ground's capacity to promote literacy through PBL, we hired a literacy specialist to model techniques and work with teachers as challenges arise. As teachers implement the project-based curriculum in 2023, they can turn to this added support for the students in their class. For example, as students contribute to discussions during whole-group lessons, teachers can attend to specific literacy skills that students need. If a student is struggling to

learn the letter A, shared writing from the project-based lesson can tie in that literacy skill. As another example, students are expected to write throughout the summer program, and the literacy specialist can support teachers' understanding of how to confer with students while they are writing to meet each student's specific literacy needs.

Another goal of the literacy specialist is to work closely with the teachers who teach emerging readers. As noted in Chapter 4, K–1 students made less growth in reading proficiency compared to students in Grades 2–4. The literacy specialist collaborated with these teachers to coach them on how to embed students' individual literacy goals through PBL. I hope to build on these steps by providing even more support for teachers in the future, as addressed in the next section. Likewise, as funding increases, we can increase this support by hiring additional specialists. By meeting with teachers weekly, the literacy specialist aligns with our goal of sustainable teacher learning, yet currently, one literacy specialist serves all seven sites.

K–1 Literacy Practices

As noted in Chapter 4, STAR scores from the K–1 sample were lower than scores in Grades 2–4, reflecting a 35% increase in reading proficiency compared to 61%. This disparity prompted me to reflect on and possibly rethink certain components of programming for students in the earliest grades. Moving forward, I intend to focus on training specific to K–1 literacy needs vs. needs for students in second grade and above. Differentiating teacher training by grade levels or instituting smaller class sizes for younger students could be possible solutions.

Taking action on this matter is important to ensure the educational opportunity gap will have less of an impact on those students as they progress in their public education. In the fall, I intend to meet with the Gaining Ground staff to discuss possible alternatives to the program that will meet the reading needs of our youngest students.

Cross-Reference Tracking System

A limitation of this study was the inability to cross-reference the students who accessed the book bus all summer long with the students in the summer program. Students visit the book bus weekly as it comes to their neighborhood or when it visits the school during summer programs. However, in 2022, we did not have a system in place to keep track of the book bus students, in part due to the high number of visitors— approximately 250 students each week. Cross-referencing those students could be beneficial, enabling us to consider the book bus combined with curriculum to determine the organization's overall impact on reading proficiency. In the fall, I intend to meet with the Gaining Ground staff to discuss a cross-checking method for attendance and programming that book bus drivers can use.

Reflection on Methodology

Reflection is a critical piece of the action research cycle (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflecting on my problem of practice, the need to assess the overall impact of Gaining Ground's summer program, I recognize student input would have added valuable data to this study. Including field notes and student surveys or interviews would have been beneficial. However, due to the course

sequence for my graduate program, district constraints, and my location outside of Oklahoma, studying students' experience with Gaining Ground was not plausible during this action research cycle.

Although I did seek the teachers' perspectives, the fact that so many of the interview responses were positive prompted additional reflection on my research methods. I offered participants opportunities to give feedback on changes they would like to see in the programming. Few expressed concern aside from scheduling conflicts that are out of Gaining Ground's control. This outcome could be related to my positive relationship with the participants. Alternatively, teachers with negative sentiments might not have volunteered for the interviews.

There were other limitations for this action research study. First, I did not gather quantitative data from all students who participated in Gaining Ground's summer programming. Because I am not familiar with the standardized assessment benchmarks for Swift Public Schools, the other district Gaining Ground serves, I only collected data from Liberty Public Schools. My familiarity with their assessments and the numbers associated with the reading proficiency scores enabled me to determine the results for approximately half ($n = 75$) of all Summer 2022 Gaining Ground students ($N = 188$).

Another limitation is the teacher training. Teachers were asked to attend a 6-hour session on a Saturday in June, before summer programming started, and 30 of the 35 teachers did, yet one of my interviewees did not. We were unable to record or reproduce the training for those teachers with schedule conflicts. In

hindsight, I could have excluded the participant who did not attend the teacher training to focus more on the fully trained teachers. However, although all teachers have different teaching experience coming into the summer program, they also had limited time to develop a deep understanding of the pedagogical expectations involved in the programming to promote PBL and shared literacy experiences. This reflection further reinforces my intention to enhance teacher training moving forward.

