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## Teacher Professional Development and Its Effects on Reading Instruction

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The University of Southern Mississippi

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND  
ITS EFFECTS ON READING INSTRUCTION

by

Kristen Lea Suarez

Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2011

ABSTRACT

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND  
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by Kristen Lea Suarez

May 2011

The world of education is an ever-evolving profession. We, as a society, have learned so much about education and how we can better benefit our students. Students depend on education to equip them with the tools needed to become successful. This dissertation addresses the need for and adequacy of today's teacher professional development in Reading instruction and how that training can translate into more meaningful classroom education.

The writer surveyed elementary Reading teachers in grades 3-6 from two school districts in southern Mississippi to determine their perceptions concerning various elements of the professional development training they received during the 2009-2010 school year. The writer also collected data about how much professional development these teachers attended, how much information from the training they actually used for their classroom instruction, and whether or not they received follow-up training for help on implementation of strategies after the initial professional development session had ended.

Using Language Arts standardized test scores for the 2009-2010 school year in the state of Mississippi, the writer compared test scores with how many teachers actually utilized information from professional development training for

their classroom instruction. The writer hoped to find a significant relationship between using information given from professional development training and increased standardized test scores. The writer also compared test scores with how much follow-up training was given to teachers after the initial professional development session was over. The writer hoped to find a difference in test scores between those who received more follow-up training for help on implementation of strategies for classroom instruction and those who received less follow-up training.

The teachers held a favorable opinion of professional development. They believed it was a worthwhile use of their time and that it increased student achievement. However, the results of this study indicated there was no significant relationship between using information from professional development and increased test scores. The results of this study also indicated there was no difference in standardized test scores regarding that the amount of follow-up training received by teachers. This information can be valuable when planning for future teacher professional development.

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May 2011

## DEDICATION

The writer would like to dedicate this dissertation to all the educators seeking to make a positive difference in students' lives. Your devotion to students and your personal and professional growth is essential in today's culture of our educational occupations. The writer encourages educators to diligently persist in their instructional endeavors even when it seems that students are not receptive. It is certain that an educator can reach a student when he or she makes every effort to do the best job possible even when personal sacrifice is necessary.

The writer would also like to dedicate this dissertation to her husband, Michael, and her children, Austin and Emily. This educational venture began because I knew I had your love and support to encourage me to keep pushing forward. I want you to understand how important it has been for me to complete this work, as I have always had you in my mind through the ups and downs of this process. Nothing could stop me from finishing this dissertation with you by my side. It has always been about family first, and I am proud to dedicate this achievement to you. I love you all very much.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In order for students to become proficient readers, they must be guided by the teacher, who should not only possess knowledge of instructional practices and activities, but should also possess the ability to utilize knowledge to develop meaningful instruction that enables students to use those strategies and skills for the comprehension of reading text (Avalos, Pazos-Rego, Cuevas, Massey, & Schumm, 2009).

Teacher educators should be knowledgeable about the complex nature of critical reflection in order to challenge the status quo. Critical reflection is a means for thinking and problem solving that will allow teachers to find solutions to issues in schools. Teachers must be able to look at several perspectives of situations and discover a rationale for different solutions by thinking on a critical level. The social, political, moral, and economic background of the problem should also be taken into consideration. Even though the ultimate result of the critical-thinking process for individuals is cognitive change, the reflective process of the Critical Reflection Theory can be utilized to make meaningful change in schools (Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000).

Critically reflective teaching can ease teacher candidates' sorting through and choosing from many ideas, help them tackle and challenge their notion of teaching and learning and their worldview, and aid them in learning how these influence their professional development and decision making skills in the classroom (Gonzales Rodriguez, & Sjostrom, 1998). Directing the reflective

thinking of preservice teachers is a method that requires rigorous, holistic restructuring of the teacher education curricula. Every teacher education program should have the goal of producing teachers who will engage in critical reflection. Existing practice is challenged by the following questions:

- Is reflection a chief focus of the preparatory event?
- How is reflection characterized?
- How is reflection being improved using the teacher education program?

Reflective practice can be established and supported over time through the teacher education curriculum. The need to attend to and address the beliefs that teacher candidates have in the teacher education program is consistently recommended. Numerous clinical experiences associated with a variety of reflective methods, that is, seminars, journal writing, portfolios, and action research should be required of preservice teachers. These elements must be incorporated so that the developmental process of inexperienced teachers' reflective abilities can be developed to the fullest extent possible in teacher education programs. Without a significant knowledge base and mentoring by teacher educators to move beginner teachers' thinking away from a descriptive level, higher levels of reflection will be hard to achieve for many inexperienced teachers (Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000).

