

LITERACY INNOVATION IN A UNIVERSITY-AFFILIATED LAB SCHOOL: ADVANCING ACHIEVEMENT FOR BLACK STUDENTS IN A HIGH-POVERTY COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

National and local reading data continue to reveal persistent disparities in literacy achievement, particularly for Black students and students attending high-poverty schools. The purpose of this dissertation in practice was to examine the impact of targeted literacy interventions on Black students' reading performance and to explore how participation in professional learning influenced teachers' instructional practices during implementation of the intervention model at East Carolina University Community School (ECUCS). Grounded in Adult Learning Theory, this study also considered how collaborative professional learning could strengthen teacher capacity to support student literacy growth.

A convergent mixed-methods inquiry design was used. The study was conducted in the third-grade classroom at ECUCS and included third-grade students, the classroom teacher, and the special education teacher. Multiple data sources were analyzed, including the North Carolina Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test, mClass DIBELS assessment data, North Carolina Reading Check-In data, the Student Reading Motivation Survey, Teacher Literacy Interviews,

and the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to examine both student literacy outcomes and changes in teacher instructional practice.

Findings indicated mixed but meaningful evidence of student growth. Baseline data showed that students began the school year with significant reading needs. Subsequent assessment data suggested that several students demonstrated showed relative growth in relation to their peers in foundational literacy skills and reading comprehension, although progress was not consistent across all participants. Survey results indicated that many students maintained generally positive attitudes toward reading, though confidence and engagement varied depending on task difficulty. Qualitative findings revealed that teachers' instructional practices shifted during the inquiry. Teachers reported that professional learning and collaborative planning strengthened their understanding of decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction. Classroom observations confirmed increased use of structured small-group instruction, differentiated learning activities, and data-informed instructional adjustments.

The findings suggest that targeted literacy interventions, when paired with meaningful professional learning and collaborative instructional planning, can create conditions that support both teacher growth and student literacy development. Although student outcomes varied, the 12-week intervention implemented in two six-week cycles underscores the importance of comprehensive, responsive, and equity-focused literacy practices in high-poverty school settings. The findings suggest that extended implementation throughout the school year could lead to additional student growth and may positively influence future cohorts, as students build on the literacy skills developed during the intervention.

Implications include the need for sustained intervention, ongoing teacher learning, collaborative support structures, and intentional efforts to improve literacy outcomes for Black students and other historically underserved learners.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to the Cole family: Joyce B. Cole (Mom), the late Ralph V. Cole, Sr. (Dad), Gerri L. Cole (Sister), Ralph V. Cole, Jr. (Brother), and Battina A. Cole (Sister-in-Love).

You have been my constant source of love, strength, and encouragement throughout this journey. There were moments when the path felt long and uncertain, but your belief in me never wavered. That belief carried me through.

To my mother, thank you for your endless prayers, sacrifices, and unconditional love. To my father, though you are no longer physically here, your legacy, values, and strength continue to guide me each day. I hope I have made you proud.

To my siblings and sister-in-love, thank you for standing beside me, cheering me on, and reminding me of who I am when I needed it most.

This achievement is not mine alone—it is a reflection of the love we share. Thank you for believing in me, always.

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This work is ultimately for the scholars I serve—especially Black children whose brilliance must be nurtured, affirmed, and realized. May this research contribute to creating

learning environments where they are not only supported, but expected to thrive, achieve, and lead.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a subject that touches all disciplines. When a child learns to read, they can apply this skill to other content areas, such as math, science, and social studies. Since 1990, the United States has been measuring fourth and eighth grade student performance in reading and math through the National Assessment of Educational Progress also known as NAEP (NAEP, n.d.). Based on the NAEP reading assessment, standardized reading test scores declined during the pandemic. With school closures, hybrid instruction, and limited in-person classes, children have not been able to access quality instruction that promotes literacy growth and development (Bond, 2020; Primdahl et al., 2021). This is especially true for Black students who attend high-poverty schools. Limited access to health care, little to no technology, and teachers who struggled to transition to online learning have placed Black students who attend high poverty schools at a greater disadvantage (Berube & Bateman, 2020; Cole, 2020; Stelitano et. al, 2020).

North Carolina is not exempt to this decline in students' reading scores. Data from North Carolina's Reading End-of-Grade (EOG) tests noted significant achievement gaps between Black and White students. This gap has also been consistent over time. This inquiry was conducted with Black students in a high poverty school in North Carolina.

At East Carolina University Community School (ECUCS), reading EOG test scores increased during the pandemic. With ECUCS's increase in reading EOG test scores during the pandemic, the reading performance gap between Black children and White children began to decrease. For example, 27.30% of the Black children in third grade were proficient on the reading EOG at the end of the 2020–2021 school year compared to 59.60% of the White children in third grade who took the same assessment. This third-grade proficiency rate for Black students at ECUCS was comparable to the state average, as 27.6% of Black students in North Carolina

were proficient on the reading EOG during the same period. As fifth graders, this same cohort of Black children was 54.50% proficient on the reading EOG compared to 61.80% of the White children who took the same assessment at the end of the 2022–2023 school year. By comparison, 31.4% of Black students in North Carolina were proficient on the reading EOG as fifth graders, indicating that ECUCS students in this cohort performed significantly above the state average by fifth grade. Again, the gap is beginning to close. While the reading performance gap between ECUCS’s Black children and North Carolina’s White children has started to decrease, the Black children have consistently performed below North Carolina’s White children over the last five years. From 2021–2025, the state’s overall reading proficiency for White children ranged from 58.5% to 64.8% while ECUCS’s overall reading proficiency for Black children ranged from 13.9% to 40.0%. Due to the size of the reading achievement gap and the existence of the gap over time, there is an urgent need to identify literacy strategies that could continue to help the reading performance of ECUCS’s Black children. When a child falls behind, they may begin to lose interest in school and misbehave because they do not understand what is being taught (Francis et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2008). Additionally, it may become difficult for children to ever reach grade level standards (Protopapas et al., 2011). Too often, when a child falls behind in school, it may lead to an increased probability of dropping out of high school, incarceration, unemployment, poor health outcomes, and poverty (DeWalt & Pignone, 2005; Elnorata, 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2014).

The purpose of this inquiry was to identify literacy strategies that support the continued growth and development of the Black student population at a high poverty school. The strategies were implemented and evaluated for their effectiveness in the third-grade class at ECUCS. This chapter will provide the background for the inquiry, describe the context of the inquiry, and state

the problem of practice. Further, the chapter will identify the definition of key terms, review assumptions, scope and delimitations, frame the significance of the inquiry, and explain how the work advanced equity, social justice, and instructional practice.

Background of the Inquiry

NAEP is known as the Nation's Report Card (Sparks, 2022). NAEP evaluates student performance on informational texts and literary texts. Students are tested on the following three areas: Ability to locate and remember information, interpret meaning, and critique and evaluate texts (2022).

According to NAEP in 2022, long-term trending results showed that nine-year-old's' average scores in reading declined 5% (D'Orio, 2023). This was the largest drop since 1990 (2023). Students' reading achievement in fourth and eighth grade fell three points during the pandemic (D'Orio 2023; Sparks, 2022). During the 2022 administration of the NAEP reading assessment, children in fourth and eighth grade performed less well than the students who took the same assessment in 2019 (Sparks, 2022). Approximately 33% of our nation's fourth graders and 31% of the eighth graders read at the proficient level in 2022. This number represents a significant drop compared to numbers prior to the pandemic (2022).

In 2022, the average for North Carolina fourth grade students' NAEP reading assessment score was 216 (NAEP, 2022). This score was lower than the average reading score of 221 in 2019. Black students in North Carolina scored on average 30 points lower on the NAEP reading assessment than White students of the same grade (2022). A similar decline in reading scores was noted in North Carolina's Reading EOG test data. Further, a significant achievement gap between Black students and White students continues to exist.

In North Carolina, the Reading End-of-Grade (EOG) test measures students' reading

proficiency based on the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts (NCDPI, 2024b). These standards were adopted by the North Carolina State Board of Education in June 2017. Students must score at a Level 3, 4, or 5 on the Reading EOG to be considered proficient at grade level.

Statewide data reveal persistent disparities in reading proficiency across student subgroups. In the 2021–2022 school year, third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade Black students scored 31.0%, 35.2%, and 28.4%, respectively, on the Reading EOG. In comparison, White students in those same grade levels scored 59.6%, 65.0%, and 60.0%, respectively. This gap persisted across subsequent years. During the 2024–2025 school year, third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade Black students scored 32.8%, 44.6%, and 38.2%, respectively, while White students scored 58.6%, 69.9%, and 65.4%. These data reflect a consistent and significant achievement gap between Black and White students. Furthermore, these trends align with national data indicating both declining reading performance and enduring racial disparities in literacy achievement.

In addition to racial disparities, significant gaps also exist based on students' economic status. In the 2021–2022 school year, third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students who were not economically disadvantaged scored 57.6%, 62.4%, and 56.8%, respectively, on the Reading EOG. In contrast, economically disadvantaged students in those same grade levels scored 30.9%, 35.2%, and 29.2%. This disparity also persisted over time. By the 2024–2025 school year, non-economically disadvantaged students scored 59.6%, 70.2%, and 65.7%, respectively, while economically disadvantaged students scored 34.4%, 45.8%, and 39.7%. These data further illustrate the strong relationship between socioeconomic status and reading proficiency outcomes. For North Carolina Reading End-of-Grade historical data trends by demographic subgroups, see Figure 1 for grade 3, Figure 2 for grade 4, and Figure 3 for grade 5.

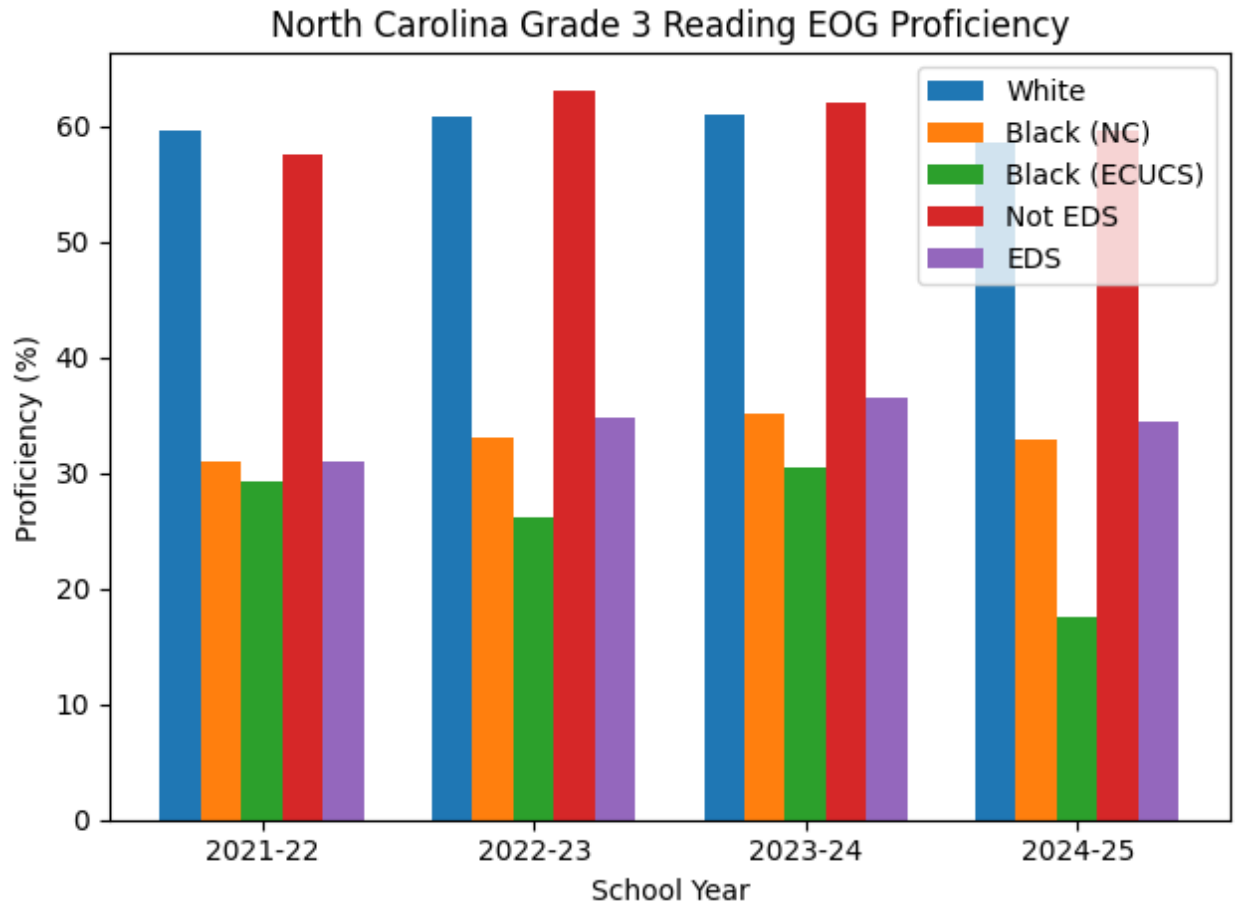


Figure 1. North Carolina grade 3 reading EOG proficiency by subgroup (2021-2025).

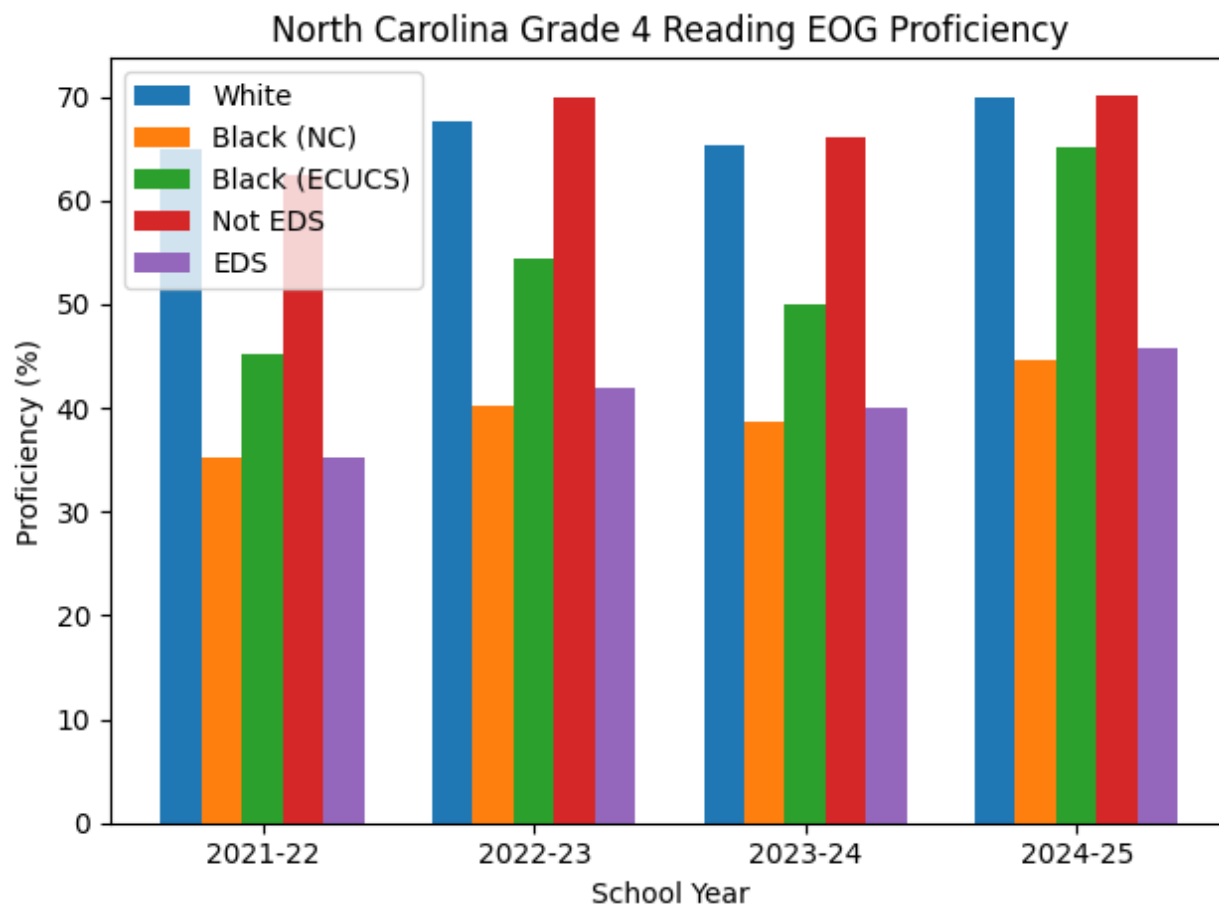


Figure 2. North Carolina grade 4 reading EOG proficiency by subgroup (2021-2025).

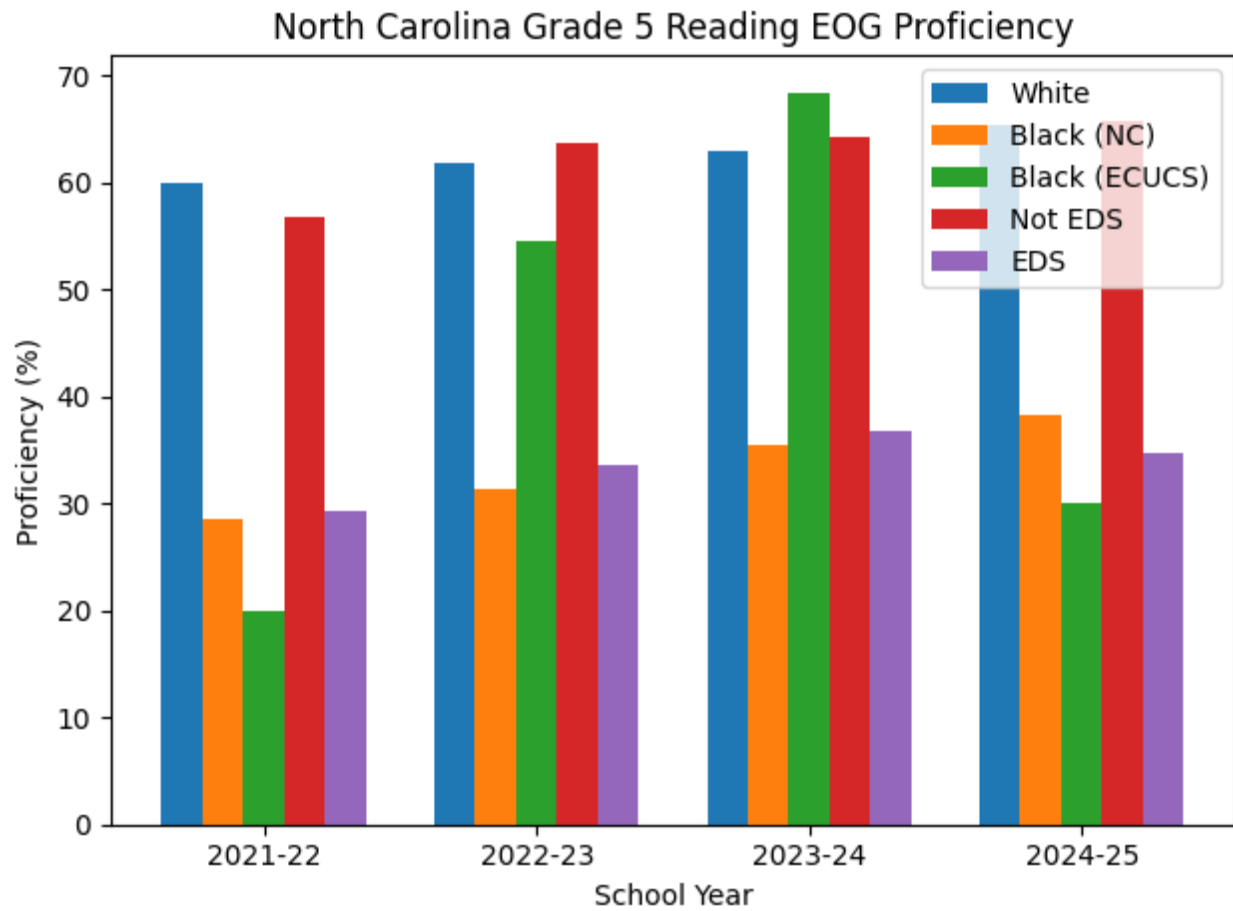


Figure 3. North Carolina grade 5 reading EOG proficiency by subgroup (2021-2025).

A similar pattern of disparities is evident at the regional level. A review of 2022–2023 reading data in the northeastern region of North Carolina indicated that 34.7% of Black students scored at or above grade-level proficiency, compared to 63.1% of White students (NCDPI, 2024b). ECU Community School (ECUCS), located in this region, reflects these broader trends. The school serves a high-poverty, predominantly minority student population, and its internal data show that Black students consistently perform below their White counterparts across the state.

As trends across national, state, regional, and school-level data consistently demonstrate significant disparities in reading achievement by race and socioeconomic status, there is a critical need to identify effective instructional practices that support historically marginalized student populations. Therefore, the purpose of this inquiry was to identify literacy strategies that support the continued growth and development of Black students in a high-poverty school context.

Context of the Inquiry

In 2016, the North Carolina General Assembly passed laws that required the University of North Carolina (UNC) Board of Governors to establish eight laboratory schools (The University of North Carolina System, n.d.). The laboratory schools' goals were to strengthen partnerships between universities and public-school units, improve student performance in low-performing schools, and provide high quality training for teacher and school administrator candidates (The University of North Carolina System, n.d.). This inquiry was conducted at East Carolina University Community School (ECUCS), one of six laboratory schools in the UNC System.

ECUCS is located in Pitt County, North Carolina. Pitt County is in the eastern region of the state. ECUCS is nestled in the heart of Greenville, Pitt County's seat. The U.S. Census

Bureau (n.d.) estimated that Pitt County's population in 2024 was 180,783 people. The city's demographics in 2024 were 49.0% White, 39.9% Black, 5.5% Hispanic, 4.6% Two or more races, 2.8% Asian, and 0.2% American Indian and Alaska Native (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Pitt County Schools is the public school unit that serves the county. In 2017, through a partnership between Pitt County Schools and East Carolina University, ECUCS was one of the first laboratory schools established as a one school, public-school unit.

During the 2025-2026 school year, ECUCS enrolled 86 children in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school had one class per grade level. ECUCS's student demographics were 96% Black, 2% two or more races, and 2% White (see Figure 4). According to the 2025 North Carolina School Report Card, 87% of ECUCS's children were economically disadvantaged (NCPDI, 2025). As a result, ECUCS received Title I funds. Title I funds are federal funds that are passed to state education agencies for distribution to public school units to support student achievement for schools that have high rates of poverty (Chen et al., 2023). ECUCS participated in the National School Lunch program and was identified as a Community Eligibility Provision School (CEP). The CEP program allowed all ECUCS's children to eat breakfast and lunch at no cost to the families (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2024).

ECUCS utilized resources from various colleges and departments across East Carolina University's campus to support students' academic, physical, and social/emotional needs. These resources include, but were not limited to, the Brody School of Medicine, the Dental School, the College of Allied Health Sciences, the College of Education, and the College of Health and Human Performances. Through a partnership with East Carolina University's Marriage and Family Therapy Department, a biopsychosocial screener was developed and administered. The screener asked parents a range of personal questions related to their possible need for food and

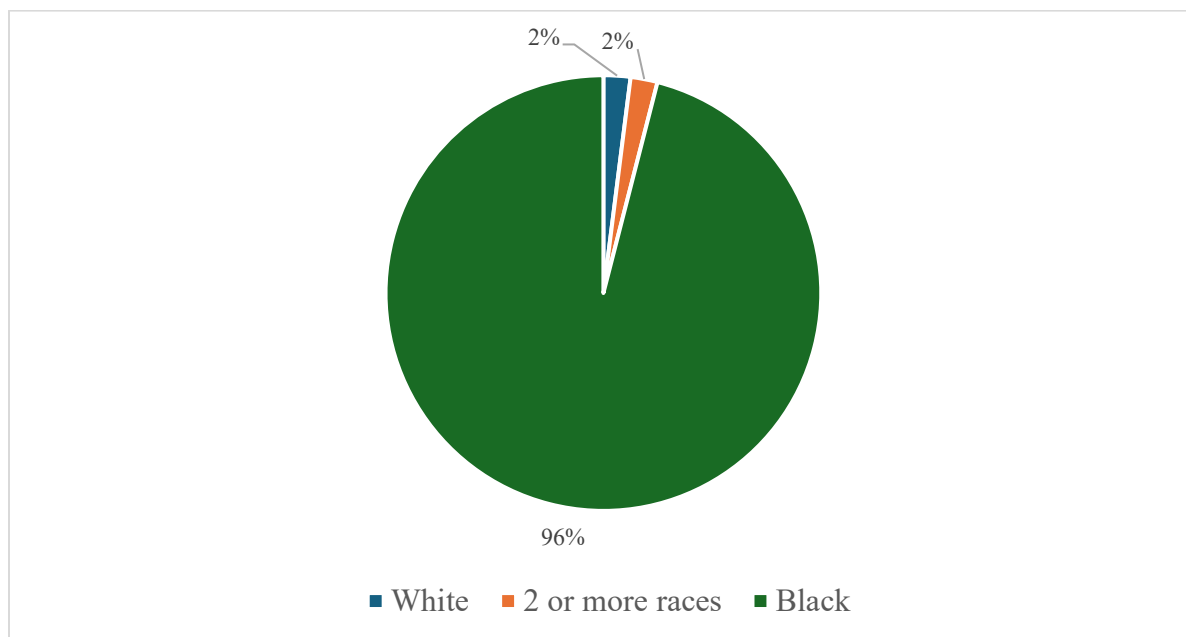


Figure 4. ECUCS student demographics for race and ethnicity in September 2025.

shelter. The screener also assessed if the family had a history of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs are defined as a collection of potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood from 0 to 17 years (Prevent Child Abuse America, n.d.). Examples of ACEs include death of a parent, separation/divorce of parents, incarceration of parents, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Results from the biopsychosocial screener indicated that 82% of the children at ECU Community School had experienced at least one adverse childhood experience. The screener also revealed that 26% of the children had experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences.

A toxic stress response may be triggered when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity (Garrett et al., 2023). Children may experience serious consequences, such as impaired brain development, immune systems, and stress response systems, when exposed to toxic stress from traumatic experiences (Garrett et al., 2023). Further, toxic stress negatively impacts children's abilities to focus, make decisions, and acquire new skills and knowledge (Garrett et al., 2023). Children may also have difficulty with building and maintaining healthy relationships when experiencing toxic stress (Garrett et al., 2023).

Research has shown that safe, stable, and nurturing childhood relationships have a positive impact on healthy development and wellbeing and can prevent or mitigate ACEs (Garrett et al., 2023). Due to the intense needs of ECUCS's student population, the school provided wrap-around services that support the children's physical growth and social/emotional development. The school employed a full-time school counselor and a full-time school social worker. The school partnered with the College of Education's Counseling division's McClammy Lab to provide on-site school-based mental health services.

To meet the children's academic needs, the school employed six teachers, two teacher assistants, a special education teacher, and a special education teacher assistant. Additionally, reading teachers provided targeted literacy instruction and intervention, which contributed to improvements in student reading achievement. As the school has continued to evolve, overall student achievement has increased, especially in reading (NCDPI, 2024a). While ECUCS's student reading performance has increased, even during the midst of the pandemic, ECUCS's Black children performed consistently below North Carolina's White children over the last seven years (NCDPI, 2024a). See Table 1. Although the reading achievement gap has narrowed over time, the gap remains significant. Therefore, there is an urgent need to identify and implement additional literacy strategies that could accelerate the closing of the gap and improve the reading performance of ECUCS's Black students.

Statement of the Problem of Practice

The purpose of this inquiry was to identify literacy strategies that support the continued growth and development of the Black student population at East Carolina University Community School. One of the most important academic skills that needs to be developed during childhood is learning to read (Chatzoglou et al., 2023). Unfortunately, there are a lot of children who experience difficulty learning to read well or do not learn to read at all (2023). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, over 400 million primary school-aged children across the world were not proficient in reading as determined by learning standards in 2019 (Gustaffson, 2021). Children who struggle with reading in the primary grades tend to have difficulty ever reaching grade level standards (Protopapas et al., 2011). When children have difficulty reading at an early age, it may cause them to have reading difficulty throughout their life, as well as difficulties in other academic subjects, such as science, social

studies, and math (Hernandez, 2011; Lin & Powell, 2022; Vaughan et al., 2013). Additionally, children who have trouble reading may also experience behavior concerns (Francis et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2008). In terms of long-range impacts, children who experience difficulty reading early in life may feel the effects on the overall quality of their life (Kirsch et al., 2007). These effects may include, dropping out of high school, incarceration, unemployment, lack of civic awareness, poor health outcomes, and poverty (DeWalt & Pignone, 2005; Elornata et al., 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2014). For these reasons, there is a dire need to help children learn how to read, as it could tremendously help their future success and positively impact the world economy.

North Carolina's accountability model from 2018-2022 designated East Carolina University Community School as a low-performing school. While reading data from North Carolina's accountability model indicated student growth and an increase in student proficiency each year, Black students' performance was consistently below their White counterparts' performance in the state. To support students' reading growth and proficiency, ECU Community School's staff implemented a research-based reading program for students in grades K-3. The purpose of this inquiry was to identify literacy strategies that further support the continued growth and development of the Black student population at East Carolina University Community School.

Inquiry Guiding Questions

This inquiry was guided by the following questions:

1. What was the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance?
2. What was the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning?