Lastly, Gaining Ground programming does not last all summer. Due to various reasons, including transportation and staffing, we did not provide programs in July 2022. Some students may have participated in other district programs during the summer months, but this study did not track such data. A longer time frame for programming would have been ideal. More importantly in terms of methodology, the study's quantitative instrument was not administered directly before and after the program occurred. Despite various other factors impacting students' performance, collecting spring and fall scores gave me a general view of the impact of Gaining Ground summer programming. However, assessing all participating students at the beginning of June and again at the end of June with a consistent assessment might have yielded more exact pre and post measurements.

Recommendations for Future Research

As I mentioned earlier, Gaining Ground teachers have different teaching styles and levels of fidelity to the curriculum. This study reinforced my awareness that teachers' understanding of the programming is an important component of

quality implementation. Thus, a future action research study could focus on effective teacher training for summer programming, specifically how to provide quality training in a short amount of time. Teachers spend the school year participating in professional development aligned with district needs, resulting in limited time for professional development related to summer learning. I could examine effective ways to implement the training as well as how to sustain teacher learning throughout summer programming. This process could involve teachers' journaling their learning experiences throughout the action research study. However, recruiting participants could be challenging because teachers are often worn out from the school year and tend to prefer a more relaxed summer experience.

Future research could also involve a long-term ethnography to follow Gaining Ground students throughout the school year. This type of study would illuminate the lasting impact of Gaining Ground on students' reading proficiency, which would be informative. However, the study would be very time-consuming. Rather than following a large population to determine impact, as in prior studies (Heyns, 1978), a more manageable approach for action research could involve a longitudinal assessment of Gaining Ground centered on a small group of students. I could also collaborate with teachers to gather ethnographic data.

Finally, I also recommend a more robust study to examine an experimental group of students who participated in Gaining Ground summer programming and a control group of students who did not participate. Comparing their reading proficiency scores would result in a clearer picture of the

effectiveness of Gaining Ground. The study could also include parental input in a survey or interview. These data collection tools would give the organization insight into students' attitudes toward reading and experiences during the summer, as well as those of their families.

Conclusion

The purpose of this action research study was to investigate the impact of Gaining Ground on summer reading setback in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as the organization strives to decrease the educational opportunity gap for students in this area. Unfortunately, education in the United States is not distributed equitably for all students, as evidenced by the difference in reading proficiency based on SES. The discrepancy between students from low-SES backgrounds and their peers is a problem deserving urgent action because literacy is a fundamental skill necessary for success in life. Although addressing this problem on a large scale may take time, I am committed to gradually chipping away at the systemic barriers and working toward solutions that provide all students with the gift of literacy.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER INTERVIEW INVITATION LETTER

Dear Gaining Ground Teachers,

My name is Tiffany Robles. In addition to serving as curriculum director for Gaining Ground Literacy, I am a doctoral candidate in curriculum studies at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a study as part of the requirements of my degree and I would like to invite you to participate. I am interested in Gaining Ground's impact on reading proficiency. Participation includes a one-on-one interview with me via Microsoft Teams at a mutually agreed upon time, lasting about 45 minutes.

I will ask questions about Gaining Ground and your perceptions and experiences with summer programming. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. I will videorecord the interview for accurate transcription but will not share the recording with anyone and will destroy it upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. I will keep your interview transcript on my password-protected laptop. The results of the study will appear in my dissertation and may be presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

If you would like to participate, please contact me at the email listed below. I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Currin.

Thank you for your consideration,

Tiffany Robles

APPENDIX B

SUMMER OVERVIEW AND LESSON PLANS

Guiding Question: *“How do the arts impact me and my community?”*

FOCUS	SESSION 1	SESSION 2	SESSION 3	SESSION 4
ARTS	Book: <i>Maybe Something Beautiful</i> PBL: Murals Art: Paint Lit: Lesson 2.1	Book: <i>Many Shapes of Clay</i> PBL: Vocab, Emotions Art: Clay Lit: Lesson 5.1, 5.4	Book: <i>I am Frida</i> PBL: SW & Research Facts Art: Self-Portrait Lit: Lesson 3.9	Field Trip Artist Workshop
MUSIC	Book: <i>Drum Dream Girl</i> PBL: Montage, Feelings Art: Drum Making Lit: Lesson 3.3	Book: <i>Double Bass Blues</i> PBL: Family, Community Art: Instrument Making Lit: Lesson 3.19 Syllables	Book: <i>When the Beat Was Born?</i> PBL: SW Class Rap Art: Hip Hop Beat Lit: Lesson 6.1	Field Trip Artist Workshop
MOVEMENT	Book: <i>I Got Rhythm</i> PBL: Montage & Movement Art: Line Dance Lit: Lesson 2.6	Book: <i>Rap a Tap Tap</i> PBL: Trailblazers Art: <i>Hip Hop Lollipop</i> , TikTok Lit: Lesson 1.16	Book: <i>Suki's Kimono</i> PBL: Culture, Web, Guided Research Art: <i>Danza</i> , TikTok Lit: Lesson 2.12	Field Trip Artist Workshop
CREATE (WEEK 4)	Book: <i>Be A Maker</i> Work on Final Project	Work on Final Project	Work on Final Project	SHOWCASE