Research indicates that children begin showing signs of reading difficulties after the first year of school. During this first indication, schools must identify areas of weaknesses in children and begin providing intensive interventions

when difficulties become apparent if children are to meet literacy achievement benchmarks (Lose, 2007). Schools have the obligation to ensure all students achieve academic success. With support from principals, literacy coaches, and mentor teachers, teachers should be collaboratively and jointly involved in creating and executing professional development sessions that focus on teaching that supports learning (Kinnucan-Welsch, Rosemary, & Grogan, 2006). Since student achievement is highly dependent on classroom instruction, teachers must be prepared to meet today's demanding challenges.

#### Statement of the Problem

Are professional development sessions in reading instruction worth the time and money that is allocated for teachers to attend? Do teachers feel motivated to seek opportunities for professional development in Reading instruction, or is it viewed as a waste of their time because of follow-up support and little understanding of how to implement strategies? How can professional development sessions in reading instruction be improved for greater relevancy in the classroom?

Through this quantitative study, the results from a written survey of reading teachers from third grade through sixth grade will determine if attending professional development sessions for Reading instruction may possibly play a role in increasing Language Arts standardized test scores. This study will also examine whether or not teachers personally believe professional development enhances classroom instruction.

## Research Questions

1. Are there differences in reading standardized test scores between teachers who utilize professional development in reading instruction and those that do not?

*(The term “utilization” is used in question 8 of the survey instrument: Of the professional development sessions you attended for reading instruction during the 2009-2010 school year, from how many sessions did you actually utilize information given by the trainer for your classroom practices?)*

2. Are there differences in reading standardized test scores between teachers who received follow-up training for professional development and those that did not?

3. What are teachers' perceptions about effectively being able to utilize the information presented in the professional development sessions?

4. What are teachers' perceptions about the belief that professional development in reading instruction is a worth-while cause and a good use of their time?

## Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses developed for this research study include the following:

1. There is no significant relationship between standardized test scores and utilization of professional development in reading instruction.

2. There is no significant relationship between standardized test scores and the amount of follow-up training after the initial professional development session in Reading instruction.

#### Definition of Terms

*Content Standards:* Official beliefs of what students are expected to know in specific subjects and able to do at certain grade levels

*Literacy:* The ability to read and write

*Mississippi Curriculum Test, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (MCT2):* The MCT2 is an untimed, multiple-choice (standardized) assessment that requires students to bubble in answers on an answer document. All eligible students in grades 3 – 8 must participate. The MCT2 is administered annually over a three-day period (The Mississippi Department of Education, 2009).

*Professional Development:* Those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students (Guskey, 2000)

*Standardized Tests:* Tests that are administered and scored in a uniform method. The test questions, scoring measures, and analysis are consistent and administered in a standard approach.

#### Delimitations

1. Only teachers of third through sixth grade students participated in this study.
2. This study only explored the relationship between the utilization of professional development training and MCT2 Language Arts

scores, as well as the relationship between the amount of follow-up training for teachers after professional development sessions have ended and MCT2 Language Arts scores.

3. This study only explored opinions of teachers pertaining to professional development in reading instruction.

#### Assumptions

The researcher assumes that teachers participating in this study felt they could be honest with their answers and that they responded truthfully. The researcher also assumes teachers correctly understood the instructions given on the survey instrument while they answered each question.

#### Justification

The significance of this study is to explore the relationship between professional development sessions in reading instruction and reading standardized test scores. The information derived from this study can help to provide educational leaders and teachers with a greater understanding of how professional development can be beneficial to classroom instruction. The information from this study can also aid professional development designers in their approaches to future sessions based on how teachers perceive sessions in reading instruction. As a result of this understanding, professional development sessions for reading instruction can be created with teachers' perspectives in mind. The study can also help create a greater understanding of whether or not professional development sessions have an impact on classroom instruction based on test scores and classroom demographics. Teachers and

administrators can determine if time and money should be spent on professional development in reading instruction.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Opportunities and Challenges for Reading Instruction: Why Do Teachers Need Professional Development?