Table 1

Reading Test Data for NC White Students and ECUCS Black Students by Year and Grade

Year	Grade 3 White	Grade 3 Black	Grade 4 White	Grade 4 Black	Grade 5 White	Grade 5 Black
2018-2019	56.00%	6.7%	57.90%	14.30%	55.60%	0.00%
2019-2020	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
2020-2021	59.60%	27.30%	59.5%	9.10%	56.60%	7.10%
2021-2022	59.60%	29.20%	65.00%	45.20%	60.00%	20.00%
2022-2023	60.80%	33.10%	67.60%	40.3%	61.80%	31.4%
2023-2024	60.90%	35.2%	65.30%	38.7%	63.00%	35.5%
2024-2025	58.6%	32.9%	69.6%	44.6%	65.4%	38.2%

At ECU Community School, Black students have consistently performed below their White counterparts on the North Carolina Reading End-of-Grade test. By conducting this inquiry and researching these questions, we started the process of identifying literacy strategies to support the growth of Black students in a high poverty school. Further, we noted the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning. Several instruments were used to collect the data necessary to appropriately answer the guiding questions. For the first question, data was collected from the administration of the m-Class DIBELS assessment. This assessment was administered two times during the duration of the inquiry: Beginning-of-the-Year and Middle-of-the-Year. It is important to note that the overall inquiry timeline differed from the intervention timeline. Beginning-of-the-Year data were collected at the start of the school year to establish baseline performance; however, the instructional interventions were implemented later in the school year across two six-week cycles (approximately 12 weeks total). It should be noted that the instructional timeline included interruptions due to Thanksgiving Break, Winter Break, and several days of school closures related to inclement weather, which impacted the continuity of instruction during the intervention period. The North Carolina Reading Check-In assessment was administered twice during the inquiry. This assessment was administered at the end of each nine-week grading period. A Student Reading Motivation survey was administered at the beginning and end of the inquiry. A teacher literacy survey and a literacy walkthrough instrument were utilized to collect data for the second guiding question.

Overview of Inquiry

To answer the questions guiding this inquiry, I used a convergent mixed method design framed around Knowles' principles of Adult Learning Theory. This inquiry design involved

simultaneously collecting quantitative and qualitative data. This inquiry was implemented in four phases. The first phase (Phase I) involved analyzing baseline data from Black students who have taken the North Carolina Reading End-of-Grade test, the North Carolina Beginning of Third Grade Reading Test, and the m-Class DIBELS assessment. A Pilot Study was conducted on the Teacher Literacy Interview questions with teachers who would not be asked to participate in the inquiry.

During the second phase (Phase II), a Student Reading Motivation survey was administered. A Teacher Literacy Interview was conducted. This interview focused on current literacy interventions. Based on the analysis of student data and teacher data, literacy interventions were selected. A Literacy Studies faculty member, the third grade classroom teacher, the special education teacher and I planned professional learning and reviewed a walk-through tool that examined the effectiveness of implementation of the literacy strategies. Professional learning and classroom walkthroughs were conducted. North Carolina Reading Check In formative assessment data was also collected to determine if there was any impact from the use of the interventions. All collected data from the six-week implementation cycle was analyzed and used to determine whether to continue the interventions as originally planned or modify the interventions based on scholar needs.

During the third phase (Phase III), a Literacy Studies faculty member, the third grade classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and I planned professional learning based on results from the second phase. Walkthroughs were conducted to gauge the impact of interventions during the second phase of the six-week intervention cycle. North Carolina Reading Check-In formative assessment data was collected. During the fourth phase (Phase IV), the Literacy Studies faculty member, the third grade classroom teacher, the special education

teacher, and I reviewed the North Carolina Reading Check-In formative assessment data from the second, six-week cycle of interventions. A post Student Reading Motivation survey was administered. A post Teacher Literacy Interview was conducted to determine the impact of the literacy interventions on teachers' practices. Findings were shared broadly with inquiry partners. Decisions were made as to whether to continue, expand, or discontinue the literacy intervention implementation.

Inquiry Partner

Throughout the project, an inquiry partner was engaged to review literacy data, assist with identifying literacy interventions, provide literacy professional development, and monitor the implementation of the interventions. The inquiry partner was a faculty member from East Carolina University's College of Education Literacy Studies Department. This partner was well versed in literacy research, especially as it relates to teaching young children how to read. The partner has worked collaboratively with ECU Community School's teachers to assess students' literacy skills, interpret assessment results, design personalized instruction, select appropriate instructional materials, and implement classroom instruction. Engagement with this partner was captured through journaling.

Theoretical Framework

The Adult Learning Theory served as a guide for this dissertation in practice. Malcolm Knowles was one of the key theorists who helped to formulate theories of adult learning (Irby et al., 2013). Knowles used the term "andragogy" to describe the art and science of working with adults (Irby et al., 2013). Andragogy presents six core principles of adult learning (Knowles, 2005). The six principles are (1) the learner's need to know, (2) self-concept of the

learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn (Knowles, 2005). The concepts of andragogy are organized in Figure 5.

Knowles stressed two key principles of adult learning. First, he believed that you begin with learners by addressing their interests, challenges, and concerns as starting points (Knowles, 1989). Secondly, Knowles emphasized the importance of involving learners in a process of active inquiry (Knowles, 1989). These guiding principles were chosen for this inquiry because in order to promote increased literacy performance at ECU Community School, the teachers and I must acknowledge our Black students' limited performance as compared to their White counterparts across North Carolina. Next, we must see ourselves as one of the primary vehicles that can bring about a change in our students' literacy performance through active learning, implementation of learning, collection of data, and reflection of the data.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were used throughout the inquiry and are defined as follows:

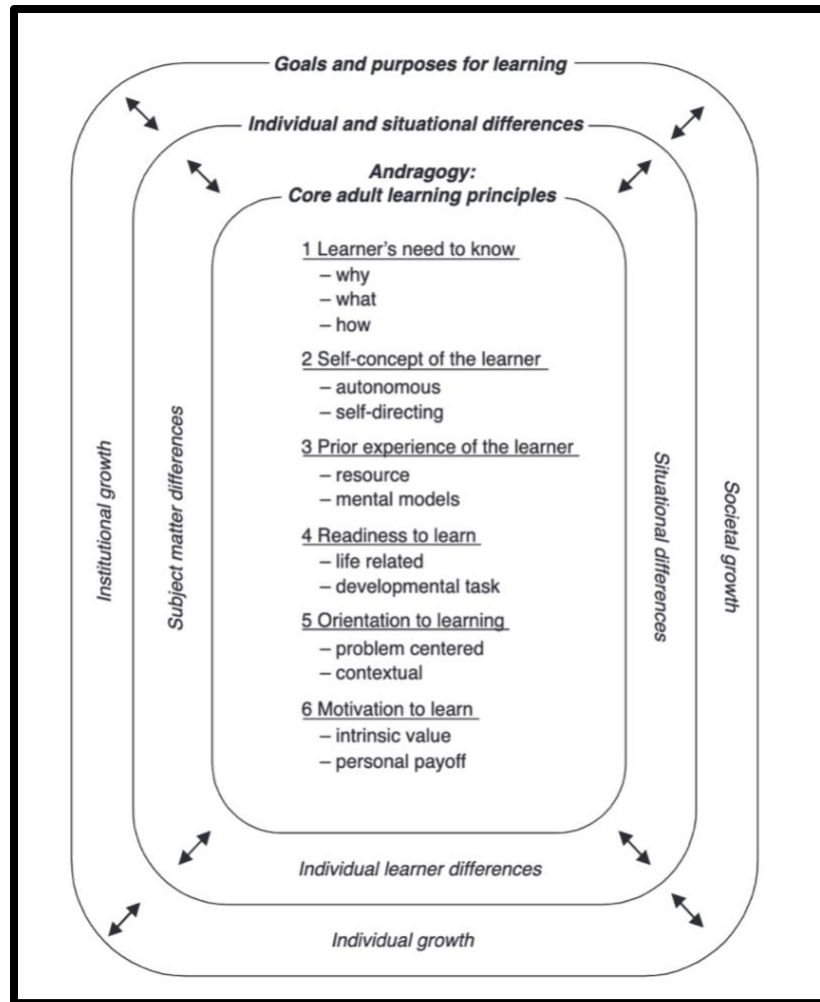
Above Benchmark – a DIBELS performance indicator that predicts that a student will have an 80% chance of achieving future proficiency (Goffreda & DiPerna, 2010).

Benchmark – a DIBELS performance indicator that predicts that a student will have some risk (50% chance) of achieving future proficiency (Goffreda & DiPerna, 2010).

Below Benchmark – a DIBELS performance indicator that predicts that a student an 80% chance of not achieving future proficiency (Goffreda & DiPerna, 2010).

BOY – an acronym for Beginning-of-the Year. The DIBELS assessment is administered three times per year. The BOY is the fall assessment (Goffreda & DiPerna, 2010).

DIBELS – an assessment tool to identify children at-risk for reading difficulties and monitor students' progress throughout their academic instruction (Good et al., 2004; Goffreda &



Note. (Knowles et al., 2005, 149).

Figure 5. Andragogy in practice.

DiPerna, 2010; Kaminski et al., 2008).

DIBELS (MAZE) – an assessment that evaluates a student’s ability to construct meaning from text using comprehension strategies, word recognition skills, background information and prior knowledge, familiarity with linguistic properties such as syntax and morphonology, and reasoning skills (Good et al., 1994).

EOY (End of Year) – an acronym for End-of-the-Year. The DIBELS assessment is administered three times per year. This is the spring assessment. (Goffreda, C.T., & DiPerna, J., 2010)

Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) – a timed assessment in which students are assessed about their knowledge of the alphabetic letters (Goffreda & DiPerna, 2010; Good et al., 1994).

MOY (Middle of Year) – an acronym for Middle-of-the-Year. The DIBELS assessment is administered three times per year. This is the winter assessment (Goffreda & DiPerna, 2010).

Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF-CLS) – a standardized, individually administered test of the alphabetic principle-including letter-sound correspondence and the ability to blend letters into words in which letters represent their most common sounds (Good et al., 1994; Good et al., 2004).

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) – an assessment that measures accuracy and fluency when reading connected text (Good et al., 1994; Kaminski et al., 2008).

Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF) – a standardized, individually administered test of phonological awareness. This assessment measures a student’s ability to segment three-and four-phoneme words into their individual phonemes fluently (Good et al., 1994; Good et al., 2004).

Well Below Benchmark- a DIBELS performance indicator that predicts that a student a 90% chance of not achieving future proficiency (Good et al., 1994).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this inquiry, it was assumed that teachers had basic literacy knowledge. ECU Community School's teachers engaged in literacy professional learning. During the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years, teachers took part in the state-mandated LETRS training. LETRS stands for Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling. This eight-unit professional development series was designed to provide teachers with the skills they need to master the fundamentals of reading instruction-phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, and language (NCDPI, 2021). Therefore, it was assumed that teachers participated fully in this two-year professional development series and were applying the best practices that they have learned within their classrooms.

A second assumption was that teachers had a genuine desire to improve their instruction to help students achieve better outcomes. ECU Community School employed a full-time reading specialist for three consecutive years preceding this inquiry. Additionally, first and second grade teachers worked with a faculty member from East Carolina University's College of Education Literacy Studies Department. The College of Education faculty member and the reading specialist worked with teachers on assessing student knowledge, interpreting assessment results, selecting appropriate literacy materials, and planning and delivering high-quality reading instruction. With the implementation of this literacy support system, it was assumed that teachers had taken full advantage of these resources to improve their instruction to help students achieve better outcomes.

A final assumption was that ECU Community School's third grade students were reading on at least a first or second grade level in order to take part in the interventions. Students were taught by teachers who have been designated in North Carolina as "highly-qualified teachers."

During first and second grade, students participated daily in a 90-minute literacy block consisting of whole group, small group, and individual instruction. Select students were also supported by the school's reading specialist and special education teacher. This prior instruction provided foundational literacy instruction; therefore, it was assumed that the third-grade students were reading on at least a first- or second-grade level in order to participate in the literacy interventions implemented during this inquiry.

Scope and Delimitations

This inquiry was designed to identify literacy strategies that support the continued growth and development of the Black student population at East Carolina University Community School. This inquiry focused on children and teachers in the third grade. Children and teachers who participated were provided informed consent. While the site has similar demographics to other elementary schools in the district, as well as schools across the state, the scope was limited due to the backgrounds of the students as designated by North Carolina lab school legislation. North Carolina laboratory schools' General Statutes (G.S. 116-239.5) states that a university will partner with a public-school unit to improve student performance in the local school administrative unit's low-performing schools by providing an enhanced education program for students residing in the unit and providing exposure and training for teachers and principals to successfully address challenges existing in high-needs school settings. Further, the legislation states that children are eligible to attend the laboratory school if they meet at least one of the following criteria: (1) Is assigned to a low-performing school, as defined by G.S. 115C-105.37 at the time of the student's application, (2) Did not meet expected growth in the prior school year based on one or more indicators, (3) Is the sibling of a child who is eligible under subdivision (1) or (2) of this subsection, and (4) Is the child of a laboratory school employee.

This focus of practice was chosen due to a significant performance gap between ECU Community School's Black children and their White counterparts across the state (NCDPI, 2024a). While ECU Community School's North Carolina Reading EOG test data increased during the pandemic, over the past five years, the school's Black children consistently performed well below North Carolina's White children. The gap lessened significantly over time, yet a considerable need still exists to identify literacy interventions that could help continue to increase the reading performance of ECU Community School's Black children.

Limitations

The described inquiry was limited by the small teacher sample size. ECU Community School has one class per grade level. Therefore, there was only one third grade regular education teacher and one special education teacher involved in the inquiry. A second limitation was the limited years of the regular education teacher's experience in teaching third grade. This was the first year that the regular education classroom teacher had taught third grade at ECU Community School. A third limitation was that I was the current principal at the school where the research was conducted. As the sole school administrator, I conduct all teacher evaluations. Therefore, the third grade regular education teacher and the special education teacher participating in the inquiry may have felt compelled to respond in a certain manner to the survey questions. Prior to the inquiry, participants were made aware that their answers to all surveys, to the extent possible, would remain anonymous with all inquiry partners. Survey interview findings would not be used in any way as a factor in the teachers' evaluations. Survey information would be used for the sole purpose of improving the literacy interventions that are utilized at ECU Community School. All participation was completely voluntary.

Significance of Inquiry

As a nation, there needs to be a strong sense of urgency when it comes to responding to gaps in reading instruction and acquired skills (Gray et al, 2023). Further, we must work to identify and address the needs of students who are identified of being at risk for future reading difficulties (Gray et al., 2023). Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) stated, “Early success at reading is one of the keys that unlocks a lifetime of reading” (p. 943). Other research (e.g. Francis et al., 1996; Juel, 1988; Sparks et al., 2014; Stanley et al., 2017) has suggested that early reading skills profoundly impact later reading proficiency and other areas of academic and nonacademic life (World Literacy Foundation, 2018). When there are delays in providing access to high quality reading interventions, especially for students who need them, this further exacerbates the concern (Gray et al., 2023). Therefore, the significance of this inquiry was to identify literacy interventions that continue to improve students’ reading performance. Through targeted literacy interventions, it was the goal to further decrease the reading achievement gap between an elementary school’s Black students as compared to their White counterparts across the state. By providing early literacy interventions, this may increase the likelihood that children can read on grade level and positively impact their performance in other content areas.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

For years, our nation has been concerned about the ever-increasing numbers of students who drop out of high school and the cost that is incurred for each student who drops out of school (Fiester, 2010). In 2007, almost 6.2 million young people, 16% of the 16-24 age group, dropped out of high school (Fiester, 2010). Each student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity (Fiester, 2010). With this awareness, there continues to be a focus on dropout prevention. However, the process

of dropping out of school starts much earlier than a student's high school years (Fiester, 2010). For some students, it can be traced back to a loss of interest and motivation in middle school that resulted from grade retention and difficulty with keeping up academically (Fiester, 2010). A closer examination may find that a student is retained due to failure to master the content and knowledge needed to make progress (Fiester, 2010). This failure to master the content and acquire needed knowledge may directly relate to not being able to read proficiently as early as fourth grade (Fiester, 2010).

Among low-income children there appears to be a pronounced shortfall in reading proficiency. This shortfall has been noted among children who attend high poverty schools (Fiester, 2010). In terms of long-range impacts, children who experience difficulty reading early on in life may feel the effects on the overall quality of their life (Kirsch et al., 2007). These effects may include, dropping out of high school, incarceration, unemployment, lack of civic awareness, poor health outcomes, and poverty (DeWalt & Pignone, 2005; Elornata et al., 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2014).

ECU Community School was identified as a high poverty school. Based on a five-year review of ECU Community School's North Carolina Reading End-of-Grade achievement data, across the state, Black students consistently performed well below their White counterparts. On the NAEP reading assessment, Black students in North Carolina scored, on average, 30 points lower than White students. It was the goal of this inquiry to help children, especially Black children, learn how to read well, as it could tremendously help their future success and positively impact the world economy.

Advances in Practice

This inquiry may heighten the awareness of ECU Community School's teachers about more specific literacy interventions that can address Black students' learning needs. Further, providing teachers with professional learning and a system of support for the implementation of the identified interventions may help to increase student proficiency with the sample population as well as other grade levels. If the outcomes indicate a positive impact for Black students in a high-poverty school, then these interventions could be replicated at schools with similar demographics within the host public school unit and schools across the region.

As a laboratory school, one of our goals is to serve as a training site for pre-service educators. Currently, East Carolina University's College of Education requires select students to take reading practicums. ECU Community School hosts two of those reading practicums in the fall and spring semesters. If the inquiry results are favorable, these interventions may be incorporated within teacher preparation reading coursework and practicum experiences. With the ability to learn about and practice these interventions in a training site, future educators may be better equipped to support Black students within their own classrooms.

Summary

On the 2022 administration of the NAEP Reading Assessment, 33% of our nation's fourth graders were proficient (Sparks, 2022). Conversely, this means that 67% of our nation's fourth graders were not proficient on the NAEP Reading Assessment. When a young child has difficulty reading, this may have negative short-term and long-term consequences on their schooling and ability to function as responsible citizens in their adult life. The focus of this inquiry was to identify literacy interventions that support the continued reading growth and development of ECU Community School's Black students. Further, this inquiry examined the impacts of teacher

practices after participating in professional learning. This chapter provided a context for the inquiry, stated the problem of practice, described the significance of the inquiry, and explained how this inquiry would advance equity, social justice, and promote advances in practice. The following chapter includes a review of literature. Specifically, Chapter 2 will address Adult Learning Theory, the history of reading instruction, the Science of Reading, the reading achievement gap, the impact of positive teacher-student relationships, and successful literacy strategies in high poverty schools.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this inquiry was to identify the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance. Additionally, this inquiry aimed to examine the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning. The literacy interventions were implemented in the third-grade class at East Carolina University Community School (ECUCS). The need for this inquiry was grounded in ongoing school improvement efforts focused on improving reading performance at East Carolina University Community School, particularly for Black students. A review of the last five years of Reading End-of-Grade Test data, including subgroup performance and comparisons to state data, indicated a need to identify and implement additional literacy strategies to improve reading outcomes and accelerate reading growth for ECUCS students. ECUCS's Black children performed consistently well below North Carolina's White children. On the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's School Report card website from 2021-2025, the state's reading proficiency for White children ranged from 58.5% to 64.8%. ECUCS's reading proficiency for Black children ranged from 13.9% to 40%. While a lot of progress has been made, there is a need for continual improvement in instruction for continual improvement in outcomes.

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that shapes the inquiry; chronicles the history of reading instruction; explores the science of reading; identifies reading achievement gaps; reviews the impact of positive teacher-student relationships; and investigates literacy strategies that support the growth of students in high poverty schools. The literature review consists of references obtained from ProQuest Education Database, Education Research Complete, and academic search bases such as Google Scholar. The references consist of websites and peer-reviewed journal articles. The search was focused on full-text, peer-reviewed journal

articles dating from 2013 to 2023, utilizing numerous keywords such as *Adulthood Learning Theory*, *early literacy*, *reading instruction*, *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, *reading achievement gap*, *teacher-student relationships*, *literacy strategies that support student growth at high poverty schools*, and *the science of reading*.

Adult Learning Theory

The Adult Learning Theory served as a guide for this dissertation in practice.

Malcolm Knowles was one of the key theorists who helped to formulate theories of adult learning (Irby et al., 2013). Knowles used the term “andragogy” to describe the art and science of working with adults (Irby et al., 2013). Andragogy presents six core principles of adult learning (Knowles, 2005). The six principles are (1) the learner’s need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn (Knowles, 2005). The concepts of andragogy are organized in Figure 1.

Knowles stressed two key principles of adult learning. First, he believed that you begin with learners by addressing their interests, challenges, and concerns as starting points (Knowles, 1989). Secondly, Knowles emphasized the importance of involving learners in a process of active inquiry (Knowles, 1989). These guiding principles were chosen for this inquiry because in order to promote increased literacy performance at ECU Community School, the teachers and I must acknowledge our Black students’ limited performance as compared to their White counterparts across North Carolina. Next, we must see ourselves as one of the primary vehicles that can bring about a change in our students’ literacy performance through active learning, implementation of learning, collection of data, and reflection of the data.

This four-phase inquiry aligned with the Adult Learning Theory framework. First, Knowles believes that we must establish the learner’s need to know. To frame the problem of

practice, I shared with the teachers during the second phase of the inquiry, North Carolina Beginning-of-Grade Three Reading test data, North Carolina Reading End-of-Grade Test data, and DIBELS data for ECU Community School's third grade Black students during 2023-2024 school year. Beginning-of-Grade Three Reading data for third-grade Black students for the current school year was also shared during the second phase of the inquiry. These data sets were compared to third grade White students in North Carolina. Through a data review, I hoped to set the stage for why the teacher research participants needed to know about this problem of practice and why there was an urgent need to support the continued growth of Black students in literacy.

In the Adult Learning Theory's second and third principles, Knowles discusses the self-concept and prior experiences of the learner. In this inquiry, a Teacher Literacy Interview was administered in the second phase and fourth phase of the inquiry. I met with each teacher research participant individually to complete the interview. Teachers were asked to describe strengths and weaknesses of the Language Arts program at ECU Community School. Teachers were asked to describe a literacy professional learning opportunity in which they have participated and how it impacted their practices. Finally, teachers were asked to describe what would make the teaching of literacy better at ECU Community School. These questions and any follow-up questions were designed to capture the teacher research participants prior experiences as it related to teaching literacy and literacy professional learning.

In the second, third, and fourth phases of the inquiry, the CIP and I actively engaged the teacher research participants in data reviews, the selection of literacy interventions, and professional learning. This active engagement focused on Knowles' remaining three principles of readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn. By acknowledging the learners' present state and actively engaging the learner in the process of inquiry, I hoped that

there would be an impact on the use of literacy interventions on Black students' performance and teacher practices.

History of Reading Instruction

In the eighteenth century, the alphabet method was used to teach children how to read (DiObilda et al., 2020). This method emphasized that children needed to master letter recognition (2020). Initially, children did not need to know the sounds of letters (2020). Children spent a tremendous amount of time learning letters. While learning the letters, children were presented with syllables (2020). Children would read the letter or letters aloud first, then they would be expected to pronounce the syllable (2020). By learning groups of syllables, children eventually learned to read words and create sentences. With this approach, the emphasis was on letter calling (2020). Teachers thought that by spelling syllables aloud that children would eventually recognize words (2020). "Since students were not directly taught letter sound relationships, perhaps they learned the sight words by analogy, association, or mere repetition" (Monaghan, 2005, 386-397).

In the 19th century, the whole word approach, sometimes called look-say, became popular (DiObilda, et al., 2020; Maughan, 2023). With this approach, there was a reading push that stressed making meaning and finding pleasure in reading by memorizing words and short sentences (2023). Education reformers, such as Horace Mann, supported this method (2023).

Over the years, there has been a constant back and forth over reading best practices. In the 1960's, teachers began utilizing a three-cueing approach to teach reading (2023). This approach allowed for using pictures and context clues, along with letter/sound knowledge to figure out words. This method for teaching reading was the focal point of what later became known as the "whole language" philosophy of reading instruction (2023). By the late 1980's, this

approach was heavily utilized in educator preparation programs and employed with students in elementary schools. The premise behind this strategy was that “reading was a naturally developed skill and that children learned to read much like they learned to speak, through immersion in books, words, and reading” (Maughan, 2023, p. 19).

Along with educators and literacy experts, scientist began studying how children learned to read (2023). “Advances in medical technology, neuroscience, cognitive and developmental psychology, and other fields led to a wealth of data in addition to identifying best practices in reading instruction” (Maughan, 2023, p. 20). In 1997, the National Institute of Child Health and the secretary of education pulled together a National Panel of experts at the request of Congress (2023). The purpose of this expert panel was to “assess the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of the various approaches to teaching children to read” (Maughan, 2023, 20). In 2000, a report was released that fully endorsed the teaching of phonics (2023). The report stated that the teaching of phonics was key to reading instruction (2023). Further, it recommended explicit instruction of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (2023). This would later serve as the foundation for the science of reading.

President Bush used these recommendations as the basis for policy with the Reading First Initiative within the No Child Left Behind Act (2023). Funding for this policy ended in the mid-2000s (2023). As a result of this failed policy, the whole language approach grew and eventually transformed into an approach called balanced literacy (2023). Balanced literacy stressed surrounding children with diverse books and using context clues and other three-cueing/word guessing strategies for figuring out words (Goldstein, 2024; Maughan, 2023). Balanced literacy, as implemented in classrooms, often put little emphasis on the teaching of phonics (Goldstein,

2024; Maughan, 2023). While balanced literacy was heavily used in the 2000s, our nation's reading scores remained low.

Brain researchers and parents of children with dyslexia championed for reading reform. (Goldstein, 2024). Since 2019, approximately 40 states have passed legislation with the goal of changing literacy instruction (Goldstein, 2024; Woulfin et al., 2022). The latest movement is the science of reading (Goldstein, 2024). The premise behind the science of reading is that teaching strategies should align with a wide body of cognitive research on how young children learn to read (Goldstein, 2024; Woulfin et al., 2022). In addition to a broad vocabulary, the movement stresses that children need to know phonics (Goldstein, 2024). Through explicit, carefully sequenced instruction in letter combinations and spelling patterns, some children may learn to become better readers (2024). As the science of reading movement continues to push forward, educators are once again charged with the tremendous task of training teachers and securing materials aligned to the latest theory of best practices in reading.

The Science of Reading

Term Use

The term “science of reading” has been around for over 200 years (Shanahan, 2020). The term means different things to varying groups of people within and beyond the research community (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2021). In the 18th century, the term the science of reading referred to text reading (Shanahan, 2020). Around this same time, the birth of linguistics and the scientific study of language occurred (2020). The purpose of scientific linguistics was to determine how to properly pronounce ancient languages (2020). In the 19th century, the science of reading referred to how people should read the Bible or Koran, specifically as it relates to how to pronounce the words (2020). During the 1830's, the science of reading was used

pedagogically (2020). In education, the term referred to teaching students how to sound out words correctly (2020). This was consistent with its original meaning as it applied to linguistics (2020).

Over the last 200 years, uses of the term science of reading have varied. “In its most true sense, it could refer to any synthesis of rigorous reading research” (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2021. S867). For the past few decades, much of the research related to the science of reading has been built upon the simple view of reading, which holds that decoding proficiency and language proficiency (typically operationalized as listening comprehension) fully account for reading comprehension proficiency (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2021). Of the two, decoding has received the most attention (Shanahan, 2020; Auckerman & Schuldt, 2021).

Authority and Expertise

A part of the great reading debate is who has the authority and expertise and what constitutes good evidence. The science of reading is expressed as a singular term (Gabriel, 2020). This implies its singular authority and suggests that other alternatives are unscientific. Upon close examination of the knowledge related to teaching reading, many fields have contributed to this area. These areas include education, psychology, linguistics, neuroscience, sociology, and biology (Shanahan, 2020; Burk & Hasbrouck, 2023). Therefore, a more accurate representation of the growing body of reading knowledge could be expressed in a plural form as the sciences of reading instead of the singular term science of reading (Shanahan, 2020).

The National Research Council (NRC) issued a report in 2002 called *Scientific Research in Education* (National Research Council, 2002). The report aimed to promote the use of research as the foundation for educational policy while also striving to bridge the divide between quantitative and qualitative researchers. The NRC maintained that not all research is equal when

it comes to educational policy. However, all research that is well implemented was scientific. What makes research scientific is not the reason behind conducting it, but the methodology used to carry it out. The NRC stated that basic research and applied research should be accepted as important to the scientific endeavor. No matter how scientific basic research may be, any science of instruction will ultimately have to rely on applied studies of teaching (Shanahan, 2020). Gabriel asserts that when designing instruction that whether something is evidence based may not be the most important question (Gabriel, 2020). For educators and parents, there is frequently a need to know what will work, when, how, and for whom. Often times, these practical questions may not be answered by clinical studies conducted in controlled situations with select groups. For others, the real science of reading is not based on outcomes from the field. Rather, others feel that work completed in laboratories, especially work that involves brain imaging techniques, is more significant (2020). As a result, individuals must carefully evaluate evidence from experience, field-based research on practice, and laboratory experiments when determining whether there is strong support for a particular program, practice, or approach (2020).

Social Justice and Equity

The science of reading informs ‘how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention of reading difficulties’ (The Reading League, 2022, p. 6). Even with knowledge about effective literacy practices, there are people in society who still cannot read (Burk & Hasbrouck, 2023). This has an impact on our world. Adults who have low literacy rates are less likely to be able to provide for their families and pay taxes. They may have difficulty with healthcare because they may avoid getting proper care or overuse the system because they are unable to follow doctor’s written guidance on prescriptions

(Burk & Hasbrouck, 2023). For these reasons, “all children deserve equitable access to high-quality literacy and reading instruction and opportunities in their schools” (NEPC, 2020, 6).

With the science of reading movement, the National Education Policy Center and Education Deans for Justice and Equity issued a statement in March 2020. The statement noted troubling concerns for the basis of the science of reading. These concerns include:

- Failing to place the current concern for reading in a historical context.
- Overemphasizing recent test scores and outlier data instead of longitudinal data with greater context (for example, NAEP)
- Misrepresenting the “science of reading” as settled science that purportedly prescribes systematic intensive phonics for all students.
- Overstating and mispresenting the findings of the National Reading Panel report of 2000, without acknowledging credible challenges to those findings.
- Focusing blame on K-12 teachers and teacher education without credible evidence or acknowledgement of challenging teaching and learning conditions and the impact of test-based accountability policies on practice and outcomes.
- Celebrating outlier examples of policy success (in particular, the Mississippi 2019 NAEP data) without context or high-quality research evidence for those claims.

The policy statement made it clear that “much of the legislation beginning to emerge is harmful, especially to students living inequitable lives and attending underfunded, inequitable schools (NEPC, 2020, p. 4). To help remedy the situation, the policy statement concludes by saying that policy makers should acknowledge the high-quality research evidence that is available and provide resources for schools so that children receive the support they need and opportunities to learn and grow (2020).