Note: Art, Music, and Movement week differs by site. Launch the Project on your site's "Session 1" during your PBL Time. Refer to Art: Session 1 for PBL, Literacy, and Community.

ART: Session 1

Breakfast & Community	<p>Every morning will begin with Community Time. The goal of community time is to build relationships among students and to focus on their SEL needs. Gather students in a circle. Discuss that we are a community and what that means.</p> <p>Greeting: Go around the circle and have students introduce themselves.</p> <p>Activity/SEL: Introduce Mood Meter (Materials) Ask students where they are on the meter. You will do this daily during Community Time. If students are able, try Rose, Thorn, and Bud.</p> <p>Share: Create Classroom Contract Discuss: <i>how we treat each other, how I will treat you, and how we will support our classmates.</i></p>
PBL	<p>Day 1: LAUNCH THE PROJECT <i>I am so excited about this summer and the community and fun we are going to have together! We will be learning this summer about all different types of art and the impact it has on the Community. We are going to work to answer the question, “How do the arts impact me and my community?” At the end of our time together this summer, you will be creating or doing art to display or perform! Ask the question: What is art? Record answers on Anchor Chart.</i></p> <p>Whole Group: <i>This week we are going to be talking and learning about Art. And today we are going to be talking about a type of art: MURALS. Start an Anchor Chart and add <u>MURAL</u>: A large picture painted on a wall. Discuss what murals are and show various pictures of them online. (Google: Street Art Murals or Murals Around Time)</i></p> <p>Activity: Pattern Blocks Allow students time to use pattern blocks to create small murals. They can use various shapes to create a bigger picture or work in groups. Have students verbalize what they made with a sentence frame: I created _____.</p> <p>Whole Group: Read Aloud: <i>Maybe Something Beautiful</i> Establish Turn and Talk Partners. Ask questions and incorporate discussions during read-aloud.</p> <p>Small-Group/Independent Work: Take students outside with CHALK and let them create large murals.</p> <p>Reflection: Have students write/draw about the mural they made and share it with the group.</p>
Literacy	<p>LAUNCH LESSON</p> <p>Whole Group: Reading Strategies Lesson: 2.1 A Perfect Reading Spot</p> <p>Read to Self/Partner & Small Groups: Spend the first-day establishing routines appropriate for your grade level. Use this time to take running records, confer one-on-one with students, and small groups.</p>
Lunch & Movement	<p>Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.</p>

Arts Experience	<p>Paint: Today students will spend time using/exploring paint and materials. Students can create different pieces of art with paint.</p> <p>Guiding Questions: <i>What lines and shapes are in your picture? How does your art make you feel?</i> Give students an opportunity to describe their own original works of art by telling about the image they created.</p>
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day. Reflect on the art component of the day & encourage students to read that night.