##### *History of Education-Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present*

Public schools have been developing in the United States since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the early years of public education, women did not have many professional choices beyond teaching. Schools chose teachers from a large pool as the need arose, and that is where the teachers worked during their careers. There were no means available to assess student achievement from collected data, and the quality of teachers was undetermined. However, during this time period, the United States was rising to the top of global power. Its citizens became mostly workers to help stimulate this rise, and fewer citizens became leaders. The quality of school instruction went practically unquestioned in light of this growth. The United States' educational system actually became a model for the world to pursue (Barone & Morrell, 2007).

These circumstances continued until the 1980s when the United States began facing a literacy catastrophe. Concerns about U.S. competitiveness in the global economy surfaced, and reports about these concerns began to emerge. One such report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), placed a great deal of focus on the United States' educational system in general and teacher preparedness. The pool of teacher candidates was decreasing as women began having more career choices than ever before,

and fewer women were electing to teach. Student populations grew quickly during the 1980s, and standards in curriculums began to appear. Language arts, math, social studies, and science curriculums became the forefront of the educational focus, and standardized tests emerged. In the past, teachers had been given total freedom of creating their own standards. They now had content standards to teach, and their effectiveness as teachers was being measured (Barone & Morrell, 2007). During the late 1980s, students who struggled with reading skills became part of prereferral interventions comprised of a school psychologist, a special educator, and an administrator or counselor. Creditable goals were set by this Student Study Team, such as avoiding unnecessary standardized testing that would only confirm reading difficulties. The team would also provide ideas for helping struggling students. Unfortunately, many of these recommendations were not based on data; they were unreliable and only conceived based on the teacher's depiction of the student's academic or behavioral performance. It was acceptable for teachers to believe that the needs of the struggling students were beyond what they could provide if the students continued to be unsuccessful. The Student Study Team would only focus on students that teachers deemed were not getting sufficient help and did not belong in the regular classroom. Suggestions for classroom instruction often backfired, and relationships between teachers and struggling students were frequently troubled. Special education was not even considered an option until a student finished second grade, which resulted in failures to provide early interventions (Gersten & Dimino, 2006).

Since teachers had historically been in charge of assessing their own needs, the need for professional development increased. Teachers began attending professional development sessions based on their perceived necessities. Once teachers attended workshops, they would share information with their school and then look for ways to incorporate the new information into their classroom routines (Bean, 2004). Today, the greatest focal point is on the results of teacher instruction in the classroom, thus influencing districts, administrators, and teachers to have a greater stake in improving teacher instruction and educational practices to increase student achievement (Avalos et al., 2009).

#### *Effective vs. Ineffective Teachers*

Professional development practices that are centered on the needs of teachers will potentially produce more positive and valuable changes in beliefs of teachers and their practices. However, effective teaching does not just rely on competent teaching strategies in the classroom. It is also determined by the teachers' effects on students. By studying consequences of teacher behavior toward students in the classroom, it can be determined what behaviors result in desirable student accomplishments. Teachers have great influences on their students, and they must be mindful of their knowledge, pedagogical skills, and character (Avalos et al., 2009).

The character of both effective and ineffective teachers regarding themselves, their students, and their teaching abilities may differ slightly. Ineffective teachers are often very unsure about their practices and how to

handle difficult situations. On the other hand, effective teachers believe they can tackle any situation that is put before them; their self-esteem is high. They are also able to convey caring thoughts toward their students, so the students know they are worthwhile and important, and high expectations are set for students as well. Ineffective teachers do not set such high expectations for students, and they do not put forth positive beliefs about student achievement and worth (Avalos et al., 2009). With so many reading programs available, it may be hard to remember that ultimately teachers, not reading programs, teach children to read. Teachers must be able to make immediate decisions to respond to individual reading difficulties in children. They must also challenge students according to their individual needs and not utilize identical classroom instruction for everyone. A truly skillful teacher can observe different learning paths and conceive appropriate instruction that fits the children's literacy needs (Lose, 2007). Positive qualities or dispositions that effective teachers demonstrate include:

- Listening to students' concerns and showing genuine interest in their well-being, both physically and emotionally;
- Being fair and respectful towards all students and treating misbehaviors on equal and individual levels; creating an environment for all students to succeed;
- Being professional and friendly during interactions with students; has an understanding of students' interests both in and out of school; is fun and can make jokes appropriately;

- Showing enthusiasm for teaching, particularly in reading and language arts; uses “teachable moments” often;
- Motivating students and providing them with feedback in a timely manner;
- Understanding areas of personal strengths and weaknesses and reflects on events to improve practices; sets high expectations for personal classroom performance and possesses high efficacy; and
- Using time outside of school to prepare lessons, participate in collegial activities, or seek professional development; possesses a positive outlook on life and teaching (Avalos et al., 2009)