Reading Achievement Gap

A common goal of U.S. education policies, such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act, is to lower the achievement gap among students, particularly between Black students and White students (Hung et al., 2020). An achievement gap is defined when a group of students significantly outperforms other student groups on average in their educational achievement (2020). Standardized test scores and/or grade point averages are used to determine educational achievement (2020). “Reading achievement represents students’ ability to extract relevant information from narrative and informational texts and to understand, use, and reflect on written texts in areas of life that are relevant to the individual and required by society” (Ludewig, et al., 2022, p. 2).

Education researchers and practitioners have long been concerned about achievement gaps because education is often referenced as the great equalizer (Hung et al., 2020). For years, U.S. schools have been seen as the social institution that work to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to learn, develop, and thrive (Reardon, 2013). Horace Mann expressed this sentiment in 1848 (Hung et al., 2020). Arne Duncan, the past U.S. Secretary of Education, stated that education is the great equalizer (2020). Education is often regarded as the great equalizer, addressing structural inequalities related to race, ethnicity, and income. (Lee & Burkam, 2002).

Gender Gap

When examining research on reading gender achievement gaps, some studies suggest that on average girls have a higher level of reading achievement than boys (Logan and Johnston, 2010; Mullis et al., 2017). The social-cognitive learning theory posits that the reading gap between girls and boys can best be explained by girls having a higher self-efficacy and better self-regulation skills (Hyde, 2014; McElvany et al., 2017). Further, reading motivation plays an

integral role in reading achievement (Toste et al., 2020). Studies have shown that on average girls have higher reading motivation and tend to read more frequently in their leisure time (Ainley et al., 2002; Lepper et al., 2022; Wigfield et al., 2016). This promotes girls' reading achievement.

Curriculum Gap

As states continue to pass legislation related to classroom reading instruction, trends have emerged related to expectations for early literacy. There is a heavy focus on phonics and a limited focus on three key components: Comprehension instruction, instruction focused on developing children's knowledge of the world in general and of core concepts in content domains like science and social studies, and writing instruction (Teale et al., 2007). These three curriculum elements are critical for success in reading and writing.

Due to legislative updates on literacy instruction and other varying reasons, early elementary teachers may not put as much emphasis on comprehension instruction. Their reasoning for limiting comprehension instruction may include one or a combination of the following reasons: (1) Reading words accurately and fluently is the key to comprehension, (2) Lots of practice with grade level text is the key to developing fluent word recognition, (3) The conceptual load in K-3 grade level texts is simple, (4) Therefore, as long as one teaches word recognition skills, comprehension will pretty much take care of itself (Teale et al., 2007). While these points may have some merit, phonics and fluency are not the only skills that our youngest learners need to become successful readers (Teale et al., 2007). Primary age children must be taught appropriate comprehension strategies and skills that will help them understand texts that are more complex than those that make up everyday words they already know and conversations in which they may hear (Teale et al., 2007). As educators, we must think about what will help to

make our young children be good readers now and in the future. “Good books are a key to creating good readers” (Teale et al., 2007, p. 346.) Unfortunately, children who live in poverty may have limited access to written texts. Therefore, schools play a major role in helping children develop their comprehension abilities.

Schools also play an essential role in helping early learners develop domain specific knowledge. In the early grades, schools may see initial test score increases on phonics skills, word recognition, word reading speed and accuracy. However, with little to no support for helping young children develop vocabulary knowledge, domain knowledge, and the ability to comprehend a variety of genres of text on a deeper level, children may experience difficulties with reading in the upper grades, such as fifth grade, eighth grade, and eleventh grade (Teale et al., 2007).

In addition to domain specific knowledge, writing must be incorporated into literacy instruction. Writing serves as an effective method for developing phonological awareness skills (Snow, et al., 1998) and awareness of the functions and uses of literacy (Teale et al., 2007). Therefore, writing must be incorporated into literacy instruction. Ultimately, increased writing instruction further supports reading growth.

The reading curriculum gap must be addressed to help close the overarching achievement gap. To help our early elementary students to evolve into successful readers now and in the future, literacy instruction must focus on phonological awareness/decoding, word recognition, fluency instruction, comprehension, content knowledge, and writing instruction. “In essence, we encourage primary-grade educators to think comprehensively about what constitutes a good beginning in reading and writing, because a good ending is far more likely when there is a good beginning” (Teale et al., 2007, p. 347).

Income Gap

In terms of the economic achievement gaps in reading, the American family has evolved over the decades. Children who are raised in high-income families are more likely to be raised by two parents who have college degrees (Reardon, 2013). Children who are raised in low-income families are more likely to be raised by a single mother with a lower level of education (2013). Parents who have higher levels of education may be able to foster an environment which promotes their children's reading socialization more comprehensively, due to their own educational experiences and by being educational role models (Dong et al., 2020). Thus, this family structure may have a positive effect on reading achievement (2020). In other studies, the number of books in a home has become an indicator of reading achievement (2020). There have been marked differences in reading achievement from families that have an increased number of books in their home (2020). When there are more books in the home, children have more opportunities to engage in reading. Parents who have more books in their homes are more likely to read themselves and serve as positive models for their child (2020). Having an increased number of books in the home may indicate a parents' appreciation for reading and intellectual stimulating activities (2020). In conclusion, higher income homes with a higher number of books may help to foster positive conditions which promote reading achievement.

Conversely, children raised in poverty may experience a tremendous impact on their development (Howard et al., 2009, Williams & Crockett, 2013). Students' depression, poor health, and poor academic performance are potential impacts of childhood poverty. According to research, 83% of fourth graders from low-income homes are unable to read fluently (Fiester, 2010; Hutchinson & Reinking, 2011; Williams & Crocket, 2013). A study of children's vocabulary revealed that children from households with greater earnings had a vocabulary of

approximately 1,100 words by the age of three. Children whose families live in poverty know only about 525 words at the same age (O'Hara, 2006). Therefore, economics plays a major role in contributing to the reading achievement gap.

Covid-19 Pandemic's Impact on Achievement Gap

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated income-based achievement gaps (Bansak & Starr, 2021). First, many of the “front line workers” who were exposed to the Covid-19 virus were parents of low-income families (Berube & Bateman, 2020; Cole, 2020). These families were less likely to have access to high quality health care (Berube & Bateman, 2020; Cole, 2020). This limited access to health care may have hindered the ability for low-income parents to effectively support their children's learning. Secondly, low-income families may have had limited access to high quality internet services and computers in the home when compared to more affluent families. This limited access to technology made it tough for children from low-income families to access online instruction (Stelitano et al., 2020). Third, when compared to their more affluent peers, children of low-income families were more likely to attend public schools that lacked the resources for teachers to provide high quality online instruction (Diliberti & Kaufman, 2020). Finally, families of low-income were less likely to supplement school instruction with enrichment and private tutoring (Lee et al., 2021). These four factors contributed greatly to the income achievement gap.

Racial/Ethnic Gap

Race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status are not experienced independently but are deeply intertwined, contributing to cumulative disadvantage (Nurius et al., 2015). Achievement declines to pre-pandemic averages are greater among student of color and students enrolled in high poverty schools. In 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cited evidence

that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted communities of color economically, socially, and in relation to health consequences. Students who attended schools whose demographics were mainly Black and Hispanic reported facing more hurdles to learning during the pandemic which included feeling depressed, stressed, or anxious (YouthTruth, 2021). Many reported that they were concerned about their health and the well-being of their family (2021). With inadequate technical infrastructure, limited high speed internet, and quiet spaces to learn at home, students from low-income families had difficulty making academic progress (Coleman et al., 2021). Research has shown that Black and Hispanic students and schools that served poorer communities made lower gains during the pandemic compared to their White and higher-income peers (Curriculum Associates, 2020; Dorn et al., 2020).

Implications for Practice

Educators, politicians, and social scientists have worked on a number of strategies to help narrow the achievement gap (Jeynes, 2015). School-based solutions are the focus for educators (2015). Psychologists tend to place their efforts on individual-based solutions (2015). Family scientist, such as in psychology, sociology, and social work, tend to gravitate towards family solutions (2015). Sociologists emphasize strategies to address societal solutions (2015). With all their efforts, there continues to be a lack of consensus about what strategies at various levels that should be done to help reduce the achievement gap (2015).

With the Covid-19 pandemic, elementary age students started the school year further behind in their reading development than previous cohorts of children (Kuhfield et al., 2023). As a result, schools should consider providing literacy professional development to upper elementary teachers with a focus on decoding skills (2023). Along with training, schools must provide upper elementary teachers with aligned resources and personnel support to facilitate

differentiated, explicit instruction for students who continue to experience difficulties in these areas (2023). Schools also need to consider providing high-quality, intensive intervention services for children who started significantly behind their peers. To help determine students' needs, schools may need to administer specific diagnostic screeners (2023). This may help educators pinpoint individual student difficulties in decoding skills and/or language comprehension (2023). Equipped with this knowledge, appropriate, targeted interventions could be provided which is key to helping students fill in the gaps of information that they have missed during the pandemic (2023). With an increased focus on administering diagnostic screeners and providing targeted interventions, teachers may need additional training and resources on administering and analyzing diagnostic screeners, determining students' needs, grouping students for instruction, implementing high quality instruction and curricula, and on-going coaching and support for decision making based on collected data (2023). Reading intervention is essential to help students access grade-level content in written materials across other subjects, such as math, science, and history (2023). While education is in a reactive state as a result of the pandemic, educators must also think in a proactive manner while moving forward. States and school districts should consider allocating a generous share of resources and efforts to the earliest grades, including kindergarten and preschool (Reardon, 2013). Since achievement gaps are self-perpetuating, early intervention is crucial for effectively reducing and eventually eliminating achievement gaps (2013).

While schools have a tremendous task in helping to reduce the achievement gap, they cannot complete this task in isolation. Politics must play a key role, too, in helping to eliminate the achievement gap (2013).

Economic policies that reduce inequality, family support policies that provide stable and secure environments for children, and early-childhood education policies that foster cognitive and social development should be integral to a comprehensive strategy for closing the economic achievement gap (2013).

To address the racial achievement gap, some researchers suggest that schools need to pay more attention to and demonstrate a greater degree of cultural sensitivity to children (Jeynes, 2015). Educators must be aware that different children have distinct learning styles (2015). Jeynes writes that today's schooling is geared toward teaching White students (2015). Ladson-Billings challenged thinking as it relates to the education of minority children. She asked us to focus on 'What is right with minority students?' rather than 'What is wrong with minority students?' (Ladson-Billings, 1990). Ladson-Billings conducted research on approaches that were shown to be successful a variety of classroom settings (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Academic achievement, cultural competency, and sociopolitical awareness were three broad categories of teaching that were identified in successful classroom settings (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Ladson-Billings' research suggests that teachers who use Culturally Relevant Pedagogy with students help them acquire the skills that are essential for academic achievement along with respecting individual differences within the classroom (2014).

Impact of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships on Learning

Relationships are fundamental to human development. As children enter school, relationships with adults beyond their families become increasingly influential. These relationships play a critical role in shaping students' educational trajectories, particularly during the early stages of cognitive and social-emotional development (Zainullah & Riniati, 2023). A growing body of research indicates that the quality of teacher–student relationships significantly

contributes to students' academic development and achievement throughout the elementary years (Walker & Graham, 2021). Moreover, positive teacher–student relationships are associated with increased student motivation, engagement, and overall well-being (Fan, 2023; Li, Bergin, & Olsen, 2022; Zainullah & Riniati, 2023).

Teacher–student relationships are formed through ongoing interpersonal interactions within the teaching and learning process (Fan, 2023). High-quality relationships are characterized by warmth, trust, responsiveness, and consistent support (Allen et al., 2021). In contrast, low-quality relationships may involve mistrust, fear, and avoidance, which can negatively impact students' academic and emotional experiences (2021). These relational dynamics are especially critical for students from historically marginalized backgrounds, who may rely more heavily on school-based relationships for academic and emotional support.

Effective teachers intentionally cultivate both individual relationships with students and a broader sense of classroom community (Garrett et al., 2022). This work requires navigating diverse cultural norms, varied student experiences, and individual learning needs (Zainullah & Riniati, 2023). Central to this effort is the creation of emotionally supportive classroom environments. In such environments, students feel cared for, respected, and valued by their teachers (Allen et al., 2021). Teachers demonstrate this support through practices such as using a warm and calm tone, engaging in positive interactions, recognizing students' individual needs, and providing responsive academic and emotional support (Walker & Graham, 2021).

Emotionally supportive classrooms also promote student autonomy and belonging. Students are given opportunities for choice, encouraged to express their ideas, and engaged in meaningful learning experiences tailored to their interests (Walker & Graham, 2021). These practices not only affirm students' identities and voices but also support higher-order thinking

and differentiated instruction, which are associated with improved academic outcomes (Allen et al., 2021). Within these environments, students are more likely to view themselves as capable learners and develop a strong sense of belonging.

School leaders play a pivotal role in fostering conditions that support positive teacher–student relationships. Administrators must establish school climates that prioritize relational practices and emotional safety (Zainullah & Riniati, 2023). This includes investing in professional development focused on interpersonal skills and cultural responsiveness, as well as implementing policies that emphasize relationships over compliance (Allen et al., 2021). Effective leaders also ensure that teachers have the time and flexibility needed to build meaningful connections with students and provide ongoing pastoral support.

Specifically, school leaders can support relational school environments by creating physically and psychologically safe spaces, prioritizing relationship-building within the school schedule, and promoting professional learning around student connectedness (Allen et al., 2021). Additionally, leaders should critically examine policies that may undermine relationships, such as rigid disciplinary practices, and instead adopt approaches grounded in care and responsiveness.

Ultimately, when schools prioritize positive teacher–student relationships, students are more likely to demonstrate increased academic engagement, a greater willingness to seek support, and stronger intrinsic motivation to learn (Zainullah & Riniati, 2023). These outcomes underscore the importance of relational practices as a foundational component of effective teaching and equitable educational environments.

Successful Literacy Strategies in High Poverty Schools

The tremendous impact of poverty on reading achievement has been well documented (Cunningham, 2006; Duncan & Seymour, 2000, Hart & Risley, 1995; Snow et al., 1998).

Schools that have been successful in making great academic gains, especially with minority children and children of poverty have been identified as having effective school level practices, effective teachers, and effective literacy practices. This portion of the literature review will examine characteristics of effective schools and identify characteristics of effective teachers and their literacy practices.

Effective Schools

Through literature reviews, several factors have been highlighted that have helped schools serving children of poverty and minority students “beat the odds.” First, schools that have “beat the odds” have common goals that are shared among school administrators, teachers, other school staff, and parents, especially as it relates to improving children’s literacy achievement (Taylor et al., 2002). Secondly, there is a strong commitment to continuous curricular improvement (Hoffman, 1991). In these environments, high expectations are set (1991). Schools are safe and orderly (Hoffman, 1991; Puma et al., 1997).

Successful schools have worked to maximize the use of their instructional time (Hoffman, 1991). To ensure that literacy is a school-wide priority, literacy blocks have been designated across buildings that span anywhere from 2 ½ hours to 3 hours each day (Taylor et al., 2002). This designation of time promotes the value of literacy to students and parents (Kennedy, 2010). Further, it provides the necessary time for acceleration of learning and for a deep exploration and creation of texts (Kennedy, 2010).

Schools that “beat the odds” have strong building leaders who focus on instructional leadership and effective practices (Hoffman, 1991; Puma et al., 1997; Taylor et al., 2000, 2002). There is also strong communication and great collaboration in highly effective schools (Cunningham, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000, 2002). It is not uncommon for regular education teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, and teacher assistants to work within the same room with small groups of children to help personalize instruction for learning (Taylor et al., 2000). Further, schools that have helped children of poverty make great literacy gains have implemented systems to frequently monitor student progress (Cunningham, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000, 2002). Another characteristic of effective schools is that they foster strong, positive home-school relationships (Hoffman, 1991; Taylor et al., 2000, 2002). Finally, schools that “beat the odds” have made a commitment to on-going professional development (Cunningham, 2006; Taylor et al., 2002).

Kennedy recommends that teacher professional development is of the utmost importance in addressing underachievement in literacy (Kennedy, 2010). Professional development sessions should focus on increasing teachers’ content knowledge in the areas of alphabetics, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and writing (Graves, 1994; National Institute of Child Health and Development, 2000; Pressley, 2001). Secondly, effective literacy professional development must provide teachers with a variety of pedagogical content strategies (Garet et al., 2001; Shulman, 1987). Effective literacy professional development must equip teachers with assessment tools to help them respond to students’ needs in a manner that builds upon their motivation and engagement (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999) while strengthening their metacognitive awareness (Paris et al., 1994). While working with teachers, it is important to move them through the change process incrementally and to build early success within their work (Kenney, 2010).

Significant changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes followed the visible improvements in student learning outcomes, motivation, and engagement. (2010). When teachers experience success, especially early success, this enhances their self-confidence and self-efficacy and helps to raise their expectations for children (2010). Finally, effective professional development must foster a supportive community where teachers share what works for particular students (Haughey et al, 2001). Au and Carroll (1997) identified benefits that will occur when collaborative professional development that involves problem-solving and reflection occurs concurrently with the goal of literacy development. Teachers have reported that their participation in reflective sessions in which they established the agenda for discussion gave them a feeling of support (Haughey et al., 2002). Further, teachers shared that the richness of the ideas that they learned from their colleagues helped to keep their motivation high for further learning (2002). In fact, with continued engagement sessions, teachers were more willing to share both problems and difficulties as well as stories of success (Haughey et al, 2002). This fostered a reach environment for greater engagement, collaborative problem-solving, increased knowledge of literacy-development strategies, and an overall increase in teachers' comfort level with implementing new literacy approaches (Haughey et al., 2002).

Effective Teachers

As researchers continue to work to identify characteristics of effective schools, they also continue to compile characteristics of effective teachers and their practices (Barone, 2004; Kennedy, 2010; Taylor et al., 2005). Effective teachers have excellent classroom management skills that foster a positive learning environment (Barone, 2002). They create classrooms where children are busy academically by doing reading and writing activities (2004). Effective teachers know how to match student activities to the varying competencies within their classroom (2004).

They scaffold learning for their students (2004). Scaffolding is a strategy in which teachers provide support for an individual or small group of children to help move to the next level of independence in completing a task, strategy, or activity (Taylor et al., 2000). Effective teachers help children to be in charge of themselves as learners (2004). They promote self-regulation by teaching students to monitor their learning, assess the quality of their work, and manage their time effectively (Taylor et.al, 2000). Effective teachers also teach their students to use strategies to be good readers and to fix problems that they may encounter as they read (2000).

In schools that “beat the odds”, highly effective teachers generate a shared sense of commitment to their school’s goals and practices (Wilder & Jacobsen, 2010). Highly effective teachers possess great initiative and perseverance (2010). They frequently utilize reading formative assessment tools to monitor student progress and used the data to make adjustments in instruction (Taylor et al, 2005). In terms of literacy, effective teachers are “all in” when it comes to their schools’ literacy reform plans (Taylor et al., 2005). This support of the school-wide literacy plan is essential for the change process to occur well and be impactful (2005).

Upon a closer examination of teacher practices that help their schools “beat the odds” in literacy, researchers have found teachers who engaged their students in higher levels of questioning promoted greater growth among their students (Taylor et al., 2003; Wilder & Jacobsen, 2010). This emphasis on higher-level thinking increased students’ understanding of what they were doing and encouraged them to be meaning makers (Knapp et al., 1995). When students are engaged in higher-level thinking about text, they make connections to their prior knowledge, consider thematic elements of the text, and interpret characters’ motives and actions (Taylor et al., 2003). Higher level questioning matters.

Effective teachers must promote reading engagement in order to teach reading well (Taylor et al., 2003). Engaged readers are motivated, read to learn, employ cognitive strategies, and actively participate in a classroom community (2003). Pressley reported that effective teachers are just as concerned about student motivation and reading involvement as they are about student reading achievement (Pressley et al., 2002). When students are provided opportunities to perform literacy activities themselves versus listening to or watching others perform the literacy activity, there is a greater opportunity for growth (Taylor et al., 2003). Examples of active reading involvement include reading, writing, manipulating, chorally responding, and sharing ideas with a partner (Taylor et al., 2003).

Teachers who are more effective tend to model for their students and teach strategies that children can apply for decoding words and understanding text (Taylor et al., 2003). This modeling and teaching can be done with the whole class or small groups. Greater literacy achievement has been linked to small group instruction and the frequency of small group instruction (Taylor et al., 2000). Student from the lowest socioeconomic status backgrounds benefited the most from intensive, small-group instruction (2000).

Teachers who have demonstrated effectiveness in teaching literacy have established classrooms with instructional balance (Taylor et al., 2000). They emphasize both literature and skills (2000). For example, these teachers instruct in decoding skills and give children many opportunities to engage in authentic, integrated reading and writing activities.

The authors of *Every Child a Reader: Action Plan* summarize effective literacy practices by recommending that every primary child be provided with the following: (1) A knowledge of letters and sounds before formal reading and spelling instruction begin, (2) A balance in

instruction between phonics and meanings, (3) Books that support their ability to decode and books that support meaning, (4) Engagement in strategies centered on comprehension, (5) Opportunities to write, (6) Smaller classes with about 15 students, (7) Participation in assessments that are tied to the curriculum, (8) Be members of many groups that are organized for learning goals, (9) Be given tutoring support if necessary, and (10) Be engaged in reading at home. High poverty schools that “beat the odds” have effective school level practices, effective teachers who implement research-based literacy practices, and a balanced literacy framework. This multi-faceted approach will facilitate the process of helping our youngest readers become tomorrow’s successful future readers.

Summary

Over the years, there has been significant debate about how reading should be taught, particularly the long-standing debate between whole language approaches, which emphasize meaning and exposure to text, and phonics-based approaches, which emphasize explicit instruction in letter–sound relationships. From the alphabet method to the whole language approach, educators, literacy experts, and scientists have chimed in about the best ways to teach children to read. While the term, “science of reading” has been around for over two hundred years, it has become increasingly focused on decoding proficiency and language proficiency (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2021).

Upon a close review of national test data, there continues to be gaps in reading performance. These gaps include gender gaps, income gaps, and racial/ethnic gaps. Further, the Covid-19 Pandemic played a major role in exacerbating the achievement gap. It has also been noted that there are reading curriculum gaps. Research has shown that high poverty schools that

make literacy a priority, implement evidence-based literacy strategies, and employ effective teachers are more likely to help children read on grade level.

In Chapter 3, the areas of focus will include the inquiry guiding questions, inquiry design and rationale, the context of the inquiry, and information regarding the inquiry partner. To ensure that the inquiry addresses a problem of practice and upholds the highest ethical principles, Chapter 3 will address ethical considerations, the inquiry procedures, inquiry design rigor, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions. Chapter 3 will conclude with the role of the scholarly practitioner.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

The purpose of this convergent mixed methods inquiry was to identify literacy strategies that support the continued growth and development of third graders at a high poverty school with 96% Black student population. This chapter outlines the methodology for implementing the inquiry. The chapter includes guiding questions and details related to the inquiry design and rationale. Further, the chapter contains ethical considerations, instrumentation, inquiry procedures, inquiry design rigor, and the role of the scholarly practitioner.

Inquiry Guiding Questions

This inquiry was guided by the following questions:

1. What was the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance?
2. What was the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning?

Inquiry Design and Rationale

For the past five years, Black students at ECU Community School have consistently performed well below North Carolina's White students on the North Carolina End-of-Grade test. From 2021-2025 the state's reading proficiency for White children ranged from 58.5% to 64.8%. The reading proficiency for ECU Community School's Black children ranged from 13.0% to 40.0%. While the reading proficiency of ECU Community Schools' students has increased, especially during the midst of the pandemic, the size of the reading achievement gap and the existence of the gap over time has led to the need to identify additional literacy strategies that could continue to help improve the reading performance of ECU Community School's Black children. In this inquiry, I analyzed the impact of literacy interventions on Black children's

performance, as well as the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning.

A convergent mixed methods research design was utilized. Mixed-methods research combines quantitative and qualitative data collection in a single research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Mertler, 2022). This design was selected to ensure the use of more than one data source. Quantitative data provides general and more broad understanding (Mertler, 2022). Qualitative data provides understanding through greater depth (2022). Data collection and analysis was enhanced by utilizing the breadth and depth of the combination of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Mertler, 2022).

The inquiry utilized the convergent parallel design. Within this design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Mertler, 2022). One type of data was not prioritized over the other type of data (Mertler, 2022). Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed independently (2022), but the results were combined to achieve the overall interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Mertler, 2022).

During the first phase of the inquiry, a pilot study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the Teacher Literacy Interview questions. When conducting research, a pilot study tests the data collection process to determine if adjustments need to be made to the instrumentation before the actual data collection process begins (Mertler, 2022). A small group of participants are selected to test the instrumentation (2022). The pilot study will provide information regarding the length of time it takes the participants to complete the instrument (2022). Additionally, researchers can get feedback from participants on the instrument and determine if there is a need to adjust specific questions to gather more precise and accurate data (2022).

The pilot study was conducted with teachers who would not be asked to take part in the research in the fall. Since the inquiry focused on early literacy with an emphasis on third grade, teachers who serve students in kindergarten through second grade were asked to participate in the pilot study. After the pilot study was conducted, the Collaborative Inquiry Partner (CIP) and I analyzed the qualitative data to determine if responses helped to answer the second guiding question on the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' performance after participating in professional learning. Quantitative data related to student performance was also collected during the first phase. This data included 2024-2025 North Carolina Beginning of Third Grade Reading test results, 2024-2025 End-of-Grade Reading test results and m-Class DIBELS assessment results. These assessment results were collected to support a comparative analysis of two distinct cohorts of third-grade students. The initial design of the inquiry anticipated that both cohorts would be instructed by the same classroom teacher across consecutive school years. This design would have allowed me to examine potential changes in teacher instructional practices over time and to explore the relationship between those practices and student literacy outcomes. By analyzing assessment data across the two cohorts, the study aimed to identify patterns of growth and to determine whether shifts in instructional approaches contributed to differences in student performance.

The second phase of the inquiry involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data. This data helped to establish a baseline on the impact of literacy interventions on participating students' performance, as well as how teacher practices were impacted after participating in literacy professional learning. One source of quantitative data came from a Student Reading Motivation Pre-Survey. A second source of quantitative data came from the North Carolina Beginning of Third Grade Reading test. The m-Class DIBELS assessment provided a third

quantitative data source. The qualitative data was collected from a Teacher Literacy Interview. Based on the analysis of the data collected during phases one and two, the CIP, research participants, and I determined and implemented literacy interventions. Professional learning was conducted on the interventions to ensure that they were implemented with fidelity. A Literacy Walkthrough tool was utilized to collect qualitative data to further examine the fidelity of implementation. Finally, data from the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessment was collected to determine if there was any impact from the use of the intervention.

The third phase of the inquiry involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data on the implementation of the second, six-week intervention cycle. Based on the analysis of data from the second phase, the CIP, research participants, and I determined modifications to the originally implemented interventions. A second professional learning session was conducted to ensure that the interventions were implemented with fidelity. A Literacy Learning Walkthrough tool was utilized again to collect qualitative data to further examine the fidelity of implementation. Data from the North Carolina Reading Check-In was collected to determine if there was any impact from the second, six-week intervention cycle.

During the fourth and final phase, a Student Reading Motivation Post Survey was administered. A Teacher Literacy Post Interview was conducted. Data from phase four was analyzed by the CIP, teacher participants, and me.

This inquiry had two guiding questions. The first question looked to examine the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance. Data collected from the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessments, DIBELS assessment data, and data from the Student Reading Motivation surveys were used to determine if there was any impact of literacy interventions on students' performance.

The inquiry's second guiding question looked to determine the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning. Data collected from the Literacy Learning Walkthrough tool and the Teacher Literacy Interview surveys were used to determine if there was any impact on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning.

Collected data was analyzed. After analysis, inquiry findings from both guiding questions were shared broadly with the CIP, research participants, and university partners. A decision was made as to whether to continue, expand, or discontinue the literacy interventions based on the collected data and outcomes.

Context of the Inquiry

ECU Community School is one of six laboratory schools in the University of North Carolina System (UNC). UNC System laboratory schools were designed to focus on three specific areas-Strengthening the partnerships between universities and public-school units, providing high quality training for teacher and school administrator candidates, and improving student performance in low-performing schools. Specifically, UNC System laboratory schools are charged with working with children who are either academically at-risk or zoned to attend a low performing school under North Carolina's accountability model. Given the legislative mandates, ECU Community School's population has resulted in a high minority population of students who live at or below the poverty line. Additionally, students have experienced a high number of Adverse Childhood Experiences early on in life. While demographics, such as these, have presented challenges to schools across the nation, East Carolina University Community School has demonstrated continued positive reading growth on standardized assessments since its inception, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, ECUCS is currently the

highest performing laboratory school in the University of North Carolina System. This inquiry was conducted not to address low performance, but to build upon existing successes and identify literacy practices that could further improve reading outcomes and accelerate student growth.

While ECU Community School has increased students' reading proficiencies and worked to close the achievement gap, the school's Black students have performed below their White counterparts across the state. Therefore, the purpose of this inquiry was to identify literacy interventions that support students' continued growth and development in reading. Further, the inquiry aimed to examine teachers' practices after participating in literacy professional learning.

To answer the first guiding inquiry question, the inquiry partner, third grade classroom teacher, special education teacher, and I acknowledged our students' current level of performance by reviewing Beginning of the Third Grade Reading test data, and DIBELS data. I also gauged students' motivation for reading by administering a student reading motivation survey at the beginning and end of the inquiry. By learning more about students' motivation for reading and reviewing their performance levels, interventions were selected to promote student growth.

To answer the second guiding inquiry question, I administered a Teacher Literacy interview at the beginning and end of the inquiry. Further, a Literacy Walkthrough Tool was used to assess the implementation of selected interventions. By reviewing pre-and post-teacher interview results and carefully examining collected data from the Literacy Walkthrough tool, it was the goal to determine the impacts of professional learning on teacher practices.