ART: Session 2

Breakfast & Community	<p>Community can consist of a Greeting, Activity, and Share.</p> <p>SEL: Mood Meter or Rose/Thorn/Bud</p> <p>Share: <i>What makes you happy?</i></p>
PBL	<p>Whole Group: <i>Today we are going to be talking about a different type of art: CLAY. Has anyone used Play-Doh or clay before? Clay is a different type of art medium.</i></p> <p>Anchor Chart: <u>MEDIUM:</u> <i>The materials used in creating a piece of artwork.</i> <u>COMMUNITY:</u> <i>A group of people living in a particular area.</i> <i>We are working towards figuring out “How do the arts impact me and my community?” One way art can impact others is using it to express your feelings and emotions. Let’s read a book to find out a way that art can make an impact.</i></p> <p>Read Aloud: <i>Many Shapes of Clay</i> Turn & Talk: <i>What feelings does Eisha feel? How does she use the clay?</i></p> <p>Small-Group/Independent Work: Show students the emotions/feelings chart. Discuss different emotions and feelings. Students will decide how they feel and write/draw a picture in their notebooks. Sentence Frame: “I feel _____. If able, students can add “because _____.”</p> <p>Activity: Clay Give students time to create with clay. Encourage them to be creative and make a piece of art that expresses whatever they want!</p> <p>Reflection: Students will share with the group what they made. Ask students if any of their emotions/feelings changed. Did making art/creating with clay make them feel happy? Did they have fun?</p>
Literacy	<p>Whole Group: Reading Strategies Lesson: 5.1 (K–2), Reading Strategies Lesson 5.4 (3–5)</p> <p>Read to Self/Partner & Small Groups: Use this time to take running records, confer one-on-one with students, and small groups.</p>
Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.

Arts Experience	Clay: Give students time to create with clay. Encourage them to be creative and make a piece of art that expresses whatever they want! Have students write and present what they created: "I created _____."
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day. Reflect on the project component of the day.

ART: Session 3


Breakfast & Community	<p>Community can consist of a Greeting, Activity, and Share.</p> <p>SEL: Mood Meter or Rose/Thorn/Bud</p> <p>Share: <i>What is your favorite color? Do you use it a lot when creating art?</i></p>
PBL	<p>Whole Group: <i>We have been talking about Art this week and working towards figuring out "How do the arts impact me and my community?" We are going to look at an artist today that made an impact on her community. We are going to spend some time researching facts about Frida Kahlo and her impact on the community. (Show class some of Frida's art)</i></p> <p>Anchor Chart: <i>SELF-PORTRAIT: A representation (drawing/painting, etc.) of oneself. "A picture that someone makes of themselves."</i></p> <p>K-2: Research facts together online. Create a Shared Writing with the class. (Ex. She was sick a lot as a kid, bus crash, etc.) Discuss overcoming obstacles, self-portraits.</p> <p>3-4 Small-Group/Independent Work: Let students use technology to research facts about Frida and write in a notebook: What impact did Frida have on her community? Did Frida overcome obstacles? Why do you think she did so many self-portraits?</p> <p>Whole Group: Read Aloud: <i>I am Frida</i></p> <p>Small-Group/Independent Work: Frida Tissue Paper Activity Students will use the Frida template to create a Frida Kahlo Crown. They can tear tissue paper and create Frida's flower crown. (Materials) Try to incorporate a literacy component. Ex. Have students try and write/describe how they think Frida is feeling in their picture OR have students label the color of tissue paper they use.</p> <p>Reflection: Have students show and describe their Frida pictures. What impact do you think Frida had?</p>
Literacy	<p>Whole Group: Reading Strategies Lesson: 3.9</p> <p>Read to Self/Partner & Small Groups: Use this time to take running records, confer one-on-one with students, and small groups.</p>
Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.

Arts Experience	<p>Self-portrait: Students will use a mirror to create a self-portrait of themselves. Remind students about Frida Kahlo's self-portrait and now they will make their own. Invite students to observe their features. If time discuss a “realistic” self-portrait vs. “abstract” and allow students to make both.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When you look in the mirror, what do you see?</i> • <i>Which colors will you need to make your drawing?</i> • <i>What shape is your face (eyes, ears, nose, and mouth)?</i> • <i>Would you like to draw your whole body or just your head? Why?</i> • <i>What expression are you going to be showing in your self-portrait?</i>
Close & Reflection	<p>End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day. Reflect on the project component of the day.</p>

ART: Session 4

Session 4 Lesson Plans consist of the day that your site goes on the ART field trip. Field Trip Day varies.


