

Findings about LIREC's Summer Lab as a Professional Development Model

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The LIREC project collected data from all Summer Lab sites in 2015 and 2016. Specifically, teachers completed an online survey on the final day of the Lab and site coaches participated in debrief interviews the following week. The purposes of this data collection were:

- To document how the Summer Lab model was implemented across sites.
- To measure teacher self-reports about impacts in the following domains:
 - o Shifts in classroom practice;
 - o Student literacy attitudes and skills; and
 - o Shifts in professional learning and collaboration.
- To identify areas of momentum to reinforce through school-year professional learning.

Overview of the model

LIREC Summer Lab was designed to address the problem of summer learning loss for students in project schools, while also providing substantial professional learning for participating teachers. The design of the student component drew on findings from the recent RAND research review on the characteristics of effective summer learning programs: “smaller class sizes, involving parents, providing individualized instruction, and maximizing students’ attendance. Other best practices include providing structures that support high-quality instruction, aligning the school year and summer curricula, including content beyond remediation, and tracking effectiveness” (RAND, 2011). The key elements of the model were:

- Although students were selected because of low literacy skills, the curriculum focus was enrichment, not remediation. Building student motivation to read and positive identity as readers was an explicit goal;
- Student group sizes were kept small, to allow teachers to perfect high intensity strategies with fewer management concerns;
- Because the model included co-teaching, peer observation, and embedded coaching, there were often multiple adults in the classroom;
- There was a focus on family engagement, tapping family members to reinforce student literacy skills and motivation;
- Morning sessions with students in the classroom were immediately followed by professional time for teacher teams in the afternoons, allowing teachers to participate in intensive PD (including LIREC inquiry cycles on focus practices), plan collaboratively, and debrief the day’s instructional experience.
- Site-based coaches were selected from among school teaching staff and provided training, materials, and support on the facilitation of the adult learning component.

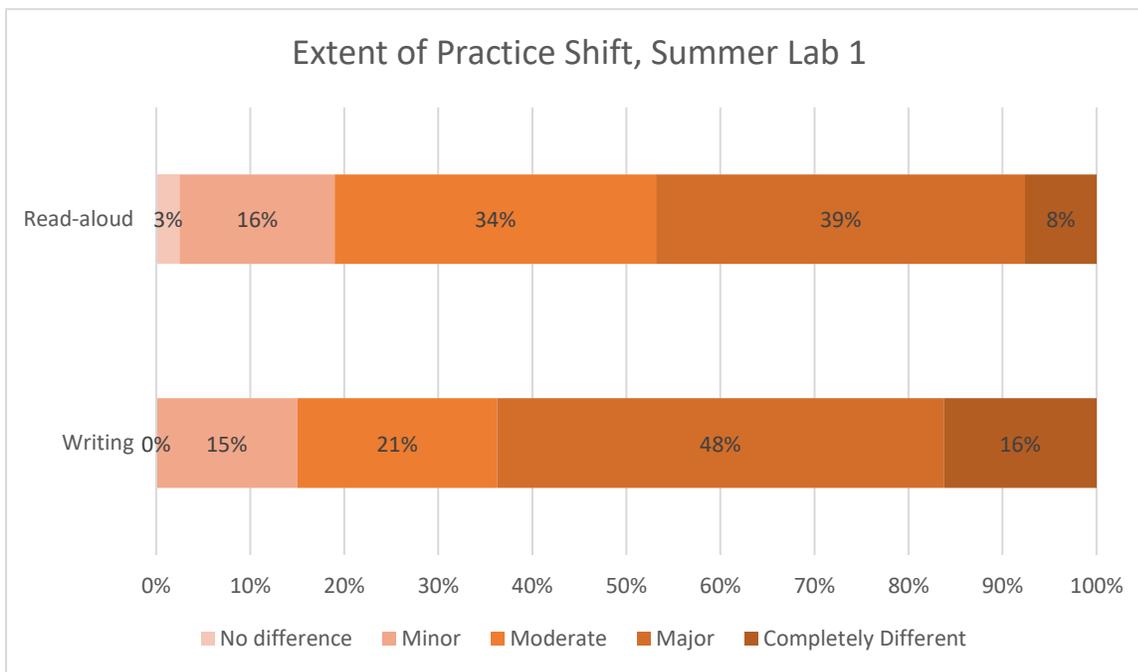
The remainder of this report presents data addressing the following questions:

- A. What changed in classroom literacy practice?**
- B. How did those changes impact students?**
- C. What changed in sites’ professional learning and collaboration?**
- D. What was sustainable?**

A. What changed in classroom literacy practice?

In both years, Summer Lab teachers reported that the literacy practices they used during Summer Lab were substantial shifts for them. Moreover, the specific practices that were described as the biggest change were different in Years 1 and 2, suggesting that Year 1 focus practices were continued into the school year and no longer seen as such a departure by the second summer.