Inquiry Partner

My partner in this inquiry was Kim L. Anderson, PhD, who serves as an Associate Professor at East Carolina University in the Department of Literacy Studies and Special Education. Her research focuses on improving teacher preparation for early literacy instruction

and on the development of literacy tutoring protocols that can be used by tutors with limited expertise. Dr. Anderson has worked collaboratively with ECU Community School's first and second grade teachers to strengthen our literacy instruction. Further, she has worked directly with ECU Community School students. Dr. Anderson reviewed literacy data throughout each inquiry phase. Secondly, she worked collaboratively with ECU Community School's third grade classroom teacher, special education teacher, and me to identify literacy interventions. Finally, the Dr. Anderson took an active role in leading professional learning.

Ethical Considerations

East Carolina University emphasizes best practices when conducting research involving human subjects. The need to conduct research that addresses a problem of practice and upholds the highest ethical principles. As a university requirement, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules on ethics treatment of human subjects. Upon completion of each module, I completed a quiz to demonstrate understanding.

The ECU Community School's Board Policy 8.103, titled Research Projects Conducted by Pitt County Agencies, was followed. The policy states that any student or faculty member who wants to conduct a research project must submit a proposal of the project. The proposal must include how the results will be used and distributed. The policy further states that the school's principal must approve the research project. To avoid a conflict of interest, the Dean of the College of Education, who serves as the principal's direct supervisor, was asked to approve the inquiry. Upon receiving the College of Education's Dean approval to conduct the inquiry, I sought IRB approval from East Carolina University (See Appendix A). After the inquiry was approved by IRB, I met with inquiry participants to discuss an overview of the inquiry, review a

timeline for implementation, share instrumentation, discuss participant responsibilities, and obtain informed consent. Inquiry participants' questions or concerns were addressed.

Confidentiality of the participants was maintained during and after the inquiry. Each teacher participant was given an informed consent prior to their participation in the inquiry (see Appendix B). Each parent of a child participant was given an informed consent prior to their child's participation in the inquiry (see Appendix C). These permission forms included a component which clearly gave the participant an opportunity to stop their voluntary participation at any time during the inquiry. If a student participant chose to withdraw from the inquiry, study-specific data collection would cease. Students would continue to participate in school-required literacy assessments, including the Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading Test, the North Carolina Reading Check-In, and mCLASS DIBELS assessments; however, their data would not be included in the study. The Student Reading Motivation Survey, which was administered specifically for this inquiry, would no longer be administered to students who withdrew from participation. The student would continue to have access to all classroom-based interventions. Microsoft 365 was utilized to house collected data. These programs were stored in the cloud. They were secure and password protected.

While completing this inquiry, I aimed to protect the interest of all research participants. By conducting an inquiry on a problem of practice in a highly ethical manner, the results of this inquiry could be used support the continued growth and development of students and teachers at ECU Community School and other schools that may have a similar demographic.

Inquiry Procedures

The inquiry was conducted in four phases. The projected timeline for the inquiry was one and a half years. The first phase started in July 2024. The second phase started in September

2025. The third phase started in December 2025. The fourth and final phase started in January 2026 and concluded in February 2026. The goal was to complete all data collection by February 2026. The subsequent sections outline the inquiry procedures.

Phase One

I met with the Collaborative Inquiry Partner (CIP) in July 2024 to discuss an overview of the research, a timeline for implementation, and instrumentation. Further, I conducted a pilot study on the Teacher Literacy Interview questions. The pilot study was conducted with teachers who would not be asked to take part in the research in the fall. Since the inquiry focused on early literacy with an emphasis on third grade, I asked teachers who serve students in kindergarten through second grade to participate in the pilot study. The teacher interviews were recorded with WebEx. The interviews were transcribed with the assistance of the WebEx recording and WebEx transcription tool. The CIP and I analyzed data from the pilot study. Based on the data analysis, revisions were completed on the Teacher Literacy Interview questions to ensure that the responses would help to answer the second guiding question related to the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning.

In December 2024, I obtained permission from the College of Education's Dean to conduct the inquiry at ECU Community School (see Appendix B). I sought IRB approval from East Carolina University (see Appendix A). Once all required approval was obtained, I met with the third-grade teacher and special education teacher to discuss an overview of the inquiry, a timeline for implementation, and the inquiry participants' responsibilities. The informed consent document was reviewed with the teacher participants and permission was obtained. I contacted parents of potential child research participants to provide an overview of the inquiry, provided a

timeline for completion, and discussed the role of child participants. I reviewed the informed consent document and obtained needed parental permission.

Instrumentation

One of the most important academic skills that needs to be developed during childhood is teaching a child how to read (Chatzoglou et al., 2023). Unfortunately, there are a lot of children who experience difficulty learning to read well or do not learn to read at all (2023). Children who struggle with reading in the primary grades tend to have difficulty with ever reaching grade level standards (Protopapas et al., 2011). At ECU Community School, 30.0% of the fifth-grade Black students were proficient on North Carolina's reading standardized test at the end of the 2024-2025 school year (NC Report Card, 2025). This level of proficiency also means that 70% of the Community School's fifth-grade Black students did not meet state reading standards when they transitioned from elementary school to middle school. In this inquiry, the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance was examined. A second guiding question examined the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning.

In this mixed methods approach, several instruments were used to collect and analyze data related to the guiding questions. Quantitative data was collected with the following instruments: The North Carolina Beginning-of-Grade 3 Reading test, the DIBELS assessment, and the North Carolina Reading Check In assessment. These data sets specifically focus on student performance. A Student Reading Motivation survey provided quantitative and qualitative data on students' motivations towards reading. These assessments and survey were used to help answer the first guiding question on the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance. A Literacy Learning Walkthrough tool was used to collect qualitative data on the

impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional development. Below are brief descriptions of each instrument.

The Beginning-of-Grade 3 Reading Test is aligned to the third grade English Language Arts North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCDPI, 2024b). This assessment must be administered between the first and fifteenth day of the school year (2024b) The North Carolina Reading Check-In assessment is a common formative assessment that is aligned to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for English Language Arts (2024). This assessment is administered once per quarter at ECUCS. The DIBELS assessment is a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of literacy skills (DIBELS Website, 2024). DIBELS stands for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS Website, 2024). These timed fluency measures are used to detect risk and monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills. DIBELS is administered three times per academic year-Beginning of the year, middle of the year, and end of the year.

Throughout the inquiry, the third grade classroom teacher administered the North Reading Check-In formative assessments. The assessments were used to monitor student understanding of taught concepts. Results from the assessment helped identify students who mastered reading objectives and determine students who needed additional instructional support. A Student Reading Motivation survey was administered at the beginning and end of the inquiry. Motivation impacts reading achievement (Mazzoni et al., 1999). With knowledge about how students are motivated, teachers may be able to improve teaching and classroom contexts for reading development (Guthrie et al., 2009). The final quantitative instrument used in this study was the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool developed by the Tennessee Department of Education. This tool was selected to support classroom observations and to examine the

implementation of the selected literacy interventions during instructional time. The instrument includes several areas of focus, including Culture of Learning, Use of Time, Reading Foundational Skills, Texts, Text Title, Questions and Tasks, and Ownership of Learning. These components provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing both instructional practices and student engagement during the literacy block.

While the instrument contained multiple components, it was not feasible to fully complete the entire tool during a single classroom walkthrough. Therefore, the teacher participants, inquiry partner, and I collaboratively identified specific intervention areas of focus. Based on the selected interventions, targeted areas of the walkthrough tool were prioritized to guide data collection during each visit. This approach allowed for a more intentional and manageable use of the instrument while maintaining alignment with the instructional focus of the inquiry. It was the goal that these data sets would provide an understanding of the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance and the impact of literacy interventions on teacher's practices after participating in professional learning.

A Teacher Literacy Interview was used to collect qualitative data on teacher practices. The purpose of this instrument was to assess teachers' perceptions before and after participating in professional learning. This instrument was developed by the CIP and me. The Teacher Literacy Interview contained five baseline questions. However, I used a semi-structured interview format to ask follow-up questions to gain greater insight into the teachers' perspectives. The interviews were administered at the beginning and end of the inquiry.

Pilot Study

My inquiry partner, Dr. Anderson, and I designed the Teacher Survey Literacy Interview questions. The goals of the interview questions were to determine, from a teachers' perspective,

what was going well with teaching literacy at ECU Community School as well as needed areas for growth and development. The feedback from the interview would be one data point that could be used in determining what type of professional learning on literacy strategies could be offered during the inquiry. At the end of pilot study, the CIP and I reviewed the data, identified patterns and trends in responses, and discussed the effectiveness of each question as it related to specifically addressing one of the guiding inquiry questions.

Pilot Procedures and Activities

Since the inquiry focused on early literacy, third grade students, and third grade teachers at ECU Community School, I selected teachers who worked with students in either kindergarten, first, or second grade at ECU Community School for the pilot study. Three teachers were asked to participate in the pilot study. The first teacher, Teacher #1, was a 19-year veteran teacher who has a Bachelor of Science degree in Child Development and Family Relations, a Master's degree in Elementary Education, and Master's degree in Executive Leadership Studies with an add on licensure in School Administration. Teacher #1 had taught kindergarten, first, and second grade. Teacher #2 was an eight-year veteran teacher who has a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies, a Master's degree in Health Care Administration, and a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education. Teacher #2 had taught second grade. Teacher #3 was a ten-year veteran teacher who has Bachelor's degree in Business and Management and a Master's degree in Special Education. Teacher #3 had served as a special education teacher who provides resource and inclusion services, especially for children with autism in kindergarten through second grade.

I met with each pilot study participant individually to solicit their support and provided an overview of the inquiry and data to support the need for the problem of practice. I also discussed the role of the pilot study participants, emphasized that participation in the pilot study

was totally voluntary, and shared that their willingness to participate or not participate would in no way impact their evaluation or employment with ECU Community School. All three teachers who were asked to participate in the pilot study agreed to participate. The pilot study participants and I agreed upon a date and time to take part in individual teacher interviews.

I met with pilot study participants in-person to conduct structured interviews. With structured interviews, pre-determined questions were used designed by the CIP and me (Mertler, 2022). Only the pre-determined questions were asked during the one-on-one sessions(2022). During the interview, I briefly described the inquiry, discussed the purpose of the interview, secured the participants' permission for the interview to be recorded via WebEx, completed a question-and-answer phase, and concluded the interview by thanking the participants for their time. Additionally interview participants were invited to share any additional thoughts or comments, especially as it related to providing feedback on the instrument. The interview participants did not have additional thoughts or comments to share.

After the interviews, transcripts from each of the three recorded sessions were printed from WebEx. Transcripts were reviewed and coded for data analysis. From the codes, categories and themes began to emerge. For example, question #1 asked pilot study participants about strengths of the Language Arts program at ECU Community School. The method for curriculum delivery and resources emerged as themes. For question # 2 asked about weaknesses of ECU Community School's Language Arts program, lack of people resources and limited training on available resources emerged. Question #3 asked participants to describe a literacy professional learning in which they have participated and identify ways in which the professional learning had impacted their teaching. Professional learning that fostered collaboration and provided strategies that could be implemented within the classroom developed as a theme. For the fourth and final

question, pilot study participants agreed that more human resources and more materials to help reinforce skills would make a better situation for teaching literacy ECU Community School.

The CIP and I agreed that the responses from the pilot study provided valuable data related to the guiding inquiry question. To further strengthen the data collection, the CIP recommended utilizing semi-structured interviews. With semi-structured interviews, I would have an established set of questions but also have the option of following up on a given response with additional questions (Mertler, 2022). For example, question #2 asked the participant to identify weaknesses with ECU Community School's language arts program. Participants shared responses. However, I could follow up with the responses by asking "What about student performance would cause you to think that this is a weakness?" A second example of asking participants follow-up questions could be found with question #4. Participants were asked to share what would make for a better situation for teaching literacy at ECU Community School. Multiple participants stated that having additional reading specialists would make for a better situation for teaching literacy at ECU Community School. A follow-up question that could be asked is "How would you see yourself collaborating with a reading specialist?" Again, the CIP and I agreed to move from a structured interview to a semi-structured interview. No further adjustments to the full implementation need to be made based on the feedback.

Phase Two

In October 2025, I conducted the Teacher Literacy Interviews. The interviews were conducted individually and virtually with the third-grade teacher and special education teacher. The interview was recorded with WebEx. The interviews were transcribed with the assistance of the WebEx recording and WebEx transcription tool.

I administered the Student Reading Motivation Survey in October 2025. I met with each student individually, obtained student assent, explained the purpose of the survey, asked the survey questions, and recorded student responses. Results from the survey were compiled.

I conducted classroom walkthroughs during the third-grade literacy block between October 2025 and December 2025. The Literacy Walkthrough Learning tool was used to collect baseline data about the teachers' practices prior to participating in the inquiry's professional learning. The walk-through data were compiled.

The third-grade teacher administered the North Carolina Beginning-of-Grade 3 Reading Test in September 2025. Additionally, the third grade teacher administered the DIBELS assessment in September 2025. Scholars who scored in the "Below" range and "Well Below" range took part in progress monitoring assessments every three weeks. The teacher research participants, the CIP, and I reviewed all collected data-North Carolina Beginning of Grade Reading Test data, DIBELS data, and Student Reading Motivation survey data. Based upon the review and analysis, the research participants, CIP, and I determined literacy interventions. The CIP led professional learning on collected data and provided feedback on strategies to support scholar growth. From October 2025 to December 2025, teacher research participants implemented the literacy intervention. The third-grade teacher administered the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessment. Using the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool, I conducted classroom walkthroughs during the third-grade literacy block at least twice per week from October 2025 to December 2025. In December 2025, the teacher research participants, the CIP, and I analyzed data from the NC Reading Check-In assessment, DIBELS progress monitoring data, and the data collected from the Literacy Walk Learning Walkthrough Tool.

Phase Three

In December 2025, the teacher research participants, the CIP, and I made the decision to continue with the implementation of the literacy intervention with modifications. The CIP provided the third-grade teacher and special education teacher professional learning on the modified intervention to ensure that it is completed with fidelity. Teacher research participants implemented the literacy intervention from December 2025 to February 2026. The third-grade teacher administered the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessment in January 2026. At least twice per week, from December 2025 to February 2026, I continued to utilize the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool to conduct classroom walkthroughs during the third-grade literacy block. In January 2026, the third grade teacher administered the Middle-of-the Year DIBELS assessment. The third-grade teacher also continued administered DIBELS progress monitoring assessments to scholars who scored in the “Below” range and “Well Below” range.

Phase Four

In February 2026, I conducted a second administration of the Student Reading Motivation survey. I met with each student individually, explained the purpose of the survey, asked the survey questions, asked probing questions at the end of each survey section, and recorded student responses. Results from the survey were compiled. In February 2026, I conducted a second administration of the Teacher Literacy Interview. The teacher research participants, the CIP, and I analyzed data from the reading formative assessments, Middle-of-Year DIBELS assessment, the second Student Reading Motivation Survey, the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool Data, and the second administration of the Teacher Literacy Interview. Inquiry findings were shared broadly with the CIP, research participants, and university partners. A

decision was made as to whether to continue, expand, or discontinue the literacy interventions based on the collected data and outcomes.

Inquiry Design Rigor

Rigor is defined as the quality, validity, accuracy and credibility of action research and its findings (Mertler, 2022). It is imperative with action research, that procedures are put in place to ensure that the results are not biased, or reflective only of the researcher's perspective (Mertler, 2022). This inquiry contained a qualitative data collection piece. To ensure the validity of research data and findings, a pilot study was conducted. Additionally, a peer debriefing session was held upon the conclusion of the pilot study.

When conducting research, a pilot study is conducted to test the data collection process to determine if adjustments need to be made to the instrumentation before the actual data collection begins (Mertler, 2022). A small group of participants are selected to test the instrumentation (2022). By completing a pilot study, the researcher can estimate how long it will take the participants to complete the instrument (2022). Additionally, the researcher can get feedback from participants on the instrument and determine if there is a need to adjust specific questions to gather more precise and accurate data (2022).

One of the guiding questions for this inquiry was as follows: What was the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning? A pilot study was completed in July 2024. The objective of the pilot study was to assess the effectiveness of the Teacher Literacy Survey Interview questions, review the data collection process, and analyze and interpret preliminary results.

The inquiry partner and I developed the Teacher Literacy Survey Interview questions. One-on-one interviews were conducted with teachers who would not be a part of the Spring

inquiry. The interviews were recorded via WebEx. After all interviews were conducted, I engaged in a peer debriefing process with the inquiry partner. Peer debriefing involves soliciting the assistance of other professionals to help reflect on the research (Mertler, 2022).

Reflection involves reviewing and critiquing processes related to data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Based on the pilot study results, the inquiry partner and I agreed that it would be best to move from a structured interview to a semi-structured interview. With this format, I would ask each future inquiry participant a set of base questions. However, I would also have the option of asking follow-up questions depending on the provided response. This shift in interviewing techniques may help me gather a more accurate assessment of teachers' perceptions during the Pre-and Post-Teacher Literacy survey.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this inquiry, it was assumed that teachers had basic knowledge of literacy development and instruction. ECU Community School's teachers engaged in literacy professional development over the past three years. During the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years, teachers took part in the state-mandated LETRS training. LETRS stands for Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling. This eight-unit professional development series is designed to provide teachers with the skills they need to master the fundamentals of reading instruction-phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, and language (NCDPI, 2021). Therefore, it was assumed that teachers participated fully in this two-year professional development series and are applying the best practices that they have learned within their classrooms.

A second assumption was that teachers had a genuine desire to improve their instruction to help students achieve better outcomes. For three years prior to the start of the inquiry, ECU Community School employed a full-time reading specialist. Additionally, first and second grade teachers worked with a faculty member from East Carolina University's College of Education Literacy Studies Department. For three years, the College of Education faculty member and reading specialist worked with teachers on assessing student knowledge, interpreting assessment results, selecting appropriate literacy materials, and planning and delivering high-quality reading instruction. With the implementation of this literacy support system, it was assumed that teachers had taken full advantage of these resources to improve their instruction to help students achieve better outcomes.

A final assumption was that ECU Community School's third grade students were reading on at least a first or second grade level in order to take part in the interventions. Students were taught by teachers who have been designated in North Carolina as "highly-qualified teachers." Daily, students took part in a 90-minute literacy block which consists of whole group, small group, and individual instruction. Select students had also been supported in Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade by the school's reading specialist. Therefore, it was assumed that the third-grade students are reading on at least a first or second grade level in order to take part in the interventions.

Scope and Delimitations

This inquiry was designed to identify literacy strategies that support the continued growth and development of the Black student population at East Carolina University Community School. This inquiry focused on children and teachers in the third grade. Children and teachers who participated were provided informed consent. While the site has similar demographics to

other elementary schools in the district, as well as schools across the state, the scope may be limited due to the backgrounds of the students as designated by North Carolina lab school legislation. North Carolina laboratory schools' General Statutes (G.S. 116-239.5) states that a university will partner with a public-school unit to improve student performance in the local school administrative unit's low-performing schools by providing an enhanced education program for students residing in the unit and providing exposure and training for teachers and principals to successfully address challenges existing in high-needs school settings. Further, the legislation states that children are eligible to attend the laboratory school if they meet at least one of the following criteria: (1) Is assigned to a low-performing school, as defined by G.S. 115C-105.37 at the time of the student's application, (2) Did not meet expected growth in the prior school year based on one or more indicators, (3) Is the sibling of a child who is eligible under subdivision (1) or (2) of this subsection, and (4) Is the child of a laboratory school employee.

This focus of practice was chosen due to a significant performance gap between ECU Community School's Black children and their White counterparts across the state (NCDPI Report Card, 2023). While ECU Community School's North Carolina Reading EOG test data increased during the pandemic, over the past five years, the school's Black children performed well below North Carolina's White children. Due to the size of the reading achievement gap and the consistency of the gap over time, there was an urgent need to identify literacy interventions that could help continue to increase the reading performance of ECU Community School's Black children.

Limitations

The described inquiry was limited by the small teacher sample size. ECU Community School had one class per grade level. Therefore, there was only one third grade regular education

classroom teacher and one special education teacher involved in the inquiry. A second limitation was the limited years the regular education teacher had in teaching third grade at ECU Community School. This was the regular education's teacher's first year teaching third grade at ECUCS. A third limitation was that I was the current principal at the school where the research was conducted. As the sole school administrator, I conduct all teacher evaluations. Therefore, the third grade classroom teacher and special education teacher who participated in the inquiry may have felt compelled to respond in a certain manner to the survey questions. Prior to the inquiry, participants were made aware that their answers to all surveys, to the extent possible, would remain anonymous with all inquiry partners. Survey interview findings would not be used in any way as a factor in the teachers' evaluations. Survey information would be used for the sole purpose of improving the literacy interventions that are utilized at ECU Community School. All participation was completely voluntary.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

The scholarly practitioner was the principal of East Carolina University Community School. As the principal, I directly supervised the third-grade teacher and the special education teacher and have direct knowledge of all student research participants. Through initial meetings and the informed consent document, I emphasized that participation in this inquiry was voluntary. There would be no negative impacts if the third-grade teacher, the special education teacher, or student participants decided to opt out of the inquiry.

To ensure that the inquiry was completed in an ethical manner, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Program (CITI). The training consisted of 13 modules that emphasized federal regulation, assessing risk, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality. These modules were a tremendous help in designing an inquiry that was sensitive to working

with vulnerable subjects, such as children and employees. I also sought approval to conduct research from the Dean of College of Education and East Carolina University's IRB.

During the inquiry, I met with the Collaborative Inquiry Partner (CIP), the teacher research participants, and parents to discuss the purpose of the research, the timeline for implementation, and responsibilities. I conducted all Teacher Literacy Interviews, administered all Student Reading Motivation surveys, and completed classroom walkthroughs using the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool. I was also actively involved in analyzing all data, selecting literacy interventions, and participating in professional development to the teacher inquiry participants. At the end of the inquiry, the CIP, teacher research participants and I discussed the results. Based on the findings, we made the decision as to whether to continue, expand, or discontinue the literacy interventions based on the collected data and outcomes.

Summary

A convergent mixed methods inquiry was conducted to determine the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance. The inquiry was conducted in four phases, with two inquiry questions guiding the inquiry. The inquiry partner was a faculty member from the College of Education's Literacy Studies Department. Inquiry participants were the third regular education classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and third grade students. Pre- and Post- Interviews were conducted with the third grade classroom teacher and special education teacher to determine the impact on teacher practices after participating in professional learning. Additionally, a Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool was utilized to determine the fidelity of implementation of the interventions. Student performance was examined through use of Beginning of Third Grade Reading test data, NC Reading Check-In data, and mClass DIBELS data. Chapter 4 will include results of the data collection.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

East Carolina University Community School is one of six laboratory schools in the UNC System. While ECUCS's student reading performance has increased, even during the midst of the pandemic, ECUCS's Black children performed consistently below North Carolina's White children over the last five years. Due to the size of the reading achievement gap and the existence of the gap over time, there is an urgent need to identify additional literacy strategies that could help the reading performance of ECUCS's Black children.

The purpose of this inquiry was to identify literacy strategies that support the continued growth and development of the Black student population at East Carolina University Community School. This inquiry was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance?
2. What is the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning?

To answer the questions guiding this inquiry, I used a convergent mixed method design framed around Knowles' principles of Adult Learning Theory. This inquiry design involved simultaneously collecting quantitative and qualitative data. This inquiry was implemented in four phases. The first phase (Phase I) involved analyzing baseline data from Black students who have taken the North Carolina Beginning of Third Grade Reading Test, the North Carolina Reading End-of-Grade test, and the m-Class DIBELS assessment. A Pilot Study was conducted on the Teacher Literacy Interview questions. During the second phase (Phase II), a Student Reading Motivation survey was administered. A Teacher Literacy Interview was conducted. This interview focused on current literacy interventions. Based on the analysis of student data and teacher data, literacy interventions were selected. A Literacy Studies faculty member, the third

grade regular education classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and I planned professional learning. Classroom walkthroughs were conducted to note the fidelity of implementation. Student formative assessment data was collected by using the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessment. Additionally, the DIBELS-8 Progress Monitoring tool was utilized for students who scored in the *Below* range or *Well Below* range on the DIBELS-8 Beginning of the Year assessment. These instruments were used determine if there was any impact as a result of the professional learning opportunities. All collected data was analyzed and used to determine whether to continue with the interventions for six more weeks or modify the interventions.

During the third phase (Phase III), a Literacy Studies faculty member, the third grade regular education classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and I planned professional learning based on the collected data. Walkthroughs were conducted to gauge the impact of the interventions. Student formative assessment data was collected by using the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessment. The DIBELS-8 Middle of the Year Assessment was administered. Further, the DIBELS-8 Progress Monitoring Tool was administered to scholars who scored in the *Below* range or *Well Below* range on the Middle of the Year DIBELS-8 Assessment. During the fourth phase (Phase IV), the Literacy Studies faculty member, the regular education classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and I reviewed DIBELS-8 data and NC Reading Check-In student formative assessment data from the second six-week cycle of instruction. A post Student Reading Motivation survey was administered. A post Teacher Literacy Interview was conducted to determine the impact of the literacy interventions on teachers' practices.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the inquiry participant demographics. This chapter

also presents a description of the data collection procedures, including participant recruitment processes, response rates, and the data collection timeframe. The chapter then outlines how the study was implemented in practice, noting where procedures aligned with the plan described in Chapter 3 and identifying any deviations that occurred. A data analysis section is included within the chapter. Finally, the chapter concludes with a comprehensive presentation of the results for each inquiry question.

Participants

Participant Recruitment

This inquiry was conducted with third grade scholars enrolled at East Carolina University Community School. In September 2025, 15 students were enrolled in the third-grade class. To recruit student participants, I distributed a Parental Informed Consent form to all 15 students. Seven forms were returned promptly. For the remaining eight students, I conducted additional recruitment efforts that included calling families to speak with a parent or guardian or leaving a voicemail, and sending home a second copy of the consent form. As a result, six additional families granted permission for their child to participate, bringing the total to 13 students. Next, I met individually with each of the 13 students who had parental consent, read the Script for Student Assent to Participate, and obtained assent from all of them. On December 1, 2025, one participating student transferred to another school. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 12 third-grade students out of a class of 14 who participated in the inquiry. This was approximately 85.7% of the class.

To recruit teacher participants, I met individually with the regular education teacher and the special education teacher who served the ECU Community School third-grade classroom. During these meetings, I explained the purpose of the inquiry, provided data supporting the

identified problem of practice, and outlined the expectations for teacher participation. I also reviewed the Teacher Informed Consent form, emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary, and clarified that choosing whether or not to participate would have no impact on their employment or evaluation. Both teachers agreed to participate in the study.

Scholar Participants

At the start of the study, the third-grade cohort consisted of 15 scholars. Parental consent and student assent were obtained for 13 of the 15 scholars, and only data from these 13 participants were included in the study. All participating scholars identified as Black. The participant group included five Black males and eight Black females. One scholar was identified as a student with a disability. Table 2 provides a summary of participant demographic characteristics.

All 13 scholars had previously been administered the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) End-of-Year assessment during their second-grade year. Results from this assessment indicated varied levels of reading performance. Four scholars (two males and two females) scored within the *Benchmark* range. Four female scholars scored in the *Below Benchmark* range. Five scholars scored in the *Well Below Benchmark* range, including three males and two females. Table 3 provides baseline reading performance data.

Throughout the inquiry, the scholarly practitioner administered a pre- and post-student motivation survey to participating third grade scholars to examine changes in reading motivation over time. In addition, all scholars were administered the North Carolina Third Grade Beginning-of-Year (BOG3) Reading Test. The BOG3 further helped to establish a baseline of scholar reading performance. Reading progress was monitored through the administration of the DIBELS Beginning-of-Year (BOY) and Middle-of-Year (MOY) assessments. Scholars who

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Scholar Participants (n = 13)

Characteristic	Category	n
Gender	Black Male	5
	Black Female	8
Disability Status	Identified as Student with a Disability	1
	Not Identified as Student with a Disability	12

Note. All participating scholars identified as Black. Parental consent and student assent were obtained for 13 of the 15 scholars enrolled in the third grade at East Carolina University Community School.

Table 3

Second-Grade DIBELS End-of-Year Reading Performance of Scholar Participants (n = 13)

Performance Level	Male (n)	Female (n)	Total (n)
Above Benchmark	0	0	0
Benchmark	2	2	4
Below Benchmark	0	4	4
Well Below Benchmark	3	2	5
Total	5	8	13

Note. DIBELS = Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills. Performance categories reflect scholars' second-grade End-of-Year assessment results. One female scholar withdrew from the school on December 18, 2025; her data were included only for assessments administered prior to withdrawal.

scored in the *Below Benchmark* range and *Well Below Benchmark* range on the DIBELS BOY and MOY were progressed monitored with the DIBELS-8 Progress Monitoring tool every three weeks. Scholars also completed the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessments in October 2025 and January 2026.

One female scholar withdrew from East Carolina University Community School and transferred to a Pitt County school on December 1, 2025. As a result, data collection for this scholar concluded on December 1, 2025, and her data were included only for measures administered prior to her withdrawal.

Teacher Participants

This inquiry involved two teacher participants at East Carolina University Community School. Teacher #1 was a third-grade classroom teacher. Teacher #1 was a 19-year veteran educator with extensive experience in early elementary education. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Child Development and Family Relations, a Master's degree in Elementary Education, and a Master's degree in Executive Leadership Studies with an add-on licensure in School Administration. Her teaching experience includes kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Teacher #2 was a 10-year veteran teacher who has served as a special education teacher providing both resource and inclusion services. Her professional experience includes working with students in kindergarten through second grade, with a particular focus on supporting students with autism. Teacher #2 holds a Bachelor's degree in Business and Management and a Master's degree in Special Education.