MUSIC: Session 1

Breakfast & Community	<p>Every morning will begin with Community Time. The goal of community time is to build relationships among students and to focus on their SEL needs. Gather students in a circle. Discuss that we are a community and what that means.</p> <p>Greeting: Go around the circle and have students introduce themselves.</p> <p>Activity/SEL: Introduce Mood Meter (Materials) Ask students where they are on the meter. You will do this daily during Community Time. If students are able, try Rose, Thorn, and Bud.</p> <p>Share: Create Classroom Contract Discuss: <i>how we treat each other, how I will treat you, and how we will support our classmates.</i></p>
PBL  Different genres of music	<p>Day 1: LAUNCH THE PROJECT <i>I am so excited about this summer and the community and fun we are going to have together! We will be learning this summer about all different types of art and the impact it has on the Community. We are going to work to answer the question, “How do the arts impact me and my community?” At the end of our time together this summer, you will be creating or doing art to display or perform! Ask the question: What is art? Record answers on Anchor Chart.</i></p> <p>Whole Group: <i>This week we are going to focus on a type of art: MUSIC. Lead a discussion: Is music art? Why or why not? What music do you listen to? Does different music make you feel different ways? (Ex. soft music = calm, etc.) Spend some time exposing the students to different types of music. Ask students to think about how each type of music makes them feel. (Emotions Chart in Materials)</i></p> <p>Anchor Chart: <i><u>Rhythm</u>: regular, repeated pattern of beats, sounds, activity, or movement.</i> <i><u>Rhyme</u>: words that end with the same sound.</i></p> <p>Small-Group/Independent Work: After listening to the music, have students write/draw how they feel when they listen to different types of music or what their favorite type of music is and how it makes them feel.</p> <p>Extension: Play the different types of music again. For each song, have students pick a marker color that they to use to color with. (Ex. loud, erratic music—students may want to draw something with red). Use sentence frame: “I feel _____”</p> <p>Whole Group: Read Aloud: <i>Drum Dream Girl</i> Turn and Talk: <i>What impact did the girl have on her community? How would you feel if you were told you couldn’t do something like play music?</i> If time allows, let them find things in the room that can be used as drums. Let them drum!</p> <p>Reflection: Music made an impact in the story. What type of impact do you think you can have on your community? Can you have an impact?</p>
Literacy	<p>Whole Group: Reading Strategies Lesson: 3.3 Students learned the word <i>rhyme</i> earlier in the day. Use this time to discuss the phonemic & phonological components associated with rhymes and that they can use parts of words to decode other words. (Ex. <i>if you know the word <u>day</u>, you can sound out the word <u>way</u></i>).</p> <p>Read to Self/Partner & Small Groups: Use this time to take running records, and confer one-on-one with students, and small groups.</p>


Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.
Arts Experience	Making Bongo Drums: Scan the QR code on instructions on making miniature bongo drums. Students will use cups and tape to create their drums. Can they make different beats with their friends?
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day. Reflect on the project component of the day.

MUSIC: Session 2

Breakfast & Community	<p>Community can consist of a Greeting, Activity, and Share.</p> <p>SEL: Mood Meter or Rose/Thorn/Bud</p> <p>Share: <i>What things do you like to do at home?</i></p>
PBL	<p>Whole Group: <i>We have been talking about art and the impact it makes on you and your community. This week we are focusing on Music.</i></p> <p>Read Aloud: <i>Double Bass Blues</i> (Few words, lots of time for discussion!) Turn and Talk during: <i>How is Nic feeling throughout the book? How does Nic's music impact his friends? Family? Community? Families can talk about what music means to Nic in Double Bass Blues. How do we know how Nic feels about playing his double bass? How does Nic use different elements of his journey to the city in the music he plays for his granddaddy? In what ways can you use music or art to handle big emotions?</i> Draw attention to the onomatopoeia in the book. The book has plenty of examples. Can students come up with some more?</p> <p>Optional: Use onomatopoeia cards in the material packet. Preview them to students first, then have students draw a card, read and act out.</p> <p>Small-Group/Independent Work: Discuss: <i>Nic's family values blues and the music that Nic makes. Does your family make any music? Or have any music that is important to your home or culture?</i> Once students have an opportunity to share about music at home, let them go write/draw in their journals about the music in their family. If they don't have any, they can write/draw about where they hear most of their music and what it sounds like.</p> <p>Whole Group: Gather students back together for Shared Writing over the topic: <i>What music does your family listen to and why is it important to them?</i> After the Shared Writing is complete, have students copy Shared Writing OR the teacher makes copies to send home for families. Have students bring them back the next day to share the answers with the class.</p> <p>Reflection: Reflect on the music in their family and community that they see or are a part of. If they are unsure have them go home and ask their families!</p>
Literacy	<p>Whole Group: Reading Strategies Lesson: 3.19</p> <p>Read to Self/Partner & Small Groups: Use this time to take running records, and confer one-on-one with students, and small groups.</p>

Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.
Arts Experience 	Instrument Making: Maracas 1. Fill plastic eggs with rice or beans. 2. Put two spoons together, with the heads of the spoons facing. Grab your washi tape and begin wrapping it tightly around the handles of the spoons. 3. Open the heads of the spoons slightly and set an egg inside the heads of the spoon. 4. Wrap your egg with washi tape, beginning by going over the seam of the egg. Going around with the tape 2–3 times around the seam will make it more secure. Can students make music with their peers? Create a song? Play to the rhythm?
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day. Reflect on the project component of the day.