In Year 1, teachers focused intently on more interactive, collaborative, and student-driven approaches to the core literacy components of read-aloud and writing. These particular shifts were supported by collaborative inquiry cycles developed by LIREC and facilitated by the site-based coach, with support from LIREC staff. Half or more of teachers rated the approaches they tried in these areas as “Completely Different” or a “Major Shift.”



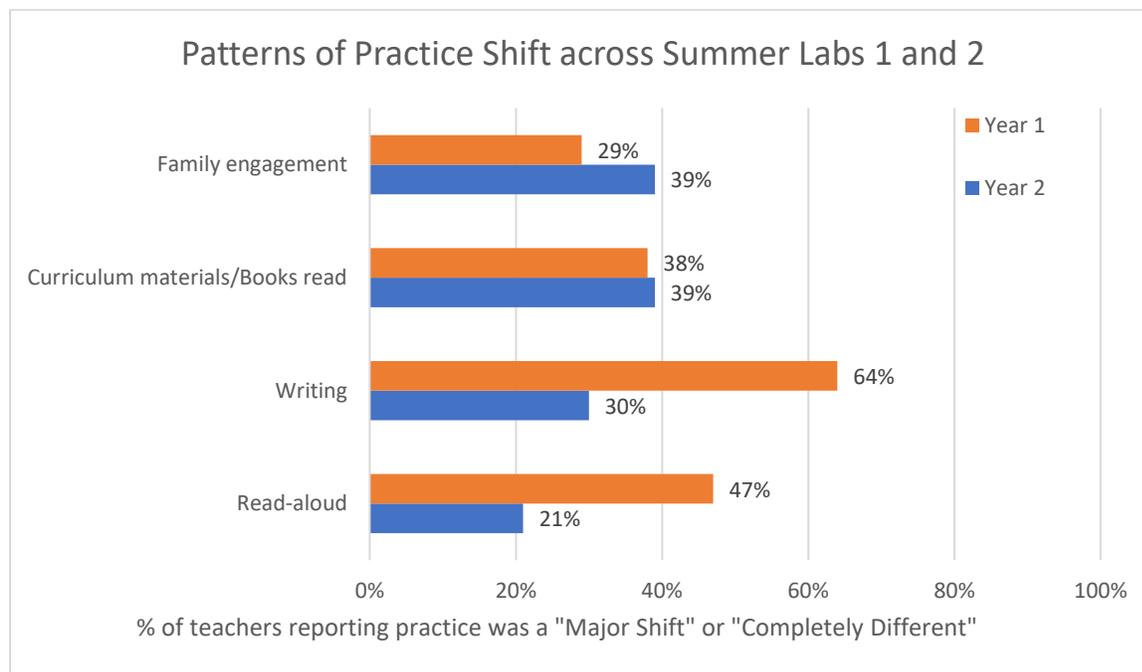
Coding of open-ended responses about these shifts identified the following key differences in instructional practice:

Read-aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More instructionally purposeful (connected to other literacy components, planned around specific instructional goals) Deeper questioning (pre-planned questions focusing on meaning and interpretation, more student-driven conversation)
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making it a daily practice More collaboration between teacher and students and among students in selection of topics and development of ideas More deliberately connected to other curriculum goals and themes.

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These were also the practices teachers rated as most effective and the ones they indicated the most interest in continuing into the school year (see below).

By Year 2, most LIREC teachers were experienced with the interactive read-aloud and collaborative writing, having continued use of these approaches to at least some degree during the school year (or for teachers who were new to Summer Lab, having worked on them as part of school-year LIREC professional development, in which Year 1 Lab teachers played an active role in disseminating the practices to their colleagues). Thus in Year 2, the % of teachers who reported having made major shifts in read aloud or writing approaches dropped, with more reporting change in their approaches to engaging families in student literacy development. In both summers, substantial numbers of teachers reported major shifts in the curriculum materials used, with an almost exclusive focus on authentic children’s books (provided through the grant via First Book) as opposed to textbooks.