Data Collection

Data for this inquiry was collected from July 2, 2024 through February 20, 2026. Table 4 outlines the data collection process in detail. Table 5 identifies the data collection

Table 4

Data Collection Timeline

Timeline	Data Collection
July 2-3, 2024	Pilot Study: Teacher Literacy Interview
September 3-23, 2025	DIBELS: Beginning of the Year Data Collection
September 29-October 3, 2025	Student Reading Motivation Survey: Pre-survey Teacher Literacy Interview: Pre-survey
October 28, 2025	North Carolina Reading Check-In Assessment
November 3-December 9, 2025	Literacy Walkthrough Data Collection (1 st six-week cycle)
November 4, 2025	DIBELS Progress Monitoring
November 17, 2025	DIBELS Progress Monitoring
December 8, 2025	DIBELS Progress Monitoring
December 15, 2025-February 20, 2026	Literacy Walkthrough Data Collection (2 nd six-week cycle)
January 8-February 2, 2026	DIBELS: Middle of the Year Data Collection
January 8, 2026	North Carolina Reading Check Assessment
February 3-10, 2026	DIBELS Progress Monitoring
February 16-20, 2026	Student Reading Motivation Survey: Post-survey Teacher Literacy Interview: Post-survey

Table 5

Data Collection Instruments and Corresponding Data Types

Action Research Cycle	Data Collection Instrument	Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data
Phase I	Reading EOG		X
	BOG3		X
	DIBELS		X
	Pilot Study	X	
Phase II	BOG3		X
	DIBELS		X
	Student Motivation Survey-Pre	X	X
	Teacher Literacy Interview-Pre	X	
	NC Check-In: Reading		X
	Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool	X	X
Phase III	NC Check-In: Reading		X
	Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool	X	X
Phase IV	DIBELS		X
	Student Motivation Survey-Post	X	X
	Teacher Literacy Interview-Post	X	

instruments and corresponding data types.

Implementation and Data Collection

Implementation With Third-Grade Scholars

All third grade students participated in a literacy intervention block for 30 minutes per day for four days per week. Student data collection included multiple quantitative and qualitative measures to examine third-grade scholars' literacy performance and motivation throughout the inquiry. The mClass DIBELS assessment was administered to all third-grade student participants at the beginning and end of the inquiry. The third-grade regular education classroom teacher administered all DIBELS assessments in accordance with standardized administration procedures.

The following DIBELS subtests were administered: Letter Sounds (NWF-CLS), Decoding (NWF-WRC), Word Reading Fluency (WRF), Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), and Basic Reading Comprehension (Maze). The NWF-CLS, NWF-WRC, and WRF subtests were administered individually. The Maze assessment was completed independently by students through the Amplify website. In addition to the beginning- and end-of-inquiry assessments, progress monitoring using DIBELS measures was conducted approximately every three weeks for students who scored in the *Below* or *Well Below* categories on the Beginning-of-Year and Middle-of-the Year DIBELS assessment. Progress monitoring was administered by the third-grade regular education teacher to track ongoing student reading growth.

Student motivation data were collected using the Student Reading Motivation Survey during the second and fourth phases of the inquiry, as outlined in Chapter 3. The survey was administered individually to each student participant. Students were provided with a paper copy

of the survey. I read each item aloud to ensure comprehension. Students responded orally, and I recorded responses on the administrator copy of the survey.

As an additional measure of student reading progress, student participants completed the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessment in October 2025 and January 2026. This online formative assessment, developed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, provided quantitative data regarding students' progress toward grade-level reading standards through the use of diverse texts and technology-enhanced questions. Scholars were allotted 90 minutes during the instructional day to complete the online assessment.

Implementation with Teachers

As outlined in Chapter 3, the pilot study was designed to gather qualitative data from teachers to examine literacy instruction at ECU Community School. The pilot study portion of the inquiry was implemented with three teachers who served students in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Each teacher participated in an individual Teacher Literacy Interview that was collaboratively developed by the inquiry partner and me. All interviews were conducted in a one-on-one setting and followed a scripted protocol to ensure consistency across participants. Initial interviews were conducted in person and recorded using WebEx, where they were securely stored. These interviews were implemented as planned and served as an initial source of qualitative data related to teachers' literacy instructional practices and perceptions. During the second and fourth phases of the inquiry, participating teachers completed pre- and post-teacher literacy interviews to examine changes in teacher perceptions and instructional practices related to literacy over the course of the inquiry. These interviews were conducted individually in a virtual format and were also recorded and stored via WebEx.

In addition to the interviews, participating teachers engaged in a series of collaborative meetings with the inquiry partner and scholarly practitioner, including an initial meeting, two follow-up meetings, and a final meeting. During the initial meeting, the inquiry partner, the third grade regular education teacher, the special education teacher, and I discussed current literacy instructional practices utilized within the classroom, scholar performance levels, instructional grouping, selected instructional materials, and strategies to support scholar reading growth.

The follow-up meetings focused on reviewing instructional and student performance data, sharing group impressions of implemented classroom interventions, and identifying next steps to support scholar literacy development. During the final meeting, participants reflected on individual scholar performance, discussed plans to support scholars moving forward, and examined inquiry outcomes, including successes and lessons learned.

Implementation of Literacy Interventions

This inquiry involved the implementation of targeted literacy interventions within the third-grade classroom. While 12 of the 14 scholars participated in the inquiry in its entirety, all 14 scholars were permitted to participate in the literacy interventions. Assessment data were collected for all students as part of normal school procedures; however, only the data from the 12 scholars for whom parental consent and student assent were obtained were included in this inquiry. The Student Reading Motivation Survey, which was specific to the study, was administered only to students who participated in the inquiry. The literacy interventions were incorporated into the third-grade instructional schedule four times per week for 30 minutes per session. The interventions were implemented across two six-week cycles.

The first six-week intervention cycle occurred from October 20 to December 9, 2025. To determine the initial literacy groups and instructional interventions, the Literacy Studies faculty

member, the teacher participants, and I reviewed multiple data sources. These data included second-grade End-of-Year DIBELS scores, third-grade Beginning-of-Year DIBELS scores, Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test scores, and teacher observations. The inquiry team also reviewed literacy materials currently being used within the classroom as well as additional resources available within the school. Based on the review of these data and available instructional materials, four student intervention groups were established for the first six-week intervention cycle.

Group 1 consisted of scholar participants #2, #3, #4, #6, and #9. This group utilized Rigby Readers as the primary instructional text. Scholars took turns reading aloud within the group and responded to writing prompts related to the text following each reading. Additionally, students completed comprehension quizzes after each book to monitor understanding. The third-grade regular education classroom teacher conducted check-ins with students in this group. These check-ins involved listening to scholars reread selected portions of text or reviewing their written responses. When available, classroom volunteers, such as Sara Smiles Scholarship recipients, supported students by engaging in additional rereading practice.

Group 2 initially consisted of scholar participants #1 and #7 and focused primarily on developing reading fluency. Students in this group used Rigby Readers and completed comprehension quizzes to monitor understanding. In addition, the scholars participated in repeated reading activities. Participants were given the option to reread passages from the Rigby Readers or texts of their choice. Scholar participants #1 and #7 were progress monitored using the DIBELS Progress Monitoring tool every three weeks. This group consisted of two scholar participants until December 2025, when scholar participant #1 relocated to another school.

Group 3 consisted of scholar participants #5, #8, #11, and #13. This group worked primarily with the third-grade regular education classroom teacher and used the End-of-Second-Grade Start Right Reader books as their primary instructional resource. Students completed a daily skill sheet and participated in partner rereading activities to reinforce reading skills. Scholar participants in this group were progress monitored using the DIBELS Progress Monitoring tool every three weeks.

Group 4 consisted of scholar participants #10 and #12 and worked primarily with the special education teacher participant. Instruction in this group focused on phonics patterns, with an emphasis on repetition and skill reinforcement. Students worked in the second-grade Beginning-of-Year Know It, Show It book and the Start Right Reader books. Scholar participants in this group were also progress monitored using the DIBELS Progress Monitoring tool every three weeks.

The second six-week intervention cycle occurred from December 15, 2025 to February 20, 2026. To determine adjustments to the literacy groups and instructional strategies, the Literacy Studies faculty member, teacher participants, and I again reviewed multiple sources of data. These included NC Reading Check-In data, DIBELS-8 Progress Monitoring data, and teacher observations. During this review, the inquiry team noted that scholars were demonstrating progress overall. For example, scholar participant #13 demonstrated significant progress toward their grade-level goal. While scholar participant #11 demonstrated progress but not at a rate sufficient to meet the grade-level benchmark within the expected timeframe.

Based on the data review, several adjustments were made to group composition and instructional focus. The inquiry team determined that scholar participant #5 would be better served by moving from Group 3 to Group 4. Additionally, the Literacy Studies faculty member

recommended administering the LETRS Spelling Assessment to students in Group 4 to further evaluate phonics and spelling development. The third-grade classroom teacher administered the assessment and shared the responses with the Literacy Studies faculty member, who scored the assessment and provided guidance regarding instructional next steps for the scholars in Group 4.

For the second six-week intervention cycle, Group 4 consisted of scholar participants #5, #10, and #12. This group continued to work primarily with the special education teacher participant and maintained a focus on phonics patterns with repeated practice. Students continued working in the second-grade Know It, Show It book and Start Right Reader materials. Scholar participants in this group continued to be progress monitored using the DIBELS Progress Monitoring tool every three weeks.

With the movement of scholar participant #5, Group 3 consisted of scholar participants #8, #11, and #13. This group worked primarily with the third-grade regular education classroom teacher and classroom volunteers, such as Sara Smiles Scholarship recipients. During the second intervention cycle, instruction focused on informational text. Scholars engaged in rereading informational passages and participated in guided reading discussions with both the classroom teacher and classroom volunteers.

Scholar participant #4 was moved from Group 1 to Group 2 during the second intervention cycle. As a result, Group 2 consisted of scholar participants #4 and #7. The instructional focus for this group remained on repeated reading to improve fluency. Additionally, scholar participant #4 was encouraged to slow their reading pace and ensure that their responses during group discussions were closely connected to the text.

During the second intervention cycle, Group 1 consisted of scholar participants #2, #3, #6, and #9. This group continued working with Rigby Readers. Scholars took turns reading

aloud, responded to writing prompts following each reading, and completed comprehension quizzes after finishing each text. Additionally, they also started reading and discussing the chapter book, *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*. The third-grade regular education classroom teacher continued to conduct check-ins, which included listening to students reread selected passages or reviewing their written responses. When available, classroom volunteers provided additional rereading support.

The two intervention cycles demonstrated responsive instructional decision-making through the ongoing use of student data to inform grouping, instructional focus, and intervention supports. Across the inquiry, the Literacy Studies faculty member, the teacher participants, and I used assessment results, progress monitoring data, and teacher observations to evaluate student needs and make adjustments intended to better support literacy growth. Changes in group membership, the use of additional assessment tools, and shifts in instructional emphasis reflected a continuous effort to align intervention practices with scholars' demonstrated strengths and areas of need. In this way, the implementation process was not static, but rather data-driven and responsive to student progress over time.

Implementation of the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool

I conducted a minimum of two Literacy Learning Walkthroughs per week throughout the duration of the inquiry. These walkthroughs were used to observe classroom literacy instruction, instructional routines, and scholar engagement during the literacy block and served as an additional source of qualitative data to document instructional practices and implementation fidelity.

Walkthroughs were conducted during the instructional time frame of 9:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., with each classroom visit lasting a minimum of 15 minutes. During each walkthrough, I

recorded timed observational notes documenting scholar behaviors, teacher instructional actions, instructional materials utilized, literacy content addressed, and instructional strategies implemented.

Data collection deviated from the protocol outlined in Chapter 3. As previously described, I planned to utilize the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool developed by the Tennessee Department of Education as the primary observation instrument. I did not use the Literacy Learning Walkthrough tool as planned. I scripted timed notes capturing scholar and teacher actions and interactions throughout the observation period. This data collection approach provided richer contextual detail and supported a more comprehensive analysis of literacy instruction and classroom engagement.

Inquiry Deviations

Although the inquiry was implemented largely as outlined in Chapter 3, several deviations from the original methodological plan occurred due to personnel changes, participant availability, and feedback from both the pilot study and the dissertation committee. These deviations are described below.

The first deviation occurred after the pilot study phase. As outlined in Chapter 3, the pilot study was to be conducted with teachers serving students in kindergarten through second grade who would not participate in the full inquiry, given that the primary focus of the study was on third grade. However, during the summer after the pilot study and prior to full inquiry implementation, ECU Community School experienced significant personnel turnover. The original third-grade teacher was reassigned to fourth grade, and the school's Reading Specialist was no longer employed at the school. Since ECU Community School had only one class per grade level, these changes limited the pool of available participants. As a result, the newly

assigned third-grade teacher and the special education teacher who supported the third-grade classroom participated in the full inquiry. Consequently, this required a deviation from the original plan, as these teachers also participated in the pilot study.

The second deviation dealt with examining student performance and teacher practice across two cohorts of children. The review of the 2024-2025 third grade cohort's literacy data was originally intended to support a comparison of teacher practice and student outcomes across two third-grade cohorts taught by the same teacher. However, due to personnel shifts within ECU Community School, this comparison could not be completed as originally planned. The teacher who taught third grade during the 2024–2025 school year moved to fourth grade for the 2025–2026 school year, and the first-grade teacher moved into the third-grade position for 2025–2026 school year. As a result, the inquiry involved a different teacher and a different cohort of children than originally anticipated. Therefore, the portion of the analysis focused on comparing teacher practice across cohorts was not feasible within the final design of the inquiry.

The third deviation involved the structure of the Teacher Literacy Interviews. During the pilot study, structured interviews were originally implemented as planned. However, based on feedback from my Collaborative Inquiry Partner regarding the need for greater flexibility in responses and opportunities for elaboration, the interview protocol was revised. As a result, the Teacher Literacy Interviews conducted during the full inquiry were semi-structured rather than structured. This modification allowed for deeper exploration of teacher perceptions and instructional practices while still maintaining consistency across interviews.

The fourth deviation from the original plan related to the selection and implementation of literacy interventions. Chapter 3 initially proposed the use of two separate literacy interventions across two implementation phases. However, based on feedback from the dissertation committee,

the design was revised to focus on a single literacy intervention block implemented over a six-week instructional cycle. At the conclusion of the first six-week cycle, the Collaborative Inquiry Partner, participating teachers, and I reviewed the collected data to determine whether the intervention block should continue for an additional six weeks or be modified. As a result of this revision, two separate literacy interventions were not implemented during the inquiry as originally planned.

The final deviation was the use of the Literacy Learning Walk Tool. Originally, I planned to use the instrument designed by the Tennessee Department of Education as the primary observation instrument. I did not use the Literacy Learning Walkthrough tool as planned. I scripted timed notes capturing scholar and teacher actions and interactions throughout the observation period. This data collection approach provided richer contextual detail and supported a more comprehensive analysis of literacy instruction and classroom engagement.

Despite these deviations, the overall integrity of the convergent mixed-methods design was maintained. Adjustments were made to strengthen the quality of the data collected and to ensure that the inquiry remained responsive to the local school context while still addressing the study's guiding research questions.

Data Analysis

North Carolina Beginning of Third Grade Reading Test

To analyze the data from the North Carolina Beginning of Third Grade (BOG3) Reading Test, several systematic steps were taken. First, the achievement levels established by the assessment were identified. The BOG3 assessment includes four achievement levels: Not Proficient, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5. Student participants who scored at Level 3, Level 4, or

Level 5 were classified as grade-level proficient, while those scoring below Level 3 were classified as Not Proficient.

Next, individual student scores were reviewed and categorized according to these achievement levels. The number of students within each performance category was then calculated. To determine the percentage of students represented in each category, the number of students at each achievement level was divided by the total number of students who completed the assessment. These calculations allowed for a clear representation of overall student performance as well as the proportion of students meeting grade-level expectations.

Additionally, the data were disaggregated by subgroup (e.g., gender) to provide a more detailed analysis of performance patterns within the cohort. This approach allowed for comparisons across groups and supported a deeper understanding of trends in student achievement.

mClass DIBELS 8th Edition

To analyze the mClass DIBELS 8th Edition data, student composite scores were first categorized according to benchmark levels: Well Below Benchmark, Below Benchmark, Benchmark, and Above Benchmark. These categories provided an indication of students' reading proficiency and risk levels in foundational literacy skills.

Individual student scores were reviewed and grouped into the appropriate benchmark category. The number of students in each category was then calculated. Percentages were determined by dividing the number of students within each benchmark level by the total number of students assessed. This analysis provided an overview of the distribution of student performance across risk levels.

The data were also disaggregated by subgroup (e.g., gender) to identify any patterns or trends in performance. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the extent to which students were meeting, approaching, or performing below grade-level expectations in foundational reading skills.

North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) Reading Test

To analyze the data from the North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) Reading Test, a similar process to the BOG3 analysis was used. First, the achievement levels for the assessment were identified: Not Proficient, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5. Students who scored at Level 3, Level 4, or Level 5 were classified as grade-level proficient, while students scoring below Level 3 were classified as Not Proficient.

Next, individual student scores were reviewed and categorized according to achievement level. The number of students within each category was calculated, and percentages were determined by dividing the number of students in each level by the total number of students who completed the assessment. This allowed for a clear comparison of the proportion of students who met grade-level expectations. Additionally, the data were disaggregated by subgroup (e.g., gender) to examine patterns in student performance across groups.

Student Reading Motivation Survey

To analyze the Student Reading Motivation Survey data, responses were first organized by survey section: Intrinsic Motivation, Avoidance, Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Reading Ability. Each student's responses from the pre-survey (October 2025) and post-survey (February 2026) were reviewed and compared to identify patterns and changes over time.

Since the survey included qualitative response options (e.g., yes, no, sometimes), responses were analyzed using a descriptive approach. Student responses were grouped by

question and examined for trends in attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions related to reading. Changes in individual responses between the pre- and post-survey were noted to identify shifts in motivation, engagement, and self-perception.

Qualitative insights from student responses and follow-up probing questions during the second administration were used to provide deeper context for interpreting the data. These responses helped to explain patterns observed in the survey results and offered insight into students' thinking about reading.

North Carolina Reading Check-In

To analyze the North Carolina Reading Check-In data, student performance was examined across two administration points: October 2025 and January 2026. For each administration, individual student scores were recorded as the percentage of items answered correctly.

Next, student scores from both time points were compared to identify changes in performance over time. Differences between October and January scores were calculated for each student to determine whether performance increased, decreased, or remained the same. This allowed for an analysis of individual student growth as well as overall trends across the group.

In addition, descriptive statistics were used to examine general patterns in student performance, including identifying the number of students who demonstrated improvement, decline, or stability. This analysis provided insight into student progress toward grade-level reading standards during the inquiry period.

Teacher Literacy Interviews

To analyze the teacher literacy interview data, a qualitative thematic analysis approach was used. Interview recordings were reviewed, and responses were transcribed and organized by

question. Initial coding was conducted to identify key ideas, phrases, and patterns in teacher responses.

Next, codes were grouped into broader themes related to teacher perceptions, instructional practices, professional learning experiences, and perceived strengths and challenges within the literacy program. Comparisons were made between pre-interview (October 2025) and post-interview (February 2026) responses to identify changes in teacher thinking and practice over the course of the inquiry.

Particular attention was given to shifts in instructional strategies, use of literacy resources, collaboration practices, and perceptions of student engagement and growth. These themes were used to interpret how participation in the inquiry and professional learning influenced teacher practices.

Results

2024-2025 Third Grade Cohort Literacy Data

During the pilot study in Phase I of the inquiry, the Literacy Studies faculty member and I reviewed literacy data from the cohort of students who were in third grade during the 2024–2025 school year. This data set included North Carolina Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test scores, North Carolina End-of-Grade Reading test scores, and mClass DIBELS End-of-Year scores. The purpose of reviewing these data was to examine student literacy performance under the direction of the teacher who was initially expected to remain with the next third-grade cohort. Although the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 third-grade cohorts were composed of two distinct groups of children, the original design of the inquiry anticipated that both cohorts would be taught by the same teacher. As a result, the review of the 2024–2025 cohort data was intended to

provide a point of comparison for examining the impact of literacy interventions on teacher practice and student performance across two cohorts.

The 2024–2025 third-grade cohort was composed of 17 students, including eight males and nine females. All 17 students identified as Black. Five of the 17 students were identified as students with disabilities.

All 17 students completed the North Carolina Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test, which was administered online between days 11 and 20 of the 2024–2025 school year. The assessment included four performance categories: Not Proficient, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5. As shown in Table 6, all 17 students scored in the Not Proficient range. These results indicated that, at the beginning of third grade, none of the students in the cohort had demonstrated proficiency on the state’s Beginning-of-Grade reading assessment; however, this assessment is administered at the beginning of third grade and evaluates students based on end-of-third-grade reading proficiency benchmarks.

The next data set reviewed was the North Carolina End-of-Grade Reading test. All 17 students completed this assessment during the final 10 instructional days of the 2024–2025 school year. The test was administered online and used the same achievement categories of Not Proficient, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5. As shown in Table 7, one student scored at Level 3, one student scored at Level 4, and one student scored at Level 5. The remaining 14 students scored in the Not Proficient range. Therefore, 83% of the class did not meet grade-level proficiency on the End-of-Grade Reading test, while 17% demonstrated proficiency. Although the percentage of students meeting proficiency remained low, these results reflected growth from the Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test administered in the fall, when 100% of students scored in the Not

Table 6

Beginning-of-Third Grade Reading Performance of 2024-2025 Cohort (n=17)

Achievement Level	Male (n)	Female (n)	Total (n)
Not Proficient	8	9	17
Level 3	0	0	0
Level 4	0	0	0
Level 5	0	0	0
Total	8	9	17

Note. BOG3 = Beginning of Grade 3 Reading Test. Achievement level categories reflect scholars' results at the beginning of third grade.

Table 7

BOY DIBELS 8th Edition Scores for Third-Grade Students in 2024-2025 (n=17)

Range	Male (n)	Female (n)	Total (n)
Well Below Benchmark	1	5	6
Below Benchmark	1	2	3
Benchmark	5	2	7
Above Benchmark	1	0	1
Total	8	9	17

Proficient range. In addition, the third-grade cohort exceeded expected growth in reading according to North Carolina's accountability model.

The final data set reviewed was the mClass DIBELS End-of-Year Composite scores. All 17 students were assessed. As shown in Table 8, three students (18%) scored in the Above Benchmark range, four students (24%) scored at Benchmark, four students (24%) scored Below Benchmark, and six students (34%) scored Well Below Benchmark. These data suggested that while a substantial portion of the cohort remained below benchmark expectations at the end of the year, several students demonstrated performance at or above benchmark.

The literacy data for the 2024–2025 third-grade cohort indicated that students entered third grade with substantial reading needs. As shown in Table 6, all 17 students scored in the Not Proficient range on the North Carolina Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test, suggesting that none of the students had demonstrated grade-level reading proficiency at the start of the school year. These findings established a baseline that reflected significant instructional need across the cohort. Demographic data further indicated that the class included 17 Black students, with five students identified as students with disabilities, underscoring the importance of closely examining literacy growth within this instructional context. The End-of-Year DIBELS 8th Edition data shown in Table 8 further suggested that literacy performance remained varied by the close of the year. Although 34% of students remained in the Well Below Benchmark range and 24% scored Below Benchmark, 24% scored at Benchmark and 18% scored Above Benchmark. These findings indicated that, while many students continued to perform below expected literacy benchmarks, a portion of the cohort demonstrated performance that aligned with or exceeded end-of-year expectations. At the same time, the data in Table 9 suggested that the cohort made

Table 8

EOY DIBELS 8th Edition Scores for Third-Grade Students in 2024-2025 (n=17)

Range	Male (n)	Female (n)	Total (n)
Well Below Benchmark	1	5	6
Below Benchmark	2	2	4
Benchmark	2	2	4
Above Benchmark	3	0	3
Total	8	9	17

Table 9

Grade 3 End-of-Grade Reading Test Performance of 2024-2025 Cohort (n=17)

Achievement Level	Male (n)	Female (n)	Total (n)
Not Proficient	5	9	14
Level 3	1	0	1
Level 4	1	0	1
Level 5	1	0	1
Total	8	9	17

Note. EOG = End of Grade 3 Reading Test. Achievement level categories reflect scholars' results at the end of third grade.

meaningful progress over the course of the school year. While 83% of students remained Not Proficient on the North Carolina End-of-Grade Reading test, three students met proficiency standards, with one student scoring at Level 3, one at Level 4, and one at Level 5.

This represented measurable improvement from the fall administration of the Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test, in which 100% of students scored in the Not Proficient range. In addition, the cohort exceeded expected growth in reading according to North Carolina's accountability model, providing further evidence that students made gains even though overall proficiency remained limited. Taken together, Tables 6 through 9 suggest that the 2024–2025 third-grade cohort began the year significantly below grade-level expectations but demonstrated notable literacy growth across the academic year. These findings provided important contextual information for the inquiry by illustrating both the literacy challenges present within the school setting and the potential for growth under targeted instructional support.

North Carolina Beginning of Grade Three Reading Test

The North Carolina Beginning-of-Grade Three Reading Test (BOG3) provided quantitative data. This state assessment was designed to serve several purposes. First, the assessment established a baseline measure of beginning third-grade students' English Language Arts (ELA) and reading skills. Second, students who scored at Achievement Level 3 or higher on the assessment were considered to have demonstrated reading proficiency appropriate for students at the end of third grade, as this achievement level represents the state's end-of-year third-grade reading proficiency benchmark. Third, results from the administration of the BOG3 and the North Carolina End-of-Grade 3 (EOG3) Reading Test were used for school accountability measures and to determine student growth for teachers and school administrators.

The BOG3 assessment consisted of five reading selections, with eight test items associated with each selection, resulting in a total of 40 test items. The estimated testing time for the BOG3 Reading Test was 120 minutes. Students who required additional time were permitted up to an additional 60 minutes to complete the assessment. The test was administered online and assessed three domains: Reading Literature, Reading Informational Text, and Language. On the BOG3 assessment, students scoring below a level 3 were classified as non-proficient, while students scoring at Levels 3 through 5 were considered proficient.

In the third-grade classroom participating in this inquiry, all 13 scholar participants completed the BOG3 assessment. The group included five male students and eight female students. Based on the results of the BOG3 assessment, all participating scholars scored in the “Non-Proficient” range. See Table 10.

DIBELS

The mClass DIBELS 8th Edition assessment gathered quantitative data. This literacy assessment was administered to all third-grade student participants at the beginning and end of the inquiry. The third-grade regular education classroom teacher administered all DIBELS assessments in accordance with standardized administration procedures.

The following DIBELS subtests were administered: Letter Sounds (NWF-CLS), Decoding (NWF-WRC), Word Reading Fluency (WRF), Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), and Basic Reading Comprehension (Maze). The NWF-CLS, NWF-WRC, WRF, and ORF subtests were administered individually to students. The Maze assessment was completed independently by students through the Amplify online platform.

In addition to the beginning- and end-of-inquiry assessments, progress monitoring using DIBELS measures was conducted approximately every three weeks for students who scored in

Table 10

Beginning of Grade Three Reading Performance of Scholar Participants (n=13)

Achievement Level	Male (n)	Female (n)	Total (n)
Not Proficient	5	8	13
Level 3	0	0	0
Level 4	0	0	0
Level 5	0	0	0
Total	5	8	13

Note. BOG3 = Beginning of Grade 3 Reading Test. Achievement level categories reflect scholars' results at the beginning of third grade. One female scholar withdrew from the school on December 18, 2025; her data were included only for assessments administered prior to withdrawal.

the *Below* range or *Well Below* range on the Beginning-of-Year and Middle-of-Year DIBELS assessments. Progress monitoring was administered by the third-grade regular education teacher to track ongoing student reading growth throughout the inquiry period.

Following the administration of the Beginning-of-Year (BOY) and Middle-of-Year (MOY) DIBELS 8th Edition assessments, student performance data were compiled to examine changes in reading development over the course of the inquiry period. The BOY assessment provided a baseline measure of students' early literacy and reading skills, while the MOY assessment provided an indicator of student progress following the implementation of literacy interventions. Scores from both administrations were analyzed to determine changes in student performance across the DIBELS subtests. Table 11 presents the BOY and MOY DIBELS scores for each scholar participant. This table provides a comparison of student reading performance at two points in time.

Table 11 presents the Beginning-of-Year (BOY) and Middle-of-Year (MOY) DIBELS 8th Edition scores for the 13 third-grade scholar participants across multiple early literacy measures. The BOY assessment provided a baseline measure of students' foundational reading skills, while the MOY assessment provided an indication of student progress during the inquiry period. Overall, comparison of BOY and MOY scores indicated that the majority of scholar participants demonstrated measurable growth across several DIBELS subtests, including Nonsense Word Fluency (Correct Letter Sounds and Whole Words Read Correctly), Word Reading Fluency, Oral Reading Fluency, and the Maze comprehension assessment.

Growth was particularly evident in the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) and Maze comprehension measures. Most scholar participants demonstrated increases in ORF rates from BOY to MOY, suggesting improvements in reading accuracy and fluency during the study

Table 11

BOY and MOY DIBELS 8th Edition Scores for Third-Grade Scholar Participants (n = 13)

Scholar	Composite BOY	Composite MOY	NWF- CLS BOY	NWF- CLS MOY	NWF- WRC BOY	NWF- WRC MOY	WRF BOY	WRF MOY	ORF Accuracy BOY	ORF Accuracy MOY	ORF BOY	ORF MOY	Maze BOY	Maze MOY
#1	327	—	79	—	26	35	—	—	100%	—	53	—	36	—
#2	355	420	104	127	34	41	47	62	100%	99%	95	132	49.5	49
#3	365	406	131	113	41	37	62	60	100%	100%	87	110	51	53
#4	359	418	128	130	40	42	63	59	99%	99%	72	125	51	50
#5	317	374	59	74	20	25	31	34	93%	99%	54	79	0	39.5
#6	347	405	101	130	33	42	50	45	99%	99%	74	96	51	48.5
#7	340	404	94	110	31	36	43	62	96%	100%	67	106	43.5	48.5
#8	316	388	59	117	20	38	37	46	89%	98%	47	63	11	44
#9	364	421	121	134	37	42	62	63	100%	99%	96	125	51	53
#10	303	367	47	83	15	28	25	33	87%	96%	33	55	0	3.5
#11	315	379	66	100	21	33	29	33	96%	98%	43	63	0	45.6
#12	294	358	48	80	16	27	11	17	64%	91%	14	42	0	5
#13	319	412	56	130	19	41	46	55	95%	98%	55	110	4.5	45.5

Note. BOY = Beginning of Year; MOY = Middle of Year; NWF-CLS = Nonsense Word Fluency Correct Letter Sounds; NWF-WRC = Nonsense Word Fluency Whole Words Read Correctly; WRF = Word Reading Fluency; ORF = Oral Reading Fluency; Maze = Basic Reading Comprehension.

period. Similarly, many students showed gains on the Maze assessment, indicating growth in basic reading comprehension skills. Increases were also observed in foundational decoding skills, as reflected by improvements in NWF-CLS and NWF-WRC scores for several participants. These results suggested that students were strengthening their ability to decode and recognize words, which contributed to improvements in overall reading fluency.