MUSIC: Session 3

Breakfast & Community	Community can consist of a Greeting, Activity, and Share. SEL: Mood Meter or Rose/Thorn/Bud Share: <i>What do you want to be when you grow up?</i>
PBL  Hip-Hop Brain Break	Whole Group: <i>We have been talking about the arts and the impact it makes on you and your community. This week we are focusing on Music.</i> Read Aloud: <i>When the Beat Was Born</i> As a longer/more complex read-aloud, you may want to take breaks. You may want to use the YouTube version (after read-aloud) with accompanying hip-hop music. Discuss the start of hip-hop: <i>What impact did DJ Kool Herc have? DJ Herc encouraged dance-offs instead of fighting. What are some ways you can solve problems without fighting? Have you heard any of the rappers/hip-hop artists listed at the end on the timeline? Have you ever seen a DJ perform?</i> Small-Group/Independent Work: Hip-Hop Brain Break Scan QR CODE or feel free to use other videos. Whole Group: Shared Writing: As a class, Create a class rap! Brainstorm a topic, encourage rhyming words, make it as simple or as complex as needed, and have students work on reading/singing the rap when finished. Small-Group/Independent Work: Have students create their own DJ Name and draw a picture of them DJ-ing! Reflection: Review the types of music you all have talked about this week.
Literacy	Whole Group: Reading Strategies Lesson: 6.1 <i>Think back to how music made the character feel in “When the Beat Was Born.”</i> Read to Self/Partner & Small Groups: Use this time to take running records, confer one-on-one with students, and small groups.

Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.
Arts Experience	Create a hip-hop beat. View the video (QR code) for ideas. If students don't have access to the app, they can make a beat by just clapping and tapping. Can they make a beat and keep rhythm with a partner/small groups?
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day. Reflect on the project component of the day.

MUSIC: Session 4

Session 4 Lesson Plans consist of the day that your site goes on the MUSIC field trip.

MOVEMENT: Session 1

Breakfast & Community	<p>Every morning will begin with Community Time. The goal of community time is to build relationships among students and to focus on their SEL needs. Gather students in a circle. Discuss that we are a community and what that means.</p> <p>Greeting: Go around the circle and have students introduce themselves.</p> <p>Activity/SEL: Introduce Mood Meter (Materials) Ask students where they are on the meter. You will do this daily during Community Time. If students are able, try Rose, Thorn, and Bud.</p> <p>Share: Create Classroom Contract Discuss: <i>how we treat each other, how I will treat you, and how we will support our classmates.</i></p>
PBL	<p>Day 1: LAUNCH THE PROJECT <i>I am so excited about this summer and the community and fun we are going to have together! We will be learning this summer about all different types of art and the impact it has on the Community. We are going to work to answer the question, “How do the arts impact me and my community?” At the end of our time together this summer, you will be creating or doing art to display or perform! Ask the question: What is art? Record answers on Anchor Chart.</i></p> <p>Whole Group: <i>This week we are going to focus on a type of art: MOVEMENT. Discuss: Is movement art? Is dance art? Why or why not? What dances and movements are you familiar with? Does watching or doing dance make you feel a certain way? Spend some time exposing the students to different types of dance/movement. Optional: Allow students to dance to the music!</i> Chart: <u>Rhythm</u>: <i>a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound.</i></p> <p>Read Aloud: <i>I Got Rhythm</i> Turn and Talk: <i>Where did she see the rhythm? How do you see rhythm? What happened as she walked through the park? What did the people around her do?</i></p> <p>Small-Group/Independent Work: Have students work independently to draw or write about their experiences with dance. How does dancing/movement make them feel? Where do they see it?</p> <p>Activity: Movement Cards Cut out and place cards face down. Have students draw a card, read, and act out the movement. This can be done in pairs, groups, or whole group. Can they put some movements together to create a pattern? Rhythm? Dance?</p> <p>Whole Group: Shared Writing (Referencing the read-aloud) <i>How did the rhythm and dancing impact her community? How does movement and dance impact your community? (If older students feel they could do this independently or with partners, have them do so.)</i></p> <p>Reflection: <i>Today we discussed different types of movement and rhythm. We will be spending some time this week working on movement and dance. Be thinking of different dances you know.</i></p>
Literacy	<p>Whole Group: Reading Strategies Lesson: 2.6</p> <p>Read to Self/Partner & Small Groups: Use this time to take running records and confer one-on-one with students, and small groups.</p>

Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.
Arts Experience	<p>Cupid Shuffle: <i>Today we are going to learn a line dance!</i> Discuss: <i>How does movement make you feel?</i></p> <p>Activity: Have students write out steps to create their own line dance: simple (Ex. 1. Leg, 2. Leg, 3. Head 4. Arm, 5. Arm) OR complex (First, step to the right. Next, spin.). You may want to write body parts so students can reference them.</p>
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day. Reflect on the project component of the day.

MOVEMENT: Session 2

Breakfast & Community	<p>Community can consist of a Greeting, Activity, and Share.</p> <p>SEL: Mood Meter or Rose/Thorn/Bud</p> <p>Share: Describe what you would do with \$100 dollars.</p>
PBL	<p>Whole Group: <i>We have been talking about art and the impact it makes on you and your community. This week we are going to continue to focus on a type of art: MOVEMENT. Today we are going to talk about Trailblazers! Do you know what a trailblazer is? (Someone who leads the way OR a person who is the first to do something, changes the way things are done)</i></p> <p>Read Aloud: <i>Rap a Tap Tap</i> Discuss: <i>This story tells the story of Bill Bojangles Robinson. He was the most famous Black tap dancer of the 20th century. He was a trailblazer in the Black community. Before him, Black and White performers couldn't dance together—this changed when he performed with Shirley Temple—and Black performers couldn't perform alone on stage.</i></p> <p>SHOW VIDEO: Bojangles Stair Dance Can any students tap dance? Let them get up and try it out!</p> <p>SHOW VIDEO of Maria Tallchief Discuss: <i>Maria Tallchief blazed the trail by becoming the first Native American ballet dancer, as well as the first prima ballerina.</i></p> <p>Discuss these dancers as trailblazers: <i>What change/impact did they make in their community? Do you believe dance/movement can make a change like that?</i></p> <p>Small-Group/Independent Work: <i>The dancers discussed “blazed the trail” for other people. What are some things you are good at? Could you see yourself being a trailblazer?</i> Encourage students to believe in themselves and remind them they are good at something and can blaze the trail by standing up for others, being kind, etc. Have students write/draw using sentence frames: <i>I can... I am good at...</i> If time allows, have students research other dance trailblazers!</p> <p>Reflection: Have students share what they wrote/drew about.</p>

Literacy	<p>Whole Group: Reading Strategies Lesson: 1.16</p> <p>Read to Self/Partner & Small Groups: Use this time to take running records, and confer one-on-one with students and small groups.</p>
Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.
Arts Experience	<p>Read Aloud: <i>Hip Hop Lollipop</i> Discuss: <i>How does hip-hop dancing make Lolli feel? Today we are going to do some dance/movement!</i></p> <p>Whole-Class or Small-Group Options: learn Tik Tok Dance for Kids (QR code), learn a cultural dance, or learn a dance from a movie (Ex. <i>Encanto</i>). Students can write the steps and practice the moves. Tomorrow, they can film the dance. The goal of this experience is to express themselves through movement.</p>
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day. Reflect on the project component of the day.