Strategies for engaging families with literacy varied across sites, but all included a component of sending books home (either in personalized book bags or via the Kindles provided by the project at some sites) with specific activities to engage the child and family member together in texts. Teachers found this practice to be powerful, with one site coach noting that teachers in her school were *“absolutely on fire”* about how it impacted student motivation and had already built a discussion of these strategies into the school-wide professional development plan for the following year. Many also included a culminating event to share the students’ summer work with families. A coach described a *“big celebration at the end to actually share what we have learned and created...students sharing their work with an actual audience (was) so meaningful for family engagement.”* In addition to sending home books and related activities and hosting culminating events, which all sites did, some sites went further, with strategies including extensive parent education programs on specific ways to support literacy development and interviews with parents to investigate literacy resources and aspirations in the communities. These deeper interactions proved powerful in opening up relationships and changing perceptions on both

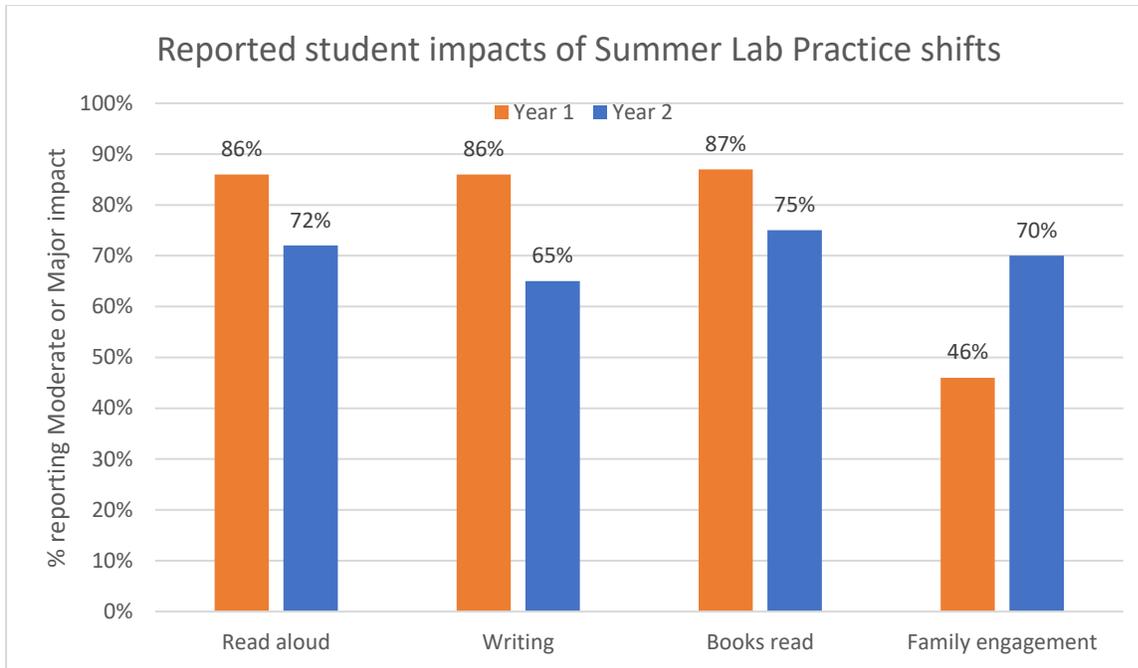
sides. A coach recounted that *“My teachers were pretty uncomfortable with all of it and I made them do it anyway. The interviews, getting parents to come in to ask these three really basic questions (about literacy). There was one parent they said would never talk and they were astounded, the questions and the way it brought out her hopes for her kids. (The teachers learned) she was not defensive, a different way to go about it.”* A coach in another site reflected on the shift in relationships between teachers and parents due to the family engagement strategies that were built into Summer Lab: *“It is not just something you read about in an article or magazine. They had time to try it and know that it worked firsthand. Even something like calling the parents, because we had quite a few to show up. I think that hit home. I think they will work harder on building those relationships, not just sending home a flyer or let the automated system do it. We have quite a few children who are struggling to read, who is to say the parent is able to read those flyers well, you need to speak with them and make sure they heard it. Build up those relationships not tear it down by only calling them when there is a problem. Even if it is just (asking) ‘do you have any questions or concerns, how are things going for your child this year?’ Take the time to get to know them.”* Teacher responses to an open-ended question about their own learning during the Lab confirmed the impact of the family engagement work:

- *I dug deeply into parent / family involvement and learned that it can look different and should look different. I am learning to talk to parents in a way that makes me the listener, so that I can better instruct their child(ren).*
- *Parent involvement seemed to have the greatest impact on the students. They could not wait to show their parents what they had learned and created. I learned that I need to communicate and involve the parents more in their child's learning...especially with reading and writing.*
- *Seeing the positive parent involvement during made a major impact on my way of thinking. I will be including my parents in activities from our classroom more often. I have seen how it changes the amount of support and the positive feelings of the parents towards their child's learning.*

B. How did those changes impact students?

In both summers, there was strong alignment between the practices teachers changed the most and those they reported as having the greatest impact on students. The chart below shows the percentage of teachers from each year who reported that each practice had a Moderate to Major impact on their students during the three-week summer lab experience (top 2 points on a 4-point scale):

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Many teachers commented on how the practices they learned through LIREC Summer Lab revealed to them that their students were capable of more than the teachers realized. As one coach summarized the impact of collaborative writing, *“The little ones you think they can’t do the morning message but boy they can do it. We had a preschool teacher working with kids going into 1st and it was very eye opening for her to see the level of the discussion. I think she will go back and work very differently with her own students. The oldest group as they began working more and more with the message they would process before they would speak. You would see the thinking going on and they would come out with this fully formed message. Another group struggled with the complete sentences- the idea that the way we speak is not the way we write. This process really helped with that. It was amazing developmentally to see what could be done with just that one piece. We collected all those samples and will use them with our whole staff. How everyone can use this one small practice and the big impact it can have on reading and writing.”*

One important finding of our surveys was that many teachers found the biggest impacts on their students not from the specific instructional practices but from the pedagogical approach underlying all LIREC literacy activities: a focus on student choice, ownership, and development of motivation to read. In open-ended questions both summers, teachers were asked to complete the statement “After Summer Lab I am more likely to...” In addition to specific instructional practices, the top themes in these responses included focus on student motivation and the related idea of providing students more choice in texts:

Student motivation/ engagement	<i>“Check in with students about their motivation to read, and their personal interests.”</i> <i>“I want to spend more time on our stories and connect outside stories and activities to help maintain student interest and growth.”</i> <i>“Use student interest surveys to help students find books that are engaging to them.”</i>
Student choice	<i>“Give choices within the content area I am teaching (reading and writing).”</i> <i>“Encourage students to find independent reading that they enjoy.”</i>

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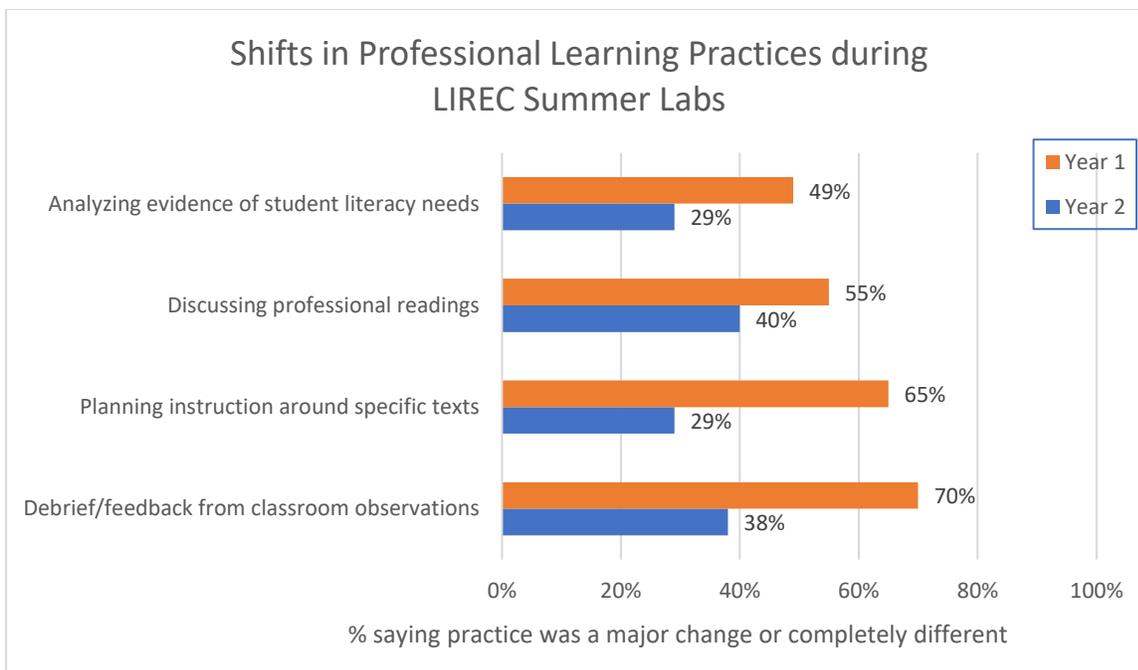
"I will make more of an effort to push student choices and offer as much literature as possible."