Although the majority of scholar participants demonstrated growth between BOY and MOY, the extent of growth varied across students and subtests. Some students showed substantial gains across multiple measures, while others demonstrated more modest improvement. Despite these differences, the overall pattern of results indicated positive movement in students' early literacy development during the inquiry period. These findings provided important contextual data for understanding students' reading progress and were considered alongside additional literacy assessments used in this study.

Student Reading Motivation Survey

A Student Reading Motivation Survey was administered to 13 student participants in October 2025. In December 2025, one student participant moved to another school. Therefore, 12 student participants completed the survey again in February 2026. These two administration points corresponded with the beginning and end of the inquiry. The survey was administered individually to each student participant. During the first administration, the survey questions were read aloud as written. Students responded orally, and I recorded each response on the administrator copy of the survey. During the second administration, the survey was also administered individually to each student participant, and the survey questions were read aloud as written for each section. However, at the conclusion of each section, I asked probing questions

to gain a deeper understanding of student participants' thinking. Students again responded orally, and responses were recorded on the administrator copy of the survey.

The survey was organized into four sections: Intrinsic Motivation, Avoidance, Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Reading Ability. The Intrinsic Motivation, Avoidance, and Self-Efficacy sections each included seven questions, while the Perceived Reading Ability section included one question, for a total of 22 survey items. Tables 12–15 present the Student Reading Motivation Survey data.

Intrinsic Motivation

Table 12 presents student responses related to intrinsic reading motivation at the beginning and end of the inquiry. Overall, the data suggest that most student participants reported generally positive attitudes toward reading across both survey administrations. At the beginning of the inquiry, a majority of students indicated that they enjoyed reading books in their free time, liked reading new books, and appreciated books that made them think. Similarly, many students reported that they enjoyed the challenge of reading and were willing to read interesting books even when the texts were difficult. These findings suggest that many participants entered the inquiry with a personal interest in reading.

For question #1 about enjoying reading books in free time, the pre-test showed 10 of the 13 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, with the other three scholars indicating “sometimes.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 scholars responding. Nine scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, one indicated “sometimes”, and two indicated either “no” or “not that much.”

For question #2 that asked if students like to read new books, the pre-test showed 12 of the 13 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, with one scholar indicating “sometimes.” In the

Table 12

Student Reading Motivation Survey Results-Intrinsic Motivation (n=13)

Questions	Pre	Post
#1 Do you enjoy reading books in your free time?	Scholar #1: Yes	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Yes	Scholar #2: Yes
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Yes
	Scholar #4: Yes	Scholar #4: Yes
	Scholar #5: Yes	Scholar #5: Not that much
	Scholar #6: Sometimes	Scholar #6: Yes
	Scholar #7: Sometimes	Scholar #7: Yes, sometimes
	Scholar #8: Yes	Scholar #8: No
	Scholar #9: Yes	Scholar #9: Yes
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: Yes	Scholar #11: Yes
	Scholar #12: Sometimes	Scholar #12: Sometimes
	Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #13: Yes
#2 Do you like to read new books?	Scholar #1: Yes	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Yes	Scholar #2: Yes
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Yes
	Scholar #4: Yes	Scholar #4: Yes
	Scholar #5: Sometimes	Scholar #5: Yes
	Scholar #6: Yes	Scholar #6: Yes
	Scholar #7: Yes	Scholar #7: Yes
	Scholar #8: Yes	Scholar #8: Yes
	Scholar #9: Yes	Scholar #9: Yes
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: Yes	Scholar #11: Yes
	Scholar #12: Yes	Scholar #12: Yes
	Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #13: Yes
#3 Is reading boring to you?	Scholar #1: No	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: No	Scholar #2: No
	Scholar #3: A little bit	Scholar #3: No
	Scholar #4: No	Scholar #4: No
	Scholar #5: Sometimes	Scholar #5: Sometimes
	Scholar #6: No	Scholar #6: No
	Scholar #7: No	Scholar #7: A little
	Scholar #8: Sometimes	Scholar #8: Sometimes
	Scholar #9: No	Scholar #9: No
	Scholar #10: No	Scholar #10: No
	Scholar #11: No	Scholar #11: No
	Scholar #12: Not really	Scholar #12: Not really
	Scholar #13: No	Scholar #13: No

Table 12 (continued)

#4 Do you enjoy the challenge of reading a book?	Scholar #1: Yes	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Yes	Scholar #2: Yes
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Yes
	Scholar #4: Yes	Scholar #4: Yes
	Scholar #5: Kind of	Scholar #5: Not that much
	Scholar #6: Yes	Scholar #6: Yes
	Scholar #7: Yes	Scholar #7: No
	Scholar #8: Yes	Scholar #8: Yes
	Scholar #9: Yes	Scholar #9: Yes
	Scholar #10: No	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: Yes	Scholar #11: Yes
	Scholar #12: Sometimes	Scholar #12: Kind of
	Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #13: Yes
#5 Do you enjoy reading interesting books even if they are hard?	Scholar #1: Maybe	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Yes	Scholar #2: Yes
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Yes
	Scholar #4: Yes	Scholar #4: Yes
	Scholar #5: Yes	Scholar #5: Yes
	Scholar #6: Yes	Scholar #6: Yes
	Scholar #7: Yes	Scholar #7: Yes
	Scholar #8: Yes	Scholar #8: Yes
	Scholar #9: Yes	Scholar #9: Yes
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: No
	Scholar #11: Yes	Scholar #11: Yes
	Scholar #12: Not really	Scholar #12: Sometimes
	Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #13: Yes
#6 Do you enjoy reading books for a long period of time?	Scholar #1: No	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Yes	Scholar #2: Sometimes
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Most of the time
	Scholar #4: Yes	Scholar #4: Sometimes
	Scholar #5: No	Scholar #5: No
	Scholar #6: No	Scholar #6: Yes
	Scholar #7: No	Scholar #7: Sometimes
	Scholar #8: No	Scholar #8: No
	Scholar #9: Yes	Scholar #9: Yes
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: Yes	Scholar #11: No
	Scholar #12: Sometimes	Scholar #12: Not really
	Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #13: Yes

Table 12 (continued)

#7 Do you like it when books make you think?	Scholar #1: Yes	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Yes	Scholar #2: Yes
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Yes
	Scholar #4: Yes	Scholar #4: Yes
	Scholar #5: Yes	Scholar #5: Yes
	Scholar #6: Yes	Scholar #6: Yes
	Scholar #7: Yes	Scholar #7: Yes
	Scholar #8: Yes	Scholar #8: Yes
	Scholar #9: Yes	Scholar #9: Yes
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: Yes	Scholar #11: A little
	Scholar #12: Yes	Scholar #12: Yes
	Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #13: Yes

post test, the responses shifted to 12 of the 13 scholars responding. All 12 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative.

For question #3 that asked children if reading was boring to them, the pre-test showed nine of the 13 scholars indicated “no”, two scholars indicated “sometimes”, one scholar indicated “not really”, one scholar indicated “a little bit”. In the post test, the responses shifted to 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Eight scholars indicated “no”, two scholars indicated “sometimes”, two scholars indicated either “a little bit or “not really.”

For question #4 that asked if the children enjoy the challenging of reading a book, the pre-test showed 10 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, one scholar indicated “kind of”, one scholar indicated “sometimes”, and one scholar indicated “not that much.” In the post test, the responses shifted to 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Nine scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, one indicated stated “no”, two scholars indicated “not that much” or “kind of.”

For question #5 that asked do you enjoy reading interesting books even if they are hard, the pre-test 11 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, one scholar indicated “maybe”, and one scholar indicated “not really.” In the post test, the responses shifted to 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Ten scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, one scholar indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “sometimes.”

For question #6 that asked do you enjoy reading books for a long period of time, the pre-test showed seven scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, five scholars indicated “no”, and one scholar indicated “sometimes.” In the post test, the responses shifted to 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Four scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, three scholars indicated “no”, three scholars indicated “sometimes”, one scholar indicated “most of the time”, one scholar indicated “not really.”

For question #7 that asked do you like it when books make you think, the pre-test showed all 13 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative. In the post test, the responses shifted to 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Eleven out of 12 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative and one scholar indicated “a little.”

During the first administration of the survey, the Intrinsic Motivation questions were read aloud as written. During the second administration, I read the questions as written; however, additional probing questions were asked to gain a deeper understanding of student participants’ thinking. These follow-up responses provided further context for interpreting students’ survey responses. For example, Student Participant #5 shared that she felt shy about reading challenging books because she perceived that her classmates were watching her. In contrast, Student Participant #13 shared that she enjoyed reading interesting books even when they were difficult, explaining that she felt motivated to follow the school’s motto to “try her best and nothing less.”

A comparison of pre- and post-survey responses shows that intrinsic motivation remained relatively stable overall, although some individual responses shifted over time. For example, several students continued to report enjoyment of reading new books and books that required thinking, while responses related to reading for long periods of time and enjoying challenging texts were more mixed. In some cases, student responses became more positive over time, while in other cases responses reflected slight decreases in enthusiasm. Taken together, the results suggest that student participants generally maintained positive dispositions toward reading throughout the inquiry, but that motivation was not uniform across all aspects of reading. In particular, stamina for extended reading and willingness to engage with difficult texts appeared to vary more across students than general interest in books.

Avoidance

Table 13 presents student responses related to reading avoidance at the beginning and end of the inquiry. Overall, the pre-survey responses suggested that many student participants did not strongly identify with avoidant reading behaviors. Across several items, most students reported that they did not typically try to avoid reading for school, did not wish to be excused from reading tasks, and did not intentionally read as little as possible. For example, many students responded “no” or gave similarly negative responses to questions about trying to get out of reading books for school, wishing they did not have to read for school, and minimizing the amount of reading they completed. At the same time, some students did report avoidant tendencies, particularly in relation to selecting easier books, guessing while reading, or expressing reduced interest in specific reading tasks. These mixed responses suggest that although avoidance was not a dominant pattern across the group, some students demonstrated behaviors or attitudes that may have limited their engagement with reading.

For question #1 about do you guess a lot when reading so you can finish quickly, the pre-test showed three of the 13 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, six scholars indicating “no”, three scholars indicated “sometimes”, and one scholar indicated “not really.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Three scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, eight scholars indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “most of the time.”

For question #2 about do you read easier books so you don’t have to work as much, the pre-test showed five of the 13 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative and eight scholars indicating “no”. In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Four scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, seven scholars indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “not really.”

Table 13

Student Reading Motivation Survey Results-Avoidance (n=13)

Questions	Pre	Post
#1 Do you guess a lot when reading so you can finish quickly?	Scholar #1: No Scholar #2: Yes Scholar #3: Sometimes Scholar #4: No Scholar #5: No Scholar #6: Sometimes Scholar #7: Sometimes Scholar #8: No Scholar #9: No Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: Yes Scholar #12: Not really Scholar #13: No, I try	Scholar #1: No data Scholar #2: Yes Scholar #3: Most of the time Scholar #4: No Scholar #5: No Scholar #6: No Scholar #7: No Scholar #8: Yes Scholar #9: No Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: No Scholar #12: No Scholar #13: No, I take my time.
#2 Do you read easier books so you don't have to work as much?	Scholar #1: No Scholar #2: Yes Scholar #3: No Scholar #4: No Scholar #5: No Scholar #6: No Scholar #7: Yes Scholar #8: Yes Scholar #9: No Scholar #10: No Scholar #11: Yes Scholar #12: Yes, absolutely Scholar #13: No	Scholar #1: No data Scholar #2: Yes Scholar #3: No Scholar #4: No Scholar #5: Yes Scholar #6: No Scholar #7: Yes, sometimes Scholar #8: No Scholar #9: No Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: No Scholar #12: Not really Scholar #13: No
#3 How often do you try to find a good book?	Scholar #1: 2 hours Scholar #2: Pretty quickly Scholar #3: A little bit of times Scholar #4: At school and home Scholar #5: Sometimes Scholar #6: Sometimes Scholar #7: A lot Scholar #8: No real often Scholar #9: Yes Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: A lot Scholar #12: Not really Scholar #13: I read my library book	Scholar #1: No data Scholar #2: Almost everyday Scholar #3: Very often Scholar #4: At home and school Scholar #5: Sometimes Scholar #6: A lot of times Scholar #7: Maybe Scholar #8: An hour or 2 Scholar #9: Not a lot Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: Not that much Scholar #12: Sometimes Scholar #13: Only for 2 minutes

Table 13 (continued)

#4 How often do you think, “I don’t want to read this?”	Scholar #1: None of the time	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Never	Scholar #2: Probably Never
	Scholar #3: I don’t know	Scholar #3: Most of the time
	Scholar #4: I do want to read.	Scholar #4: Sometimes
	Scholar #5: Yes	Scholar #5: A lot
	Scholar #6: No	Scholar #6: No
	Scholar #7: Never	Scholar #7: Never
	Scholar #8: I like books	Scholar #8: I don’t
	Scholar #9: No	Scholar #9: No
	Scholar #10: No	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: Never	Scholar #11: A lot
	Scholar #12: Sometimes	Scholar #12: Not really
	Scholar #13: I do read the books.	Scholar #13: I don’t think that
#5 Do you try to get out of reading books for school?	Scholar #1: No	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: No	Scholar #2: No
	Scholar #3: No	Scholar #3: No
	Scholar #4: No	Scholar #4: No
	Scholar #5: No	Scholar #5: Yes
	Scholar #6: No	Scholar #6: Yes
	Scholar #7: Yes	Scholar #7: No
	Scholar #8: No	Scholar #8: No
	Scholar #9: No	Scholar #9: No
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: No
	Scholar #11: No	Scholar #11: No
	Scholar #12: Yes	Scholar #12: No
	Scholar #13: I take books home.	Scholar #13: No, reading is fun
#6 Do you wish you didn’t have to read for school?	Scholar #1: No	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: No	Scholar #2: No
	Scholar #3: No	Scholar #3: No
	Scholar #4: No	Scholar #4: No
	Scholar #5: No	Scholar #5: No
	Scholar #6: Yes	Scholar #6: No, I like reading
	Scholar #7: No	Scholar #7: No
	Scholar #8: No	Scholar #8: No
	Scholar #9: No	Scholar #9: No
	Scholar #10: No	Scholar #10: No
	Scholar #11: No	Scholar #11: Kind of
	Scholar #12: Not really	Scholar #12: No
	Scholar #13: I need to read	Scholar #13: No

Table 13 (continued)

#7 Do you read as little as possible?	Scholar #1: Kind of	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: No	Scholar #2: Probably sometimes
	Scholar #3: No	Scholar #3: No
	Scholar #4: No	Scholar #4: No
	Scholar #5: Yes	Scholar #5: No
	Scholar #6: Sometimes	Scholar #6: No
	Scholar #7: Yes	Scholar #7: No
	Scholar #8: No	Scholar #8: No
	Scholar #9: No	Scholar #9: No
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: No	Scholar #11: No
	Scholar #12: Yes	Scholar #12: Not really
	Scholar #13: Not really	Scholar #13: No

For question #3 about how often do you try to find a good book, the pre-test showed two of the 13 scholars indicated yes in the affirmative, two scholars indicated “sometimes”, one scholar indicated “two hours”, one scholar indicated “pretty quickly”, one scholar indicated “a little bit of the time”, one scholar indicated “at school and home”, one scholar indicated “a lot”, one scholar indicated “not real often ” one scholar indicated “a lot”, one scholar indicated “not really”, and one scholar indicated “I read my library book.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. One scholar indicated in the affirmative with yes, two scholars indicated “sometimes”, one scholar indicated “almost every day”, one scholar indicated “very often”, one scholar indicated “at home and school”, one scholar indicated “a lot of times”, one scholar indicated “maybe”, one scholar indicated “an hour or two”, one scholar indicated “not a lot”, one scholar indicated “not that much”, and one scholar indicated “only for two minutes.”

For question #4 about how often do you think “I don’t want to read this?”, one scholar indicated the affirmative yes, three scholars indicated “no”, three scholars indicated “never”, one scholar indicated “sometimes”, one scholar indicated “none of the time”, one scholar indicated “I don’t know”, one scholar indicated “I do want to read”, one scholar indicated “I like books”, one scholar indicated “I do read the books.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. One scholar indicated in the affirmative yes, two scholars indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “probably never”, one scholar indicated “most of the time”, one scholar indicated “sometimes”, two scholars indicated “a lot”, one scholar indicated “never”, one scholar indicated “I don’t”, one scholar indicated “not really”, one scholar indicated “I don’t think that.”

For question #5 that asked do you try to get out of reading books for school, nine scholars indicated “no”, three scholars indicated “yes”, and one scholar indicated “I take books home.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. 10 scholars indicated “no” and two scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes.

For question #6 that asked do you wish you didn’t have to read for school, 10 scholars indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “yes”, one scholar indicated “not really”, and one scholar indicated “I need to read.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. 11 scholars indicated “no” and one scholar indicated “kind of.”

For question #7 about do you read as little as possible, four scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, six scholars indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “kind of”, one scholar indicated “sometimes”, and one scholar indicated “not really.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. One scholar indicated in the affirmative with yes, nine scholars indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “probably sometimes, and one scholar indicated “not really.”

During the first administration of the survey, the Avoidance questions were read aloud as written. During the second administration, I read as written; however, after completing the Avoidance section, then I asked probing questions to better understand student participants’ responses. These follow-up responses provided additional context for interpreting students’ perspectives on reading avoidance. For example, Scholar Participant #4 shared that she attempts to find good books both at home and at school but prefers selecting books at school due to the larger selection available. Scholar Participant #5 stated that although she sometimes thinks, “I don’t want to read this,” she still listens to and follows her teacher’s directions. Scholar Participant #13 expressed a similar sentiment, noting that even when she feels reluctant, she

reads assigned texts because “if the teacher gives us a book, I read it.” When asked if she tries to get out of reading books for school, Scholar Participant #13 responded that reading is fun, explaining that books help you learn many things and prepare you for fourth grade. Additionally, Scholar Participant #13 indicated that she does not guess while reading to finish quickly, emphasizing the importance of taking her time. Scholar Participant #6 shared that she enjoys reading at school because it helps her “get smarter.” These responses suggest that while some students may experience moments of reluctance, they also demonstrate a sense of responsibility, persistence, and value for reading tasks.

A comparison of pre- and post-survey responses indicates that avoidance-related responses remained somewhat mixed across the inquiry, with signs of improvement for some students and continued variability for others. Several students gave fewer avoidant responses on the post-survey, particularly on items related to getting out of reading for school, wishing they did not have to read, and reading as little as possible. For instance, some students shifted from affirmative or uncertain responses to responses that reflected greater acceptance of reading tasks. However, responses to items such as guessing while reading, choosing easier books, and thinking “I don’t want to read this” remained inconsistent across participants. Taken together, the findings suggest that while some students appeared to become less avoidant of reading over time, avoidance behaviors were not eliminated entirely. Instead, the data indicate that student engagement with reading continued to vary by task, personal preference, and perceived difficulty of the reading activity.

Self-Efficacy

Table 14 presents student responses related to reading self-efficacy at the beginning and end of the inquiry. Overall, the pre-survey responses suggested that many students entered the

Table 14

Student Reading Motivation Survey Results-Self-Efficacy (n=13)

Questions	Pre	Post
#1 Can you figure out hard words when reading?	Scholar #1: No Scholar #2: Yes Scholar #3: Yes Scholar #4: Yes Scholar #5: Yes Scholar #6: Yes Scholar #7: Yes Scholar #8: Yes Scholar #9: Yes Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: Yes Scholar #12: Sometimes Scholar #13: I sound it out	Scholar #1: No data Scholar #2: Yes Scholar #3: Yes, sometimes Scholar #4: Sometimes, try sounding Scholar #5: Sometimes Scholar #6: Yes Scholar #7: Sometimes Scholar #8: No Scholar #9: Yes Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: Yes Scholar #12: Sometimes Scholar #13: Sometimes
#2 Can you sound out long words?	Scholar #1: Yes, but no maybe Scholar #2: Yes Scholar #3: Yes Scholar #4: Yes Scholar #5: Yes Scholar #6: Yes Scholar #7: Yes Scholar #8: Yes Scholar #9: Yes Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: Yes Scholar #12: Not really Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #1: No data Scholar #2: Yes Scholar #3: Yes Scholar #4: Yes Scholar #5: Yes Scholar #6: Sometimes Scholar #7: Yes Scholar #8: Yes Scholar #9: Yes Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: Yes Scholar #12: Sometimes Scholar #13: Yes
#3 Do you learn more from reading than most students in class?	Scholar #1: Kind of Scholar #2: Yes Scholar #3: Yes Scholar #4: Maybe Scholar #5: No Scholar #6: Sometimes Scholar #7: Yes Scholar #8: Sometimes Scholar #9: No Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: Yes Scholar #12: No Scholar #13: Basically	Scholar #1: No data Scholar #2: Maybe Scholar #3: Yes Scholar #4: Yes Scholar #5: No Scholar #6: Sometimes Scholar #7: Yes Scholar #8: Yes Scholar #9: No Scholar #10: Yes Scholar #11: Yes Scholar #12: Not really Scholar #13: No

Table 14 (continued)

#4 Can you recognize words easily when you read?	Scholar #1: Yes	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Yes	Scholar #2: Yes
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Yes
	Scholar #4: Sometimes, Kind of	Scholar #4: Sometimes
	Scholar #5: Sometimes	Scholar #5: Sometimes, I can't
	Scholar #6: Yes	Scholar #6: Yes
	Scholar #7: Yes	Scholar #7: Yes
	Scholar #8: Yes	Scholar #8: Sometimes
	Scholar #9: Yes	Scholar #9: Yes
	Scholar #10: No	Scholar #10: No
	Scholar #11: Yes	Scholar #11: Yes
	Scholar #12: Sometimes	Scholar #12: Sometimes
	Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #13: Yes
#5 Do you think you will do well in reading next year?	Scholar #1: Yes	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Yes	Scholar #2: Hope so
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Yes
	Scholar #4: I believe in myself	Scholar #4: Yes
	Scholar #5: Yes	Scholar #5: Sometimes
	Scholar #6: Yes	Scholar #6: Yes
	Scholar #7: Yes	Scholar #7: Yes
	Scholar #8: Yes	Scholar #8: Yes
	Scholar #9: Yes	Scholar #9: Yes
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: Yes	Scholar #11: Yes
	Scholar #12: When I grow up	Scholar #12: Maybe
	Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #13: Definitely
#6 Are you good at remembering words?	Scholar #1: Kind of	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: Yes	Scholar #2: Yes
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Yes
	Scholar #4: Yes	Scholar #4: Yes
	Scholar #5: Yes	Scholar #5: Yes
	Scholar #6: Yes	Scholar #6: Sometimes
	Scholar #7: No	Scholar #7: No, not really
	Scholar #8: No	Scholar #8: No
	Scholar #9: Yes	Scholar #9: Yes
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: Yes	Scholar #11: Yes
	Scholar #12: Not really	Scholar #12: Sometimes
	Scholar #13: Yes	Scholar #13: Yes

Table 14 (continued)

#7 Do hard words in a story stop you from reading?	Scholar #1: No	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: No	Scholar #2: No
	Scholar #3: Yes	Scholar #3: Yes, sometimes
	Scholar #4: No, I will skip it	Scholar #4: No
	Scholar #5: Sometimes	Scholar #5: No
	Scholar #6: No	Scholar #6: No
	Scholar #7: Sometimes	Scholar #7: No
	Scholar #8: Yes	Scholar #8: No
	Scholar #9: No	Scholar #9: No
	Scholar #10: Yes, a lot	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: No	Scholar #11: No
	Scholar #12: Yes	Scholar #12: Sometimes
	Scholar #13: No	Scholar #13: No

inquiry with relatively positive beliefs about their ability to engage with reading tasks. A majority of students reported that they could figure out hard words, sound out long words, and recognize words when reading. In addition, many students expressed confidence about their future reading performance, indicating that they believed they would do well in reading the following year. However, responses also indicated variability in perceived reading ability among some students. Several participants reported only partial confidence, responding with statements such as “sometimes,” “kind of,” or “not really” when asked about remembering words or recognizing words easily. Similarly, some students indicated that difficult words in a story could interfere with their reading, suggesting that while many students perceived themselves as capable readers, confidence levels varied across different aspects of reading.

For question #1 about can you figure out hard words when reading, 10 scholars indicated the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “sometimes”, and one scholar indicated “I sound it out.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Five scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “yes sometimes”, four scholars indicated “sometimes”, and one scholar indicated “sometimes try sounding.”

For question #2 about can you sound out long words, 11 scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “yes, but no maybe”, and one scholar indicated “not really.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only 12 of the 13 scholars responding. 10 scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes and two scholars indicated “sometimes.”

For question #3 about do you learn more from reading than most students in class, five scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, three scholars indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “kind of”, one scholar indicated “maybe”, two scholars indicated “sometimes” and one

scholar indicated “basically.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Six scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, three scholars indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “maybe”, one scholar indicated “sometimes”, and one scholar indicated “not really.”

For question #4 about can you recognize words easily, nine scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “no”, two scholars indicated “sometimes”, and one scholar indicated “sometimes kind of.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Seven scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “no”, three scholars indicated “sometimes”, and one scholar indicated “sometimes, I can’t.”

For question #5 about do you think you will do well in reading next year, 11 scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “I believe in myself”, and one scholar indicated “when I grow up.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Eight scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “hope so”, one scholar indicated “sometimes”, one scholar indicated “maybe”, and one scholar indicated “definitely.”

For question #6 about are you good at remembering words, nine scholars indicated the affirmative with yes, two scholars indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “kind of”, and one scholar indicated “not really.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only of the 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Eight scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “no”, one scholar indicated “no, not really”, and two scholars indicated “sometimes.”

For question #7 about do hard words in a story stop you from reading, three scholars indicated the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “yes, a lot”, six scholars indicated “no”,

two scholars indicated “sometimes” and one scholar indicated “no, I will skip it.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only 12 of the 13 scholars responding. One scholar indicated in the affirmative with yes, one scholar indicated “yes, sometimes”, nine scholars indicated “no”, and one scholar indicated “sometimes.”

During the first administration of the survey, I asked the Self-Efficacy questions as written. During the second administration, the questions were again asked as written; however, after completing the Self-Efficacy section, I asked probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of students’ thinking. These follow-up responses provided additional context for interpreting students’ perceptions of their reading abilities.

For example, when Scholar Participant #13 was asked whether she learned more from reading than most students in the class, she responded, “No, I don’t be the first one to finish. I take my time instead of rushing. It is important that I understand what I am doing so that I can get it right.” This response suggests that, while some students may not perceive themselves as outperforming peers, they demonstrate thoughtful engagement and persistence when completing reading tasks. Similarly, Scholar Participant #4 shared that she could figure out hard words when reading “sometimes by just trying to sound it out.” This response reflects the use of foundational decoding strategies and indicates developing confidence in applying learned reading skills when encountering unfamiliar words.

A comparison of pre- and post-survey responses suggests that students’ perceptions of their reading abilities remained generally positive but continued to vary across participants. Many students continued to report that they could sound out long words, recognize words while reading, and expected to perform well in reading in the future. Additionally, several students reported that difficult words did not prevent them from continuing to read, indicating persistence

when encountering challenging texts. At the same time, some responses reflected continued uncertainty about specific reading skills, particularly related to figuring out unfamiliar words and remembering words while reading. Overall, the findings suggest that students generally maintained a sense of confidence in their reading abilities throughout the inquiry, although individual perceptions of skill and difficulty varied. These results indicate that while many participants demonstrated positive reading self-efficacy, some students continued to experience challenges that may influence their confidence when engaging with complex texts.

Perceived Reading Ability

Table 15 presents student responses related to their perceived need for additional help in reading at the beginning and end of the inquiry. Pre-survey responses suggested that students held varied perceptions of their reading abilities. Several students indicated that they did not believe they needed extra help in reading, while others reported that they sometimes needed additional support. A smaller number of students responded affirmatively that they needed extra help. These mixed responses suggest that students entered the inquiry with differing levels of confidence in their reading abilities, with some students perceiving themselves as relatively independent readers and others recognizing areas in which they required additional support.

The only question in the Perceived Reading Ability section was do you need extra help in reading. Three scholars indicated in the affirmative yes, one scholar indicated “yes, sometimes”, three scholars indicated “sometimes”, five scholars indicated “no”, and one scholar indicated “not really.” In the post test, the responses shifted with only 12 of the 13 scholars responding. Three scholars indicated in the affirmative with yes, five scholars indicated “no”, two scholars indicated “sometimes”, one scholar indicated “not that much”, and one scholar indicated “a little.”

Table 15

Student Reading Motivation Survey Results-Perceived (n=13)

Questions	Pre	Post
#1 Do you need extra help in reading?	Scholar #1: Yes	Scholar #1: No data
	Scholar #2: No	Scholar #2: Sometimes
	Scholar #3: No	Scholar #3: No
	Scholar #4: Not really	Scholar #4: No
	Scholar #5: Sometimes	Scholar #5: Not that much
	Scholar #6: Yes	Scholar #6: No
	Scholar #7: No	Scholar #7: A little
	Scholar #8: Sometimes	Scholar #8: Yes
	Scholar #9: No	Scholar #9: No
	Scholar #10: Yes	Scholar #10: Yes
	Scholar #11: Yes, sometimes	Scholar #11: Yes
	Scholar #12: Sometimes	Scholar #12: Sometimes
	Scholar #13: No	Scholar #13: No

During the first administration of the survey, the Perceived Reading Ability question was read aloud as written. During the second administration, the question was again read as written; however, I asked probing questions after the completion of this section to gain a deeper understanding of students' thinking. These follow-up responses provided additional context for interpreting students' perceptions of their reading needs. Several students, including Scholar Participants #2, #7, #8, #10, #11, and #12, indicated that they needed extra help in reading because they sometimes encountered unfamiliar words or had difficulty pronouncing certain words. These responses suggest that students were aware of specific challenges related to decoding and vocabulary development.