MOVEMENT: Session 3

Breakfast & Community	<p>Community can consist of a Greeting, Activity, and Share.</p> <p>SEL: Mood Meter or Rose/Thorn/Bud</p> <p>Share: What is your favorite type of dance?</p>
PBL	<p>Whole Group: <i>We have been talking about art and the impact it makes on you and your community. This week we are going to focus on a type of art: MOVEMENT.</i></p> <p>Read Aloud: <i>Suki's Kimono</i> <i>How does Suki feel when she remembers the festival and dancing with her grandma? Why was wearing her kimono and dance at school important? Suki's culture is a big part of who she is! Movement is embedded in different cultures.</i></p> <p>SHOW VIDEO: <i>Kabuki Dance</i></p> <p>Small-Group/Independent Work: Have students write/draw about their family/culture and any movement or dance important to them. OR Have them write/draw of an event that was really special to them because of the memories (just like Suki and the festival).</p> <p>Whole Group: Read Aloud: <i>Danza</i> (or parts, if time is limited) SHOW VIDEO: <i>Folklorico Dance</i> <i>Baile Folklorico plays an important role in Mexican culture by providing an opportunity for people of Mexican heritage to convey their emotions and to get to know their cultural identity better.</i></p> <p>Create a CULTURE WEB. Write the word <u>Culture</u> in the middle. <i>What different areas of culture can be added? (Ex. food, clothes, dance) The culture of a group of people is the traditions and beliefs that they practice in their daily lives.</i></p>

	Reflection: <i>Many cultures use dance to share stories about their heritage and show emotions. What are some ways that would impact the community?</i>
Literacy	Whole Group: Reading Strategies Lesson: 2.12 Read to Self/Partner & Small Groups: Use this time to take running records, and confer one-on-one with students and small groups.
Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.
Arts Experience	Allow students time today to continue practicing their dance/movement. When they are ready, they can film it. Reflection: <i>What was it like learning to dance together? How did it feel?</i>
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day. Reflect on the project component of the day.

MOVEMENT: Session 4

Session 4 Lesson Plans consist of the day that your site goes on the MOVEMENT field trip.

CREATE: Session 1

Breakfast & Community	<p>Every morning will begin with Community Time. The goal of community time is to build relationships among students and to focus on their SEL needs. Community can consist of a Greeting, Activity, and Share.</p> <p>SEL: Mood Meter or Rose/Thorn/Bud Share: <i>What is your favorite book?</i> OR <i>What is your favorite book that we've read?</i></p>
PBL	<p>Read Aloud: <i>Be a Maker</i> <i>The characters in the book were able to make/create all sorts of things. Today we are going to choose what form of art we want to use to impact our community for the showcase this week!</i> Discuss with the students their experience with the arts, music, and movement over the past few weeks. Students will decide which they will form of art they will do. Will they create a mural, painting, or clay? Perform a song, dance? Inform students that this is showcase week. Students will need to write and be able to present what they showcase to the community. Younger students will need scaffolding and help.</p> <p>Prompt: <i>Why is your art important?</i> (How does their art impact themselves or the community?) Optional Sentence Frames (scaffold by skill level): <i>My art is important because _____.</i> <i>My art is _____.</i> <i>My art makes me feel _____.</i></p> <p>When students have written their piece about their art form, have them practice oral presentation. (Rehearse the words, speak loud and clear, etc.)</p>
Literacy	Running Records: Use today to work on running records.
Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.
Arts Experience	Allow time for students to work on their "arts" final project.
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Revisit the positive moments of the day that you would like to see. Make a plan for the next day.

CREATE: Session 2

Breakfast & Community	Activity, SEL, Share
PBL	Continue to work on the Final Project and Presentation.
Literacy	Running Records: Use today to work on running records.
Lunch & Movement	Students will eat lunch and have active movement time. This includes recess, dancing, stretches, yoga, etc. It is a time for allowing students to be active.
Arts Experience	Continue to work on the Final Project.
Close & Reflection	End each day with a closing circle. Make a plan for the next day!

CREATE: Session 3

PBL	Use today to prepare for the showcase. Students should be able to verbally present their art and its impact.
Literacy	Running Records: Use today to work on running records. Finish them today.
Arts Experience	If time and students are prepared for the showcase, let them create with the remaining art supplies. Send all extra materials home with the kids today.

CREATE: Session 4 - Session 4 Lesson Plans consist of going on a field trip for the **SHOWCASE**.

APPENDIX C

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name, School, Grade
2. How was your experience with Summer Programs for Summer 2022?
3. Did your students gain any literacy skills? Can you give me some examples?
4. What do you think was the most powerful component of the day that you saw an increase in reading skills?
5. What impact did the project-based learning approach have on summer school? Can you give me some examples?
6. Tell me about a time when students were engaged in the program?
7. Which components of the program did you feel like students were engaged in the most?
8. Tell me about the literacy components of the day and how kids interacted with those parts of the day.
9. Tell me about the students' time reading the provided books.
10. What changes do you think we should make to the literacy components in the program?
11. In what ways do you think the students will benefit during the school year because of Gaining Ground?