The list of things teachers said they were LESS likely to do as a result of summer lab participation was the inverse of what they were more likely to do, with most responses focusing on practices that limit student engagement:

- Limit student reading choices
- Use teacher-centered instruction
- Read aloud without questions or discussion
- Stick to textbook/workbook

C. What changed in sites' professional learning and collaboration?

The LIREC Summer Lab model places equal emphasis (and time investment) in teacher and student learning. After mornings in the classrooms, teachers and their site coach had time each afternoon to debrief the day's instruction, learn new instructional strategies, and plan collaboratively. Teachers and coaches alike reported that this intense, collaborative professional learning was as great a shift from typical practice as the changes they were making in the classroom, and provided the support needed to make those significant instructional shifts. As with the instructional shifts, reported shifts in professional learning practices were greater in Year 1 than Year 2, suggesting that some of these practices had become more routine during the school year in LIREC schools. The chart below shows the percentage of Summer Lab teachers each summer who reported that each professional learning practice was a major change or completely different from professional collaboration in the school during the year (top 2 points on a 5-point scale).



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There was strong alignment in both summers between the professional learning practices teachers reported were most different and those that they found most effective for their own learning. Notably, although fewer teachers in Year 2 saw the LIREC professional learning practices as a major shift, they still rated them at the same level of effectiveness. In both years, between 60% and 80% of participating teachers rated each of these forms of professional learning as Effective or Extremely Effective in developing their own classroom practice (top 2 points on a 5 point scale).

When asked in an open-ended prompt to describe their most powerful learning experience this summer, the most common themes in teacher stories were:

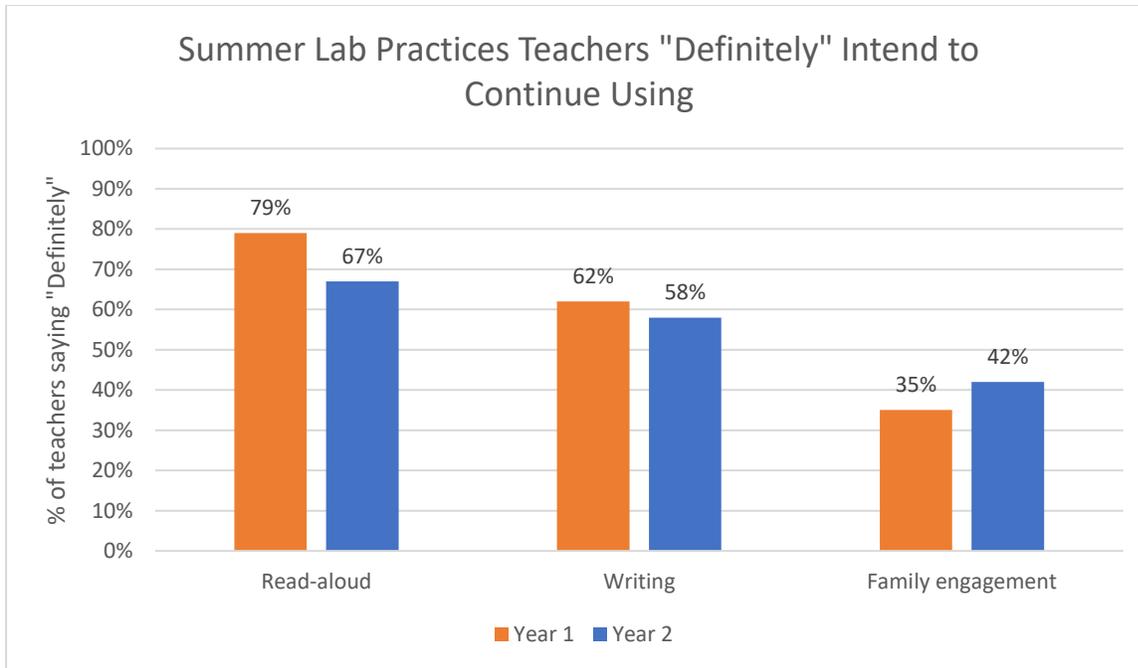
- Collaboration and discussion (the power of multiple perspectives being openly shared)
- Peer observation (seeing practices in action and having the opportunity to debrief after)
- Professional articles and videos that gave them specific ideas.