A comparison of the pre- and post-survey responses indicates that students' perceptions of their need for reading support remained varied across the inquiry period. Some students continued to report that they did not need additional help in reading, while others indicated that they sometimes required support. In a few cases, student responses shifted slightly toward greater independence, with students reporting that they needed less help than they initially indicated. However, some students continued to perceive that they needed assistance with reading tasks. Overall, the findings suggest that student perceptions of their reading abilities were not uniform and continued to reflect a range of confidence levels. These results align with the patterns observed in the previous survey sections, where students generally expressed positive attitudes toward reading while still acknowledging varying levels of difficulty and support needs.

Taken together, the results from Tables 12–15 suggest that student participants generally demonstrated positive attitudes toward reading while also expressing varying levels of confidence and engagement with reading tasks. Responses in the Intrinsic Motivation section

indicated that many students reported enjoying reading, particularly when texts were interesting or thought-provoking. However, responses related to reading stamina and the challenge of difficult texts were more varied. The Avoidance section further illustrated that while many students did not strongly identify with avoidant reading behaviors, some students reported tendencies such as selecting easier books, guessing while reading, or occasionally expressing reluctance to read certain texts. Similarly, the Self-Efficacy results indicated that many students believed they were capable of performing key reading tasks, such as sounding out words and recognizing words while reading, though some students expressed uncertainty when encountering more difficult reading situations. Finally, responses related to Perceived Reading Ability showed that students held mixed perceptions about whether they required additional help in reading. Overall, the survey results suggest that while many student participants maintained generally positive dispositions toward reading throughout the inquiry, their motivation, confidence, and engagement varied depending on the reading task and perceived level of difficulty. These findings provide additional context for understanding student engagement with the literacy interventions implemented during the inquiry.

North Carolina Reading Check-In

The North Carolina Reading Check-In provided quantitative data related to student reading performance. Student participants completed the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessment in October 2025 and January 2026. This online formative assessment, developed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, provides data regarding students' progress toward grade-level reading standards through the use of diverse texts and technology-enhanced questions. Scholars were allotted 90 minutes during the instructional day to complete the assessment.

Scores from both administrations were analyzed to determine changes in student performance across the North Carolina Reading Check-In. Table 16 presents the October and January scores for each scholar participant. This table provides a comparison of student reading performance at two points in time and allows for examination of individual and overall changes in reading performance during the inquiry period.

Overall, the data indicate variability in student performance across the two administrations of the assessment. Several students demonstrated increases in their percent correct scores between October and January. For example, Scholar #3 increased from 62.5% to 75.0%, Scholar #9 increased from 50.0% to 70.8%, Scholar #10 increased from 20.8% to 29.2%, Scholar #11 increased from 25.0% to 33.3%, and Scholar #13 increased from 20.8% to 29.2%. These changes suggest that some students demonstrated measurable growth in their performance on the formative reading assessment during the inquiry period.

At the same time, several scholar participants demonstrated decreases in their percent correct scores between the two administrations. For example, Scholar #2 decreased from 54.2% to 33.3%, Scholar #4 decreased from 66.7% to 58.3%, Scholar #5 decreased from 37.5% to 16.7%, Scholar #6 decreased from 45.8% to 37.5%, Scholar #7 decreased from 41.7% to 37.5%, Scholar #8 decreased from 33.3% to 12.5%, and Scholar #12 decreased from 25.0% to 12.5%. These mixed results suggest that student performance across the assessment period was not uniform and may reflect differences in text difficulty, student engagement, or individual reading development. Overall, the data indicate that while several students demonstrated improvement in their reading performance, other students experienced declines, highlighting the variability in reading progress across the scholar participants during the inquiry period.

Table 16

North Carolina Reading Check-In Data (n = 13)

Scholar	Percent Correct (October)	Percent Correct (January)	Percent Change (%)
Scholar #1	12.5	No data	—
Scholar #2	54.2	33.3	-38.6
Scholar #3	62.5	75.0	+20.0
Scholar #4	66.7	58.3	-12.6
Scholar #5	37.5	16.7	-55.5
Scholar #6	45.8	37.5	-18.1
Scholar #7	41.7	37.5	-10.1
Scholar #8	33.3	12.5	-62.5
Scholar #9	50.0	70.8	+41.6
Scholar #10	20.8	29.2	+40.4
Scholar #11	25.0	33.3	+33.2
Scholar #12	25.0	12.5	-50.0
Scholar #13	20.8	29.2	+40.4
Overall Mean	40.3	37.2	-7.8

Teacher Literacy Interviews

Teacher literacy interviews were conducted with the third-grade regular education teacher and the special education teacher. Interviews were conducted in October 2025 and February 2026, corresponding with the beginning and end of the inquiry period. All interviews were conducted virtually in a one-on-one setting. Interviews were recorded using WebEx and securely stored for review. The purpose of the interviews was to examine changes in teacher perceptions and instructional practices related to literacy over the course of the inquiry.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format. The initial interview questions included the following: (1) What do you see as strengths of the Language Arts Program at ECU Community School? (2) What do you see as weaknesses of the Language Arts Program at ECU Community School? (3) Describe a literacy professional development experience in which you engaged and identify ways in which the professional development impacted your teaching of literacy. (4) If budget were not an issue, what do you think would make teaching literacy more effective at ECU Community School? and (5) Do you have anything else that you would like to share that has not been addressed in our questioning? Based on teacher responses, probing follow-up questions were asked to clarify or expand upon their perspectives.

October Interviews

During the October interviews, teacher participants identified several strengths of the Language Arts Program at ECU Community School. Both teachers noted that the Into Reading curriculum provided multiple components that support decoding, fluency, and comprehension development. One teacher shared, “Students each have their own copy of the My Book. Students can read aloud or read in pairs. At the end of the story, there are collaborative questions they have to answer.” The teacher provided an example of how the class was working on poetry.

They read several poems. After reading, they were given an opportunity to write their own poem. In the Know It, Show It books, students were able to work on spelling patterns with vocabulary words from the texts. The teacher concluded that the Into Reading materials build upon each other. The guided text are used in small groups and help to reinforce skills. Teachers also reported that the program helps address literacy gaps by allowing educators to meet students at their point of need and provide targeted support. One teacher participant said, “I think I see the strengths in the literacy program here at ECU Community School is that we really work on meeting students at their need. Even if it means that we have to go back to letter sounds in an upper grade level.” The teacher participant noted that sometimes that children have difficulty retaining information. At times, they just have to work with students on sounding out words which eventually will help increase their fluency. Additionally, both teachers stated that the language arts program encourages students to read regularly, collaborate with peers, and develop written expression skills.

In discussing weaknesses of the language arts program, both teachers emphasized the need for additional adults in the classroom during the literacy block. Teachers indicated that having more personnel available would allow for more personalized instruction and better support students with reading gaps. One teacher participant said, “If we have more people involved and in place, we could run small groups every day.” When asked about impactful literacy professional development, one teacher highlighted the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training provided by the state of North Carolina. The teacher explained that this training helped her understand the underlying structure of language and the “why” behind many reading strategies. The teacher participant said, “This training caused me to say ‘Wait a minute-how am I teaching students when I don’t even know the why and it does not

make sense to me? So, this training actually took us out of a teacher mode and looked at it from the students point of view.” The teacher felt it was wonderful to see literacy from a student’s perspective. She reported that the training provided a deeper understanding of spelling patterns, word meanings, and strategies that support reading comprehension. The second teacher participant described a professional development series on reading comprehension led by an East Carolina University faculty member. The teacher reported that this training helped strengthen her ability to monitor student comprehension and emphasized strategies such as making predictions, modeling thinking while reading, and building students’ background knowledge. The teacher reported, “That was a good professional development. We did more than one session, and then we had time to go back into our classrooms to practice what we learned in the PD. Then, we talked about it when we met again to see how it worked with students.

When asked what improvements could be made if budget were not a constraint, one teacher expressed a desire for additional books and instructional materials to provide a more hands-on and individualized literacy experience. Both teachers again emphasized the need for more adults in the classroom to support small-group instruction. At the conclusion of the October interviews, neither teacher participant had additional comments to share. Table 17 outlines the main themes for each teacher question during the October interviews.

February Interviews

During the February interviews, teacher participants again identified strengths of the school’s Language Arts Program. One teacher highlighted the variety of literacy resources available in the school’s literacy room, which allowed teachers to rotate materials, collaborate with colleagues, and adjust instruction based on student needs. The second teacher emphasized the benefits of the school’s small class sizes, noting that they allowed teachers to better meet

Table 17

Teacher Literacy Interview Themes (Pre-Interviews – October)

Interview Question	Emergent Theme	Summary of Teacher Responses
What do you see as strengths of the language arts program at ECU Community School?	Comprehensive literacy resources and gap-responsive instruction	Both teachers identified the Into Reading program as a major strength because it includes multiple literacy components, including decoding, fluency, comprehension, writing, spelling, grammar, and collaborative tasks. Teachers also emphasized that the program is strengthened by their ability to revisit foundational skills and address student learning gaps.
What do you see as weaknesses of the language arts program at ECU Community School?	Program gaps require teacher supplementation	Teachers generally viewed the program as strong but noted that it does not fully address all student needs independently. One teacher emphasized that foundational skill gaps must be supplemented by the teacher, while the other highlighted the need for more personnel to implement small groups more effectively.
Describe a literacy professional development in which you have engaged. Identify ways in which the professional development impacted your teaching of literacy.	Professional development improved teachers' literacy knowledge and instructional practice	Teachers described literacy professional development as beneficial in strengthening instructional practices. One teacher discussed LETRS training as deepening her understanding of phonics, decoding, and fluency, while the other described professional learning on comprehension strategies, think-alouds, and read-aloud practices. Both indicated that professional development influenced how they taught literacy and supported student understanding.
If budget were not an issue, what do you think would make this a better situation for teaching literacy at ECU Community School?	Additional staff and materials would strengthen differentiation and support	Teachers identified more staffing and instructional resources as key needs. One teacher emphasized the need for additional books and materials for independent and pre-assessment work, while the other stressed the importance of more adults in the classroom to support small groups and differentiate instruction for students with varied needs.
Do you have anything else that you would like to share?	No additional concerns were raised	Neither teacher added substantial new concerns or comments beyond the issues already discussed.

individual student needs. The teacher also described the school's extensive literacy resources. The teacher said, "The reading program with the Start Right Reader, Know It, Show It, and My Books are good for students. We are able to pull second grade materials, while others work on third grade materials." These resources enabled teachers to select texts that matched students' reading abilities, even if it required using materials from lower grade levels to support skill development.

In discussing weaknesses of the language arts program, both teachers again identified the need for additional adults during literacy blocks. Teachers explained that additional personnel would help ensure that literacy stations operate effectively and that students remain engaged during independent reading and writing activities. One teacher said, "Okay, so I would just say having all hands on deck like having enough people to do groups to fidelity so that everybody's getting what they need." The second teacher reported, "The only weakness that I'm seeing right now is that we don't have enough staff at ECU Community School to help us run the small groups. I feel like if we had more hands to help, then the groups would have more teacher led collaboration with the students. This would strengthen our students with literacy.

When asked about literacy professional development that had influenced their teaching practices, one teacher again referenced the state LETRS training. She explained that the training deepened her understanding of the structure of language, including how students decode and pronounce words and how syllables combine within words. She also noted that the training helped her recognize the relationship between reading fluency and comprehension. The second teacher participant described a recent professional development series focused on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to support literacy instruction. This training, led by an East Carolina University faculty member, introduced strategies for using AI to support lesson planning,

develop instructional materials, and create more personalized literacy interventions. The teacher reported, “The AI in literacy helped me because I’m able to go in and type exactly what I need it to do for me. So, like if the kids are reading a book, I can go in and ask for comprehension questions or what I need.

When asked what would improve literacy instruction if budget were not an issue, both teachers again emphasized the need for additional personnel. One teacher suggested that a reading specialist could provide instructional support for teachers, while the other indicated that a teacher assistant would be helpful in supporting literacy rotations and facilitating small-group instruction.

At the conclusion of the February interviews, both teachers expressed positive perceptions of the collaborative literacy intervention process. One teacher participant stated, “I just want to say that I appreciate you trusting me to do this with you because it has made a difference and the confidence of the kids is amazing.” The second teacher participant shared that she enjoyed collaborating with colleagues and observing student growth throughout the inquiry period. She noted that both teachers and students appeared more energized and enthusiastic during the literacy block and that students were excited to participate in their reading groups. Table 18 outlines the main themes for each teacher question during the February interviews.

Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool

I conducted a minimum of two Literacy Learning Walkthroughs per week throughout the duration of the inquiry. These walkthroughs were used to observe classroom literacy instruction, instructional routines, and scholar engagement during the literacy block and served as an additional source of qualitative data to document instructional practices and implementation fidelity.

Table 18

Teacher Literacy Interview Themes (Post-Interviews – February)

Interview Question	Emergent Theme	Supporting Evidence (Summary)
What are the strengths of the language arts program?	Differentiation and instructional flexibility support student growth	Small group instruction, ability to adjust materials (2nd/3rd grade levels), integration of multiple resources, and flexibility to modify instruction based on student needs
Why are small groups effective? (Follow-up)	Individualized instruction enhances student understanding and engagement	Teachers can target specific skills, monitor student thinking, and adjust instruction based on how students learn
What are the weaknesses of the program?	Limited staffing constrains effective implementation of small group instruction	Need for more adults to support groups, provide guidance, and ensure all students receive targeted support
What would additional staff do? (Follow-up)	Adult support increases confidence, structure, and academic productivity	One-on-one support builds confidence, reduces confusion, minimizes off-task behavior, and improves group effectiveness
Describe a literacy professional development experience and its impact	Professional development enhances instructional responsiveness and differentiation	AI tools support individualized instruction and resource creation; LETRS training strengthens understanding of decoding, fluency, and comprehension connections
If budget were not an issue, what would improve literacy instruction?	Increased personnel and instructional expertise would strengthen implementation	Need for teacher assistants, reading specialists, and additional staff to support small group instruction and provide expert guidance
Is there anything else you would like to share?	Positive shifts in student motivation, confidence, and engagement	Students show increased excitement for reading, improved confidence, and stronger engagement; teacher collaboration also strengthened

Walkthroughs were conducted during the instructional time frame of 9:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., with each classroom visit lasting a minimum of 15 minutes. During each walkthrough, the scholarly practitioner recorded timed observational notes documenting scholar behaviors, teacher instructional actions, instructional materials utilized, literacy content addressed, and instructional

Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool

I conducted a minimum of two Literacy Learning Walkthroughs per week throughout the duration of the inquiry. These walkthroughs were used to observe classroom literacy instruction strategies implemented.

A total of 27 Literacy Learning Walkthroughs were conducted during the implementation of the inquiry. During the first six-week intervention cycle, 12 walkthroughs were conducted. In 10 of the 12 walkthroughs, the scholarly practitioner observed students engaged in small-group literacy instruction. The third-grade regular education teacher primarily worked with scholar participants #4, #5, #8, #11, and #13. During these sessions, students were observed participating in phonics reviews, identifying parts of a text (e.g., title and table of contents), reading aloud and summarizing nonfiction texts, and writing responses about texts they had read. The third-grade regular education teacher also frequently assessed students' background knowledge and encouraged them to make text-to-self connections.

Scholar participants #10 and #12 worked primarily with the special education teacher participant. This group followed a structured weekly routine. On Mondays, the group read and reread a story, taking turns reading with the teacher. During reading, the teacher asked comprehension questions and encouraged students to make predictions about what might occur next in the story. The teacher also worked to build students' background knowledge by introducing unfamiliar vocabulary prior to reading. For example, during one lesson the words

“yam” and “fig” were introduced. Students discussed their prior knowledge of the words and were allowed to look up images online to further develop their understanding.

On Tuesdays, the special education teacher and students alternated reading sections of a story and completed follow-up exercises. Students also worked on activities in the *Know It, Show It* workbook that accompanied the text. In addition, students practiced spelling words associated with the lesson. On Wednesdays, the group continued reading stories, completed *Know It, Show It* exercises, and engaged in additional spelling activities. On Fridays, students finished workbook exercises, reviewed spelling words, and wrote short responses related to the stories they had read.

Scholar participants #1 and #7 frequently worked independently or with a Sara Smiles Scholarship recipient. These scholars primarily used *Start Right Reader* materials. Students alternated reading aloud to one another or reading with the Sara Smiles Scholarship recipient when available. During these sessions, the volunteer supported students by discussing unfamiliar vocabulary and assisting with comprehension. When working independently, the students occasionally experienced difficulty understanding portions of the text or unfamiliar vocabulary.

Scholar participants #2, #3, #6, and #9 frequently worked as a small independent group during the literacy intervention period. This group read texts such as *The Fox and the Well*, *A Cave for Harvey*, and *Pecos Bill*. After reading, students completed comprehension questions and skill-based worksheets focusing on skills such as comparing and contrasting. Students also studied key vocabulary using activities from the *Know It, Show It* workbook.

During two walkthrough visits in the first intervention cycle, the class engaged in whole-group literacy instruction. On November 24, students wrote letters to classmates describing characteristics they appreciated about them. Students then placed their letters under the

document camera and read them aloud to the class. This activity allowed students to practice writing and oral reading skills while strengthening the classroom learning community. On November 25, students wrote letters to adults at ECU Community School expressing gratitude. Students read their letters aloud in class and then participated in a “Thankful Walk” throughout the building to deliver their letters.

During the second six-week intervention cycle, the scholarly practitioner conducted 15 literacy learning walkthroughs. Students were engaged in small-group literacy instruction in 14 of the 15 visits. Observational data indicated that group composition and instructional focus shifted for some groups during this phase of the inquiry. For example, scholar participant #4 was reassigned to work with scholar #7. This group continued to work independently or with the Sara Smiles Scholarship recipient, focusing on rereading and writing responses about the texts they read.

Scholar participant #5 was reassigned to work with scholar participants #10 and #12. This group continued working primarily with the special education teacher participant and maintained their established weekly instructional routine. The third-grade regular education teacher’s group was reduced from four students to three students (#8, #9, and #11). During the second intervention cycle, this group worked on skill sheets that focused on identifying the main idea and supporting details, as well as analyzing cause-and-effect relationships. The group also shifted to reading more informational texts.

The group that worked more independently during the literacy intervention period was reduced by one student and consisted of scholar participants #2, #3, #6, and #9. The instructional focus for this group shifted toward reading, discussing, and writing about a chapter book.

On January 14, the class was observed participating in a whole-group literacy activity focused on informational text. Students had read about the life cycle of a frog. After reading, students folded a sheet of paper into sections and illustrated and labeled each stage of the frog life cycle. The third-grade regular education teacher placed selected student work under the document camera, allowing students to explain their drawings and written descriptions. This activity supported comprehension, sequencing, and the integration of reading and writing skills.

Overall, the Literacy Learning Walkthrough observations indicated that the literacy interventions were implemented consistently and that students were actively engaged in structured literacy instruction throughout the inquiry period. The majority of walkthroughs documented students participating in small-group literacy activities focused on phonics, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and written responses to text. Observations also indicated that teachers used a variety of instructional strategies, including rereading, guided questioning, vocabulary development, and connections to prior knowledge, to support student understanding of texts. Additionally, adjustments to group composition and instructional focus were observed during the second intervention cycle, demonstrating that teachers used student data to inform instructional decisions. Taken together, the walkthrough data suggest that the literacy intervention model supported differentiated instruction, increased opportunities for small-group engagement, and fostered an environment in which students were actively participating in literacy learning.

Summary

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the impact of targeted literacy interventions on Black students' reading performance and teachers' instructional practices within the third-grade classroom at ECU Community School. Findings from multiple data sources—including the

North Carolina Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test, mClass DIBELS assessments, North Carolina Reading Check-In assessments, the Student Reading Motivation Survey, Teacher Literacy Interviews, and the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool—provide a comprehensive view of both student outcomes and instructional changes during the inquiry period. Across the quantitative data sources, student reading performance demonstrated mixed but meaningful indicators of progress. Some students showed improvement in reading assessment scores and foundational literacy skills, while others continued to experience challenges with grade-level texts. Survey data further indicated that many students maintained generally positive attitudes toward reading, although motivation, confidence, and engagement varied depending on the difficulty of reading tasks and students’ perceived reading ability.

Qualitative data from teacher interviews and classroom walkthrough observations provided insight into how instructional practices evolved during the inquiry. Teachers reported that professional learning experiences and collaborative planning strengthened their understanding of literacy instruction, particularly in relation to decoding, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies. Walkthrough observations confirmed that these practices were reflected in classroom instruction, as teachers regularly implemented structured small-group literacy instruction, differentiated learning activities, and data-informed adjustments to instructional groupings and materials. The intervention model supported ongoing collaboration among educators and created opportunities to respond to students’ literacy needs in real time. Taken together, the findings suggest that the literacy intervention model contributed to shifts in instructional practice and provided targeted support for student literacy development. While student outcomes varied, the integration of professional learning, collaborative planning,

and structured literacy interventions created conditions that supported both teacher growth and student engagement in literacy instruction.

This chapter presented the findings of the inquiry by analyzing multiple sources of data related to student reading performance and teacher instructional practices during the implementation of the literacy interventions. Quantitative data from literacy assessments and surveys, along with qualitative data from teacher interviews and classroom walkthrough observations, provided a comprehensive view of how the intervention model influenced both student outcomes and instructional practices within the third-grade classroom. While Chapter 4 focused on presenting the results of the data analysis, the next chapter moves beyond description to interpret the significance of these findings.

Chapter 5 examines the findings in relation to the existing body of literature on literacy instruction, teacher professional learning, and equity in education. The chapter also explores the implications of the findings for professional practice and educational leadership, particularly in relation to improving literacy outcomes for Black students in high-poverty school contexts. In addition, recommendations for future research and practice are presented. The chapter concludes with a reflection on my leadership growth and learning as a scholarly practitioner throughout the inquiry process.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 presents an interpretation of the findings from this inquiry and situates those findings within the broader body of research related to literacy instruction, teacher professional learning, and equitable educational practices. The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the impact of targeted literacy interventions on Black students' reading performance and to explore how participation in professional learning influenced teachers' instructional practices during the implementation of the intervention model. Using a mixed-methods approach, data from literacy assessments, student surveys, teacher interviews, and classroom observations provided multiple perspectives on student learning and instructional practice. In this chapter, the findings from Chapter 4 are examined in relation to existing literature to better understand their significance and implications for improving literacy outcomes. The chapter also explores implications for professional practice and educational leadership, offers recommendations for future research, and concludes with a reflection on the scholarly practitioner's leadership growth throughout the inquiry process.

This inquiry was guided by the following questions:

1. What was the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' performance?
2. What was the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional learning?

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the impact of targeted literacy interventions on Black students' reading performance and to explore how participation in professional learning influenced teachers' instructional practices during the implementation of the literacy intervention

model. Multiple sources of data were collected and analyzed to address the inquiry's guiding questions, including literacy assessment data, student motivation surveys, teacher interviews, and classroom observations documented through literacy learning walkthroughs.

Findings related to the first guiding question, *What is the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' reading performance?*, indicated that student reading outcomes varied across participants but demonstrated several indicators of growth. Baseline literacy data showed that students began the school year with significant reading needs, as reflected in the North Carolina Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test results. Subsequent assessment data from DIBELS and the North Carolina Reading Check-In suggested that several students demonstrated improvements in foundational literacy skills and reading comprehension during the inquiry period, although progress was not uniform across all participants. Additionally, results from the Student Reading Motivation Survey indicated that many students maintained generally positive attitudes toward reading, though levels of confidence, engagement, and perceived difficulty varied depending on the reading task.

Findings related to the second guiding question, *What is the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' instructional practices after participating in professional learning?*, suggested that the intervention model contributed to shifts in teacher practice. Teacher interview data indicated that participation in professional learning experiences and collaborative planning strengthened teachers' understanding of literacy instruction and influenced their approach to supporting student reading development. Teachers described greater awareness of strategies related to decoding, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. Observational data collected through the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool provided additional evidence that

teachers implemented structured small-group instruction, differentiated learning activities, and data-informed instructional adjustments during the literacy block.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the literacy intervention model supported both instructional changes and opportunities for student literacy growth. Although student outcomes varied, the integration of professional learning, collaborative instructional planning, and structured literacy interventions contributed to increased teacher responsiveness to student literacy needs and supported a classroom environment focused on reading development.

Interpretation of Findings

Findings related to the first guiding question, *What is the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' reading performance?*, suggest that targeted literacy interventions provided opportunities for growth in foundational literacy skills and reading engagement, although progress was not consistent across all students. Baseline data indicated that students began the school year with significant literacy needs, as evidenced by the North Carolina Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test results. This finding reflects broader trends identified in the literature on reading achievement gaps, which indicate that Black students and students from high-poverty backgrounds often enter upper elementary grades with lower levels of reading proficiency due to inequitable access to early literacy experiences, instructional resources, and opportunities for vocabulary and language development (Reardon, 2013; O'Hara, 2006; Nurius et al., 2015). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these disparities, particularly for students in under-resourced communities (Bansak & Starr, 2021; Dorn et al., 2020).

Subsequent literacy assessment data, including DIBELS and the North Carolina Reading Check-In assessments, indicated that some students demonstrated measurable improvement in reading skills during the inquiry period. While several students increased their performance on

literacy assessments, other students continued to experience challenges with grade-level reading tasks. These mixed results align with research on the science of reading, which emphasizes that literacy development is complex and requires explicit, systematic instruction in foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Goldstein, 2024; Shanahan, 2020). Furthermore, these findings support research suggesting that students with significant reading gaps require sustained, differentiated instruction over time, rather than short-term interventions alone (Kuhfield et al., 2023).

Inquiry Question One

One of the guiding questions for this inquiry was: *What is the impact of literacy interventions on Black students' reading performance?* Multiple sources of data were analyzed to examine changes in student reading performance and reading-related attitudes during the inquiry.

The Beginning-of-Third-Grade Reading test results indicated that all students in the comparison cohort scored in the Not Proficient range. These findings are consistent with research indicating that students who do not develop strong foundational literacy skills in the early grades are more likely to experience continued academic challenges (Snow et al., 1998; Teale et al., 2007). This reinforces the importance of early and targeted intervention, particularly for students in high-poverty schools.

mClass DIBELS data suggested that some students made measurable gains in foundational reading skills. This aligns with research indicating that progress monitoring and targeted intervention can support growth in decoding and fluency skills when instruction is responsive to student needs (Cunningham, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000). However, the variability in

student outcomes reflects the reality that literacy development is not uniform and is influenced by a range of factors, including prior knowledge, vocabulary exposure, and instructional consistency (Teale et al., 2007).

Similarly, Reading Check-In data revealed inconsistent growth patterns across students. While some students demonstrated improvement, others experienced declines. These findings are consistent with literature suggesting that reading comprehension is influenced not only by decoding ability but also by background knowledge, vocabulary, and engagement with text (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2021; Teale et al., 2007). The variability in outcomes may also reflect the curriculum gap identified in the literature, which highlights the need for balanced instruction that includes comprehension, content knowledge, and writing in addition to phonics and fluency (Teale et al., 2007).

Student Reading Motivation Survey results further contextualize these findings. While many students reported positive attitudes toward reading, their confidence and engagement varied depending on task difficulty. This aligns with research indicating that reading motivation plays a critical role in reading achievement and that students who are more engaged are more likely to demonstrate academic growth (Toste et al., 2020; Wigfield et al., 2016). Additionally, the findings suggest that fostering motivation and engagement is particularly important for students who have historically struggled with reading.

Taken together, these findings suggest that literacy interventions can support growth in foundational skills and engagement; however, outcomes are not uniform. This reinforces the need for differentiated, sustained, and responsive literacy instruction, particularly in high-poverty settings (Kuhfield et al., 2023; Reardon, 2013).

Inquiry Question Two

The second guiding question was: *What is the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' instructional practices after participating in professional learning?*

Findings from the Teacher Literacy Interviews indicated that teachers developed increased awareness of effective literacy practices following professional learning experiences such as LETRS training and literacy-focused professional development sessions. This aligns with research grounded in Adult Learning Theory, which suggests that professional learning is most effective when it is relevant, experiential, and directly connected to teachers' practice (Knowles, 2005; Irby et al., 2013). Teachers' ability to apply strategies such as decoding instruction, fluency development, and comprehension strategies reflects the importance of content-focused professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Shulman, 1987).

Teachers also emphasized the importance of small-group instruction and collaboration. This finding is strongly supported by the literature, which identifies small-group instruction as a key practice in schools that successfully improve literacy outcomes for students in high-poverty settings (Taylor et al., 2000). Additionally, collaboration among teachers and instructional staff has been shown to support more responsive and effective instruction (Cunningham, 2006; Haughey et al., 2002).

Data from the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool further supported these findings, as teachers were observed implementing evidence-based practices such as guided reading, questioning strategies, vocabulary instruction, and differentiated groupings. These instructional practices align with characteristics of effective teachers, including scaffolding instruction, using formative assessment data, and engaging students in higher-order thinking (Barone, 2004; Taylor et al., 2005; Wilder & Jacobsen, 2010).

Importantly, teachers reported increased student confidence and engagement during the literacy block. This finding connects directly to research on teacher–student relationships, which emphasizes that emotionally supportive classroom environments contribute to student motivation, engagement, and academic success (Allen et al., 2021; Walker & Graham, 2021; Zainullah & Riniati, 2023). As teachers implemented more responsive and supportive instructional practices, students appeared more willing to engage in reading tasks and participate in learning activities.

Overall, the findings suggest that professional learning, combined with collaborative intervention practices, influenced teachers’ instructional approaches by increasing their use of differentiated instruction, small-group learning, and data-informed decision-making. These changes align with research on effective schools and teachers, which emphasizes the importance of ongoing professional development, collaboration, and instructional responsiveness in improving literacy outcomes (Kennedy, 2010; Taylor et al., 2002).

Overall, the findings of this inquiry suggest that literacy improvement for Black students in a high-poverty school requires far more than a single program or isolated intervention. Rather, the results point to the importance of a comprehensive, relational, and responsive approach to literacy instruction—one that combines targeted support in foundational reading skills, ongoing assessment, differentiated small-group instruction, meaningful professional learning for teachers, and emotionally supportive classroom environments. Although student growth was uneven, evidence of improvement in foundational skills, engagement, and confidence indicates that intentional literacy interventions can make a meaningful difference. At the same time, the variability in outcomes underscores the persistent influence of broader inequities and the need for sustained, collaborative efforts to address them. Collectively, these findings affirm the

literature reviewed in Chapter 2: students in historically marginalized and high-poverty contexts benefit most when effective literacy practices are paired with strong teacher capacity, supportive relationships, and school structures that prioritize both academic growth and student belonging. In this way, the inquiry highlights not only the complexity of literacy development, but also the responsibility of schools to create the instructional conditions in which Black students can thrive as capable, confident readers.