When asked how what they most hoped would be different about how teachers will learn together going forward, more time for collaboration and co-planning was the overwhelming theme, with peer observation mentioned second most frequently.

- *I hope that as we go forward in the next school year, I hope teachers will be able to collaborate more. I hope that we will be able to analyze each other's classroom and students' work, so we will be able to move children to the next level.*
- *I hope that more collaborative planning will come about. Simply working together in the same room with some of the other teachers allowed for ideas to be shared and to create more exciting and detailed plans.*
- *I hope to be able to do more peer to peer conferencing and observing to better my instruction practices.*
- *I really hope that we will have the opportunity to meet together as a whole group and have discussions about what is and isn't effective in the classroom. Teachers can learn so much from each other if we are given the opportunity.*
- *It has been wonderful to work in a classroom with another teacher. Observations, collaboration, planning, and teaching has been so interactive that it has helped me grow.*

D. What was sustainable?

At the conclusion of both Summer Labs, strong majorities of teachers reported that they would “Definitely” continue the practices of Interactive Read-Aloud and Collaborative Writing. The drops between Years 1 and 2 in teachers reporting that these practices were major shifts provides corroborating evidence that the practices were becoming more routine in LIREC schools between summers. Teachers were less confident they could continue the kinds of family engagement strategies developed over the summer, despite the reported impact on students in Year 2.



When teachers were asked in an open-ended question what might keep them from continuing Summer Lab practices, the most prevalent answers were lack of instructional time, larger class sizes, and conflict with mandated curriculum materials or schedules for the literacy block.

When asked about challenges to the sustainability of the collaborative, inquiry-driven professional learning practices used during Summer Lab, not surprisingly the overwhelming response was lack of time, specifically dedicated collaboration time built into the day. Teachers also specifically noted the difficulty of getting substitutes in order to do peer observations during the instructional day. In addition to lack of time, lack of administrative support was cited as a potential challenge, with some teachers specifically noting that when collaboration time was available to them it was not teacher run as was the case during Summer Lab:

- *I don't think we will be allowed to collaborate without being told what we are doing and planning sessions without being given the plan.*
- *The majority of PD time involving listening to presenters, with little time to meet in PLCs.*

Summary and Implications

Teacher survey responses and interviews with site coaches point to the cumulative power of the Summer Lab model within the LIREC learning cycle, with Summer Labs bookending focused school year professional learning experiences. Both in terms of literacy instruction and professional collaboration, Summer Lab provided opportunities for supported practice with learning approaches that were substantially different than the school year norm. However, practices that were radical shifts during Summer Lab 1 had become more familiar by the second summer because of use and reinforcement during the school year. As confidence with interactive read aloud and writing techniques deepened from sustained use, more attention was paid in Summer Lab 2 to strategies for engaging families and building student motivation to read (especially through student choice and classroom talk). Participating

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teachers recognized the power of teacher-led collaboration in building their understanding and successful implementation of these practices and advocated for shifts in their site-based professional learning to become more collaborative and teacher inquiry-driven beyond the term of the LIREC project.

McCombs, Jennifer Sloan, Catherine H. Augustine, and Heather L. Schwartz. *Making summer count: How summer programs can boost children's learning*. Rand Corporation, 2011.