Limitations of the Study

While the inquiry was fully implemented, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, student enrollment at ECU Community School is determined by North Carolina lab school legislation. According to this legislation, UNC System lab schools must prioritize enrollment for students who are identified as academically at risk, zoned to attend a low-performing school under North Carolina's accountability model, siblings of students who meet these criteria, or siblings of lab school employees. As a result, ECU Community School serves a population that includes a high percentage of minority students, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and students with disabilities. While this population aligns with the mission of UNC System lab schools to serve historically underserved students, the specific demographic characteristics of the school may limit the generalizability of the findings to other school contexts.

A second limitation of the inquiry was the small size of the school and the limited number of participants. ECU Community School had only one class per grade level and relatively small class sizes. As a result, the pool of student and teacher participants available for the study was limited. This limitation became more significant when the school experienced substantial personnel turnover between the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 school years.

This personnel shift also impacted the original design of the inquiry. The initial plan for the study was to examine the impact of literacy interventions on two different cohorts of third-grade students who would be taught by the same teacher across consecutive school years. However, the teacher who taught third grade during the 2024–2025 school year was reassigned to teach fourth grade during the 2025–2026 school year. As a result, the intended comparison between cohorts taught by the same teacher could not be conducted.

A third limitation of the inquiry was the limited experience of the teacher participants in teaching third grade. Prior to the 2025–2026 school year, both teacher participants had primarily taught students in kindergarten through second grade. Therefore, this was their first year teaching third grade at ECU Community School. Their relative inexperience with third-grade instructional expectations may have influenced instructional practices during the inquiry period.

A fourth limitation of the inquiry was the dual role of the scholarly practitioner as both researcher and direct supervisor of the teacher participants. As the evaluator of the teachers' performance, the scholarly practitioner held a position of authority that may have influenced teacher participation and responses during interviews or collaborative meetings. Teachers may have felt pressure to participate in the study or to respond in ways they perceived as favorable.

A fifth and final limitation of this study was the length of the inquiry and intervention period. The literacy interventions were implemented over two six-week cycles, totaling approximately 12 weeks, which represents roughly one quarter of the students' academic year. Literacy development, particularly in the upper elementary grades, often requires sustained intervention over longer periods of time before significant changes in reading performance are reflected in assessment data. While the formal study period was limited, the small group interventions and instructional adjustments continued through the remainder of the school year,

with ongoing adjustments made based on student needs. A longer intervention period may have resulted in greater measurable improvements in student reading performance.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

The findings of this inquiry have several implications for professional practice, particularly for educators and school leaders working in schools that serve historically marginalized student populations. First, the findings suggest that structured literacy interventions that incorporate small-group instruction, differentiated materials, and ongoing assessment can support students with diverse literacy needs. Throughout the inquiry, teachers implemented literacy interventions that targeted phonics development, vocabulary building, reading comprehension, and written responses to text. Observational data from the Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool indicated that these interventions allowed teachers to provide more individualized instruction and adjust instructional strategies based on student needs. For schools serving students who enter upper elementary grades with significant reading gaps, structured literacy intervention models that prioritize small-group instruction and targeted skill development may help create more responsive literacy learning environments.

Second, the findings highlight the importance of professional learning in strengthening teachers' literacy instructional practices. Teacher interview data indicated that professional learning experiences, including LETRS training and literacy-focused professional development sessions, helped teachers deepen their understanding of reading development and the instructional strategies needed to support struggling readers. Teachers reported that these learning experiences improved their ability to support decoding, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension skills. These findings suggest that sustained professional learning opportunities that focus on evidence-based literacy practices can play a critical role in

improving literacy instruction. School leaders should prioritize ongoing professional development that provides teachers with both theoretical knowledge and practical strategies for addressing students' literacy needs.

Third, the findings underscore the value of collaborative instructional practices. Throughout the inquiry, teachers worked collaboratively with the scholarly practitioner and other instructional supports to plan literacy interventions, review student data, and adjust instructional groupings. Teachers noted that this collaborative approach helped them reflect on instructional practices and make data-informed decisions about how to support student learning. For schools seeking to improve literacy outcomes, establishing collaborative structures—such as instructional planning meetings, data review sessions, and shared intervention planning—may strengthen teachers' ability to respond to student learning needs in a timely and intentional manner.

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of providing adequate instructional support during literacy instruction. Both teacher interview data and classroom observations indicated that teachers believed additional instructional personnel, such as teacher assistants or reading specialists, would enhance the effectiveness of literacy instruction. Small-group literacy instruction requires significant teacher attention and coordination, particularly in classrooms where students have diverse literacy needs. Schools seeking to strengthen literacy instruction should consider staffing models that allow for additional instructional support during literacy blocks. Providing additional personnel can help ensure that students receive individualized guidance and that literacy interventions are implemented with fidelity.

Taken together, these implications suggest that improving literacy outcomes for students requires a comprehensive approach that combines targeted literacy interventions, ongoing

professional learning for teachers, collaborative instructional planning, and adequate instructional support. For school leaders and educators working to improve literacy outcomes among historically underserved student populations, these findings reinforce the importance of creating instructional systems that are responsive to students' literacy needs while also supporting teacher growth and instructional effectiveness.

Implications for Equity and Social Justice

The findings of this inquiry have important implications for equity and social justice, particularly in relation to improving literacy outcomes for Black students and other historically underserved populations. ECU Community School was established as a UNC System lab school to serve students who are academically at risk and who often come from communities that have experienced long-standing educational inequities. The results of this study reinforce the importance of implementing instructional approaches that intentionally address these inequities by providing targeted academic supports and equitable access to high-quality literacy instruction.

One key implication of this inquiry is the importance of providing structured literacy instruction that directly addresses foundational reading skills while also supporting comprehension and vocabulary development. Many of the students in this study entered third grade with significant literacy gaps, a challenge that has been widely documented in research related to opportunity gaps in education. The literacy intervention model implemented in this inquiry sought to respond to these needs by providing differentiated instruction, small-group support, and targeted literacy strategies. From an equity perspective, this approach reflects the principle that students who have historically experienced limited access to effective literacy instruction benefit from intentional, research-based instructional practices designed to meet them at their point of need.

Another implication related to equity is the importance of teacher learning and instructional capacity. Teacher participants in this study reported that professional learning experiences such as the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training and literacy-focused professional development sessions strengthened their understanding of reading instruction and influenced their teaching practices. Ensuring that teachers have access to sustained professional learning opportunities focused on evidence-based literacy instruction is a critical component of promoting equitable educational outcomes. When teachers are equipped with a deeper understanding of how students learn to read, they are better positioned to support students who may require additional instructional support.

The findings of this inquiry also highlight the importance of collaborative and responsive instructional systems. Teachers in this study engaged in ongoing collaboration to review student data, adjust instructional groupings, and refine literacy interventions. Such collaborative practices create opportunities for educators to collectively respond to students' needs and ensure that instruction remains responsive and equitable. Schools that prioritize collaborative planning and data-informed decision-making may be better positioned to address disparities in literacy achievement.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of providing adequate instructional resources and support for literacy instruction. Both teachers in this study identified the need for additional personnel during the literacy block, such as reading specialists or teacher assistants, to help facilitate small-group instruction and provide individualized support for students. Ensuring that schools serving historically underserved student populations have access to the personnel and resources necessary to support effective literacy instruction is essential for advancing educational equity.

Taken together, the findings of this inquiry suggest that efforts to improve literacy outcomes for Black students must extend beyond individual classroom practices to include systemic supports for teachers, intentional instructional structures, and equitable allocation of resources. When schools implement targeted literacy interventions, invest in teacher learning, and create collaborative systems for responding to student needs, they take meaningful steps toward addressing long-standing inequities in literacy achievement and promoting more just educational opportunities for all students.

Recommendation for Future Study

While this inquiry provided insights into the impact of targeted literacy interventions on Black students' reading performance and teachers' instructional practices, several opportunities exist for future research that could extend and deepen the findings of this study.

First, future studies could examine the long-term impact of literacy interventions implemented across multiple grade levels. This inquiry focused on a single cohort of third-grade students within part of one academic year. Conducting longitudinal research that follows students across several grade levels could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how sustained literacy interventions influence reading development over time. Such studies could help determine whether early intervention strategies produce lasting improvements in literacy achievement as students progress through elementary school.

Second, future research could explore the impact of literacy interventions with larger and more diverse participant groups. Since ECU Community School has small class sizes and only one class per grade level, the number of participants in this study was limited. Expanding future studies to include multiple classrooms, schools, or districts would allow researchers to examine whether similar literacy intervention models produce consistent results across different

educational settings. Larger participant pools would also allow for more robust analysis of patterns in student literacy growth.

Third, future studies could investigate the role of teacher professional learning in supporting literacy intervention implementation. Teacher participants in this inquiry reported that professional learning experiences, such as LETRS training and literacy-focused professional development, influenced their instructional practices. Additional research could examine how different types of professional learning experiences contribute to changes in teachers' literacy instruction and how these changes impact student outcomes. Studies that compare different professional development models may provide valuable insights into how to best support teachers in implementing effective literacy interventions.

Fourth, future research could examine the role of collaborative instructional practices in improving literacy outcomes. Teachers in this inquiry described the value of collaborative planning, data analysis, and instructional adjustments when implementing literacy interventions. Further research could explore how structured collaboration among teachers, instructional coaches, and school leaders influences literacy instruction and student achievement. Understanding how collaborative professional practices support effective intervention implementation may help schools develop stronger instructional systems.

Finally, future studies could examine students' perspectives on literacy interventions and reading engagement. While this inquiry included a Student Reading Motivation Survey, additional qualitative research such as student interviews, focus groups, or classroom discourse analysis could provide deeper insight into how students experience literacy instruction and how their perceptions influence their engagement with reading. Understanding students' perspectives

may help educators design literacy interventions that are both academically effective and personally meaningful for learners.

Taken together, these recommendations highlight several avenues for future research that could build upon the findings of this study. Continued investigation into literacy interventions, teacher professional learning, and equitable instructional practices will contribute to a deeper understanding of how schools can support improved literacy outcomes for Black students and other historically underserved learners.

Conclusion

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the impact of targeted literacy interventions on Black students' reading performance and to explore how participation in professional learning influenced teachers' instructional practices during the implementation of the intervention model at ECU Community School. Through the analysis of multiple data sources—including literacy assessments, student motivation surveys, teacher interviews, and classroom observations—this study provided a comprehensive view of student literacy development and instructional practices within the third-grade classroom.

The findings of the inquiry suggest that the implementation of structured literacy interventions, combined with ongoing professional learning and collaborative instructional planning, created opportunities for both student growth and instructional improvement. While student reading outcomes varied across participants, several indicators of progress were evident in foundational literacy skills, reading engagement, and classroom participation. Additionally, teachers reported that professional learning experiences strengthened their understanding of literacy instruction and supported their ability to implement targeted strategies during the literacy block. Observational data further confirmed that teachers incorporated small-group instruction,

differentiated learning activities, and data-informed instructional adjustments throughout the intervention period.

Beyond the instructional findings, this inquiry highlights the importance of equity-focused practices in schools serving historically underserved student populations. ECU Community School was established to address educational inequities by providing innovative instructional models and research-informed practices for students who are academically at risk. The results of this study reinforce the importance of providing intentional literacy support, sustained teacher learning opportunities, and collaborative instructional structures in order to create equitable learning opportunities for Black students and other historically marginalized learners.

Engaging in this inquiry also provided the scholarly practitioner with valuable opportunities for professional and leadership growth. Through the process of implementing the intervention model, analyzing data, and collaborating with teachers, the practitioner developed a deeper understanding of how instructional leadership can influence both teacher practice and student learning. The experience highlighted the importance of fostering collaborative professional learning environments, supporting teachers as reflective practitioners, and maintaining a commitment to equitable instructional practices.

While this inquiry was limited in scope and context, the findings contribute to the ongoing conversation about how schools can better support literacy development for students who have historically been underserved by traditional instructional models. Continued research and innovation in literacy instruction, teacher professional learning, and equitable educational practices will remain essential as educators work to ensure that all students have access to meaningful opportunities for literacy success.

Scholarly Practitioner Reflections

Engaging in this practitioner inquiry provided meaningful opportunities for professional and leadership growth. As the scholarly practitioner and school leader at ECU Community School, this study allowed me to move beyond traditional administrative responsibilities and engage more deeply in the instructional practices that directly influence student learning. Throughout the inquiry process, I gained a deeper understanding of how intentional instructional leadership, collaborative problem solving, and data-informed decision-making can support both teacher development and student literacy outcomes.

One of the most significant areas of leadership growth involved strengthening my role as an instructional leader. Historically, many school leaders are responsible for managing operations, supporting personnel, and ensuring compliance with district and state policies. While these responsibilities remain essential, this inquiry reinforced the importance of prioritizing instructional leadership as a central component of school improvement. By working closely with teachers to examine literacy data, develop intervention strategies, and reflect on instructional practices, I was able to engage in a more collaborative and supportive leadership approach. This experience reinforced the idea that meaningful school improvement occurs when leaders and teachers work together to examine instructional practices and respond to student learning needs.

This inquiry also strengthened my appreciation for the power of collaborative professional learning. Throughout the intervention process, teachers and instructional staff worked together to review student progress, adjust instructional groupings, and discuss strategies for supporting students who were experiencing difficulty with reading. These collaborative conversations created opportunities for professional growth and helped build a shared commitment to improving literacy outcomes for students. As a leader, I learned the importance

of creating structures that allow teachers to engage in reflective dialogue about instruction, share successful practices, and collectively problem-solve challenges that arise in the classroom.

Another area of leadership growth emerged through the process of engaging in systematic data analysis. This inquiry required careful examination of multiple data sources, including literacy assessments, student surveys, teacher interviews, and classroom observations. Analyzing these data helped me develop a more nuanced understanding of student learning and instructional practices. It also reinforced the importance of using data not simply as a measure of accountability but as a tool for continuous improvement. Through this process, I developed greater confidence in facilitating data-driven conversations with teachers and using evidence to inform instructional decisions.

The inquiry also deepened my commitment to advancing equity in educational practice. ECU Community School was established to serve students who have historically experienced limited access to high-quality educational opportunities. Conducting this research reinforced the importance of designing instructional systems that intentionally address the needs of students who enter school with significant literacy gaps. This work reminded me that promoting educational equity requires more than acknowledging disparities; it requires deliberate action to ensure that instructional practices, professional learning opportunities, and school resources are aligned to support student success.

Finally, this inquiry reaffirmed the value of reflective leadership. Engaging in practitioner research required me to continually reflect on my own leadership decisions, assumptions, and practices. It challenged me to think critically about how leadership actions influence both teacher practice and student learning. Through this reflective process, I have grown not only as a

researcher but also as an instructional leader who is committed to fostering a culture of collaboration, inquiry, and continuous improvement within the school community.

Ultimately, this inquiry reaffirmed my belief that meaningful educational change begins with a commitment to understanding and responding to the needs of students. As an instructional leader, I recognize that improving literacy outcomes requires more than implementing programs or strategies; it requires building systems of support that empower teachers, engage students, and address the inequities that exist within educational systems. The process of conducting this study strengthened my resolve to lead with intentionality, collaboration, and a deep commitment to equity. As I continue my leadership journey, I remain dedicated to fostering learning environments where every child—regardless of background—has access to the instruction, resources, and support necessary to become a confident and capable reader.

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APPENDIX A: INSTIUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
Willis Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Tracy Cole](#)

CC: [Travis Lewis](#)

Date: 9/16/2025

Re: [UMCIRB 25-000372](#)

The Impact of a Literacy Intervention on Black Students in a High Poverty School

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 9/15/2025. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1,2a.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Literacy Interview Protocol(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Literacy Learning Walkthrough Tool(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Parent Informed Consent(0.01)	Consent Forms
Script for Student Assent to Participate(0.01)	Consent Forms
Student Reading Motivation Survey(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Teacher Informed Consent Form(0.01)	Consent Forms
Teacher Informed Consent Form II(0.01)	Consent Forms
The Impact of a Literacy Intervention on Black Students in a High Poverty School.(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: The Impact of Literacy Interventions on Black Students in a High Poverty School

Principal Investigator: Tracy L. Cole (Person in Charge of this Study)

Institution, Department or Division: Educational Leadership

Address: 811 Howell Street; Greenville, NC 27833

Telephone # 252-737-5600

Study Coordinator: Dr. Travis Lewis

Telephone # 252-328-5485

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems, and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

The purpose of this focus of practice is to examine the impact of literacy interventions on Black students in a high poverty school. Further, the study seeks to examine the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional development. By working collaboratively with a faculty member from the College of Education's Literacy Studies Department, a reading specialist, and a teacher, we will analyze literacy data, select an intervention, engage in professional development related to the intervention, implement the intervention, and analyze data related to student performance and teacher practice. By identifying and implementing literacy interventions with fidelity, my goal is to share information about strategies that support the growth and development of children and teachers.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of literacy interventions on Black students in a high poverty school. Further, the study seeks to examine the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional development. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a reading specialist or third grade teacher at the school where I would like to learn more about the implementation of literacy strategies which support students and teacher practices. By doing this research, we hope to learn how we can identify strategies to support the growth of students and teachers.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of two people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

There are no known risks in participating in this study. All work will be done within the normal school day and after school. Further, the work will be tied to classroom instruction.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate. If you choose not to participate, there are no negative impacts.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at your elementary school. You will be provided with all instructional materials and any professional learning that you may need. This research will last through the end of the 2024-2025 school year.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following: During this study, a College of Education Literacy Study faculty member and I will work with you to during this research project.

In September, you will be asked to take part in a Pre-Teacher Literacy Interview. Further, you will be asked to review the following literacy data with the faculty member and scholarly practitioner: 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 North Carolina Beginning of Third Grade Reading data and 2024-2025 Beginning of the Year DIBELS data. Your students will be given a Pre-Student Motivation Reading survey. After reviewing state literacy data and Student Reading Motivation Survey data, we will identify a literacy intervention to support students. You will take part in professional development on the literacy intervention to ensure that it is implemented with fidelity. You will implement the intervention within the third-grade classroom from September 2024 through December 2024. While implementing the intervention you will administer and collect reading common formative assessment data on students' performance.

In January 2025, the Middle of the Year DIBELS assessment will be administered. College of Education Literacy Studies faculty member, you, and I will review all collected literacy data-Classroom Reading Common Formative Assessment data and Middle of the Year DIBELS data. We will identify a second literacy intervention to support students. You will take part in professional development on the second literacy intervention to ensure that it is implemented with efficiently and effectively. You will implement the intervention within the third-grade classroom from February 2025 through April 2025. While implementing the intervention you will administer and collect reading common formative assessment data on students' performance.

In May 2025, you will take part in a Post Teacher Literacy Interview. Your students will be given a post Student Reading Motivation survey and the End of Year DIBELS assessment.

In June 2025, you will administer the North Carolina Reading End-of-Grade test. Additionally, the College of Education Literacy Studies faculty member, you, and I will review all collected data.

No data collected will be connected to you or your name. Your confidentiality in this study will be maintained at all times.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (or chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

Any information that I collect from you or about you will be kept strictly confidential. With Microsoft 365 and WebEx, all digital files will be stored in these secure, cloud-based programs that are password protected. Files will be stored for three years. Your confidentiality will be protected.

What if I decide I don't want to continue this research?

You can stop at any time after it has started. There will be no consequence if you stop, and you will not be criticized or penalized on your evaluation. You will not lose any benefit that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study can answer any questions concerning this research, now, or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at (252)737-5600 Monday-Friday, between 9:00 am-5:00 pm.

If you have questions about your rights as someone who takes part in research you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number (252) 744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm)> If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of Human Research Protections, at (252) 744-2914.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask. You to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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APPENDIX C: PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT

Parental or Legally Authorized Representative Permission to Allow Your Child to Take Part in Research

Information to consider before allowing your child to take part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

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The purpose of this focus of practice is to examine the impact of literacy interventions on Black students in a high poverty school. Further, the study seeks to examine the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional development. By working collaboratively with a faculty member from the College of Education's Literacy Studies Department, a reading specialist, and a teacher, we will analyze literacy data, select an intervention, engage in professional development related to the intervention, implement the intervention, and analyze data related to student performance and teacher practice. By identifying and implementing literacy interventions with fidelity, my goal is to share information about strategies that support the growth and development of children and teachers.

Why is my child being invited to take part in this research

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of literacy interventions on Black students in a high poverty school. Further, the study seeks to examine the impact of literacy interventions on teachers' practices after participating in professional development. Your child is being invited to take part in this research because they are a third-grade student at ECU Community School who receives reading instruction. By doing this research, we hope to learn how we can identify strategies to support the growth of students and teachers.

If you and your child agree for him/her to volunteer for this research, your child will be one out of about 19 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

I understand that I should not agree for my child to take part in this study if he/she is uncomfortable.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

Your child can choose not to participate. If you choose not to participate, there are no negative impacts.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at your elementary school. You will be provided with all instructional materials and any professional learning that you may need. This research will last through the end of the 2024-2025 school year.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will take place at ECU Community School. You will not need to come to school during the study. The study will last from September 2024 through June 2025.

What will my child be asked to do?

Your child will be asked to do the following: In September 2024, your child will take a Student Reading Motivation survey. This should take about 15 minutes. In May 2025, your child will be asked to take a second Student Reading Motivation survey to see if their thoughts toward reading changed.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (or chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life.

Will my child be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you or your child for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me for my child to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

Any information that I collect from you or about you will be kept strictly confidential. With Microsoft 365 and WebEx, all digital files will be stored in these secure, cloud-based programs that are password protected. Files will be stored for three years. Your confidentiality will be protected.

What if my child decides he/she doesn't want to continue this research?

Your child can stop at any time after it has started. There will be no consequence if he/she stops, and he/she will not be criticized or penalized on your evaluation. Your child will not lose any benefit that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study can answer any questions concerning this research, now, or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator, Ms. Tracy Cole, at (252)737-5600 (Monday-Friday, between 9:00 am-5:00 pm).

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I have decided my child can take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask. You to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Parent's Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)

Signature

Date

APPENDIX D: STUDENT ASSENT SCRIPT

Script for Student Assent to Participate

Information to read be read aloud for third grade students who choose to take part or not take part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: The Impact of a Literacy Intervention on Black Students in a High Poverty School

Principal Investigator: Tracy L. Cole (Person in Charge of this Study)

Institution, Department or Division: Educational Leadership

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Telephone # 252-737-5600

Study Coordinator: Dr. Travis Lewis

Telephone # 252-328-5485

Script for speaking with third grade students:

Hi everyone, my name is Ms. Cole. I am a student at East Carolina University. I am working on a project for my school. Thank you for letting me tell you about it.

This project is about finding ways to help children become better readers. I know that you have been reading or had people reading to you for a while. Your kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers all read to you. Your third grade teacher has been reading to you. Sometimes you read on your own. Sometimes you read with a friend. I will be working with your teachers, and some of you may help me too—if you want to.

Here is what might happen:

- I may come into your class during reading time to watch what you are doing.
- I may look at some of your reading work.
- Two times, I may ask you some questions about what you like or don't like about reading.

There will be no grades and no homework for this project. It is just a way for me to learn.

You do not have to take part. If you decide not to, that is okay. You will still do your regular class reading activities, but I will not look at your work or ask you questions.

If you decide to help, you can also change your mind later and stop at any time.

Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX E: STUDENT READING MOTIVATION SURVEY

Intrinsic Motivation	1. Do you enjoy reading books in your free time?
	5. Do you like to read new books?
	8. Is reading boring to you?
	15. Do you enjoy the challenge of reading a book?
	20. Do you enjoy reading interesting books even if they are hard?
	22. Do you enjoy reading books for a long period of time?
Avoidance	27. Do you like it when books make you think?
	7. Do you guess a lot when reading so you can finish quickly?
	9. Do you read easier books so you don't have to work as much?
	14. How often do you try to find a good book?
	17. How often do you think, "I don't want to read this?"
	23. Do you try to get out of reading books for school?"
Self-Efficacy	25. Do you wish you didn't have to read for school?
	26. Do you read as little as possible?
	4. Can you figure out hard words when reading?
	10. Can you sound out long words?
	12. Do you learn more from reading than most students in class?
	18. Can you recognize words easily when you read?
Perceived	19. Do you think you will do well in reading next year?
	24. Are you good at remembering words?
	28. Do hard words in a story stop you from reading?
	2. Do you need extra help in reading?

Adapted from *Profiles of Motivation for Reading Among African American and Caucasian Students* (Guthrie et al., 2009).

APPENDIX E: LITERACY LEARNING WALKTHROUGH TOOL

LITERACY LEARNING WALK TOOL

Tennessee Department of Education

TEACHER/GRADE: _____

SCHOOL: _____

DATE/TIME: _____

CLASSROOM CONTEXT: How is the classroom organized? What is on display in the room? Is there a classroom library?

1. CULTURE OF LEARNING: Are all students engaged in the work of the lesson from start to finish?

- Students **complete** instructional tasks, volunteer responses and/or ask appropriate questions.
- Students **follow behavioral expectations** and directions.
- Students **execute transitions, routines and procedures** in an orderly and efficient manner.
- Students are **engaged in the work of the lesson** from start to finish; there is a **sense of urgency** about how time is used.
- Students and their teacher demonstrate a **joy for learning** through positive relationships and strong classroom culture that is responsive to student interests, experiences, and approaches to learning.

- 1 Not Yet
2 Somewhat
3 Mostly
4 Yes

2. USE OF TIME: Is time used effectively within the literacy block?

- a. Total number of **minutes observed** _____
- b. Total number of **minutes spent reading** _____
- c. Time spent in the following structures:

Teacher modeling or direct instruction	_____	Center rotations	_____
Whole group read aloud	_____	Small group or partner work	_____
Shared reading (could include close reading)	_____	Independent reading	_____
Small group, teacher led guided reading	_____	Independent writing	_____
Small group, teacher led instruction (other)	_____	Independent work (other)	_____

- N No
Y Yes

READING FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS: Were foundational reading skills targeted in this lesson? (Yes/No)

If yes, rate this Core Action (RFS). If no, skip to next section.

3. READING FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS: Does instruction explicitly and systematically provide all students with the opportunity to master foundational skills?

- a. The foundational skills being taught are **aligned to the standards** for this grade. _____
- b. Foundational skills **instruction is explicit**, including teacher modeling and student practice. _____
- c. Students have **sufficient opportunities to practice** their newly acquired foundational skills with authentic reading and writing experiences. _____
- d. Students connect acquisition of foundational skills to **making meaning** from connected text(s). _____
- e. Students spend time on skills they are still working to develop, not those they have already mastered. _____

- 1 Not Yet
2 Somewhat
3 Mostly
4 Yes

LITERACY LEARNING WALK TOOL

Tennessee Department of Education

TEACHER/GRADE: _____

SCHOOL: _____

DATE/TIME: _____

READING/LISTENING COMPREHENSION: Was reading or listening comprehension targeted in this lesson? (Yes/No)
If yes, rate these Core Actions (Texts, Questions & Tasks, Ownership). If no, skip to next section.

4. TEXTS: Is the lesson centered on a high-quality text or texts?

- a. A majority of the lesson is spent listening to, reading, writing, or speaking **about text(s)**. _____
- b. The text(s) are **at or above the complexity level expected** for the grade and time in the school year. Note: Texts read aloud in K-2 are above the complexity level of what students can read on their own. Texts read independently or in small groups are appropriate for the purpose. _____
- c. The text(s) are worthy of student time and attention. They exhibit **exceptional craft and thought and/or provide useful information**; where appropriate, the texts are richly illustrated. _____

N No
Y Yes

Text Title(s): _____

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ This text(s) reinforces negative assumptions or stereotypes about specific cultural groups, racial groups, ethnic groups or genders. ☐ This text(s) was written by an author or features a protagonist from an underrepresented cultural, racial, or ethnic group. | <p>Indicate for which purpose(s) this text(s) was used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Read aloud ☐ Shared reading ☐ Teacher-led guided reading ☐ Independent reading ☐ Other. Please specify _____ |
|---|---|

5. QUESTIONS AND TASKS: Do questions and tasks, both oral and written, integrate the standards and build students' comprehension of the text(s) and its meaning?

- a. Questions and tasks reflect the **depth of textual analysis** required by grade-level standards and integrate these standards in service of deep understanding of text(s) and topics. _____
- b. Questions and tasks address the specific text(s) at hand by attending to its particular **structure, concepts, ideas, events and/or details**. _____
- c. Questions and tasks require students to **use details from the text** to demonstrate understanding and/or support their ideas about the text. _____
- d. Questions and tasks attend to **words (academic vocabulary), phrases and sentences** within the text focus that matter most to build students' vocabulary and deepen understanding of the text. _____
- e. Questions are **skillfully crafted and sequenced** to deepen students' understanding of the text, the author's craft, and/or the topic under consideration. _____
- f. Questions and tasks **elicit responses in age-appropriate ways** (e.g. drawing, dictating, labeling, in addition to writing in Kindergarten). _____
- g. Questions and tasks **address the varying needs of students** in accessing grade-level work (i.e. those who read, write, speak or listen below or above grade level). _____

1 Not Yet
2 Somewhat
3 Mostly
4 Yes

6. OWNERSHIP: Are students responsible for doing the thinking in this classroom?

- a. Students display **persistence with challenging tasks**, particularly when providing textual evidence to support answers and responses, both orally and in writing. _____
- b. Students provide **precise responses**. When responses are imprecise, the teacher probes understanding but students do the complex thinking. _____
- c. Students **share their developing thinking** about the content of the lesson. _____
- d. Students **explain their thinking**, orally and/or in writing, using evidence from the text(s). _____
- e. Students build on or respectfully question each other's responses, using evidence from the text to **defend their thinking**. _____
- f. Students demonstrate **progress toward independence** in reading and writing. _____

1 Not Yet
2 Somewhat
3 Mostly
4 Yes