Studies conducted in 2001 and 2002 on the amount of time that is required to produce adequate professional development sessions have yielded conflicting results. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) concluded that high-quality professional development requires a considerable number of hours and must be continuous. A later study conducted by Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, and Yoon (2002) did not determine a specific number of hours and duration for professional development sessions to be a factor among substantial changes in instruction. A second study conducted in 2002 by Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole concluded that professional development done over the course of a year was one quality of successful schools. Therefore, researchers have not determined exactly how much time teachers should be engaged in these sessions to generate the best possible results for every instructional situation (Kinnuncan-Welsch et al., 2006).

There are three important issues when professional development is designed to further growth in teachers' dispositions. First, a nonthreatening atmosphere must be created. In order for involvement and participation to occur, activities geared toward the needs and interests of the learners must be set, and they should also have a sense of identification and belonging. Second, relevant information and experiences should be conveyed. Diverse approaches and formats should be used to provide information to the learners, and focus must be on important values and structures linked to the predetermined needs of the group. This ensures that knowledge is conveyed in the most effective manner. Third, there are three key learning conditions that encourage the exploration and discovery of personal significance: reflection, discussion groups, and relaxed structure and timing. These key learning conditions may be done by using individual projects, lessons, workshops, courses, units, and whole programs of study. Each one of these components plays a vital role in the quest of professional expertise (Avalos et al., 2009).

#### *Preservice and Inservice Teacher Instruction*

Twenty-first century classrooms rely on effective teachers to have a conceptual understanding of the knowledge and capabilities of their students. Appropriate instruction must be devised based on strengths and weaknesses of students. Teachers must have a complete understanding of effective instructional strategies to effectively help students. Preservice course work serves as a foundation for teacher effectiveness, but once teachers are in the classroom, they must receive valuable inservice education that can build upon

the information gained during preservice course work. If teachers are to build upon their understanding, stay informed of new practices according to research, and to understand how to incorporate their inservice opportunities to the context in which they teach, they must understand how to support the development of literacy skills in students. New teachers require support given by mentorship programs. Similarly, more experienced teachers must recognize the need for efficient inservice opportunities (Avalos et al., 2009). The International Reading Association (IRA) has developed many reports to outline standards of reading teacher training programs. The most contemporary statement (International Reading Association, 2003) about teacher preparation programs can be found in the report, *Prepared to Make a Difference: Research Evidence on How Some of America's Best College Programs Prepare Teachers of Reading*. The IRA depicts the preparation of reading teachers as a top priority. There is a large inconsistency of the number of required credit hours for completion of reading instruction programs. These required credit hours can range from 3 hours to 24 hours. IRA also places emphasis on building from undergraduate expectations to inservice teacher expectations. Ongoing professional development is important for creating a literate environment (Barone & Morrell, 2007). The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory wrote a policy report to outline the needs for improvement in preservice teacher education. It indicates that preservice teachers are not given an adequate amount of information or classroom experience to build sufficient skills to teach reading comprehension. The report stated that research had been done on every state using its teacher education

programs, and it found that none of the states met IRA literacy standards of at least 15 credit hours in reading, language arts, children's literature, and developmental practices. Most programs only required 6 hours in reading.

Three recommendations were made at the conclusion of the report:

1. Require that teacher-education programs align with research-based standards for teaching reading.
2. Require school districts to provide professional development opportunities targeted to reading within all content areas.
3. Require states to align teacher testing at each certification step with research-based standards for teaching reading. (Avalos et al., 2009, p. 121)

The report also indicates crucial areas that should be implemented in preservice and inservice instruction. "These areas include (a) understanding the psychology of reading development, (b) possessing knowledge of language structures and application, (c) understanding and effectively using best instructional practices, and (d) using a variety of assessments to inform instruction" (Avalos et al., 2009, p. 122).

The IRA has created three central topics that are focused on undergraduate reading curriculums. These topics, found in the report *Prepared to Make a Difference: Research Evidence on How Some of America's Best College Programs Prepare Teachers of Reading*, are:

- (a) foundational knowledge and dispositions (reading development, oral, and written language, and how to read reports and enact them in

classrooms); (b) instructional strategies and curricular materials (how to select materials, knowledge to develop strategic readers, and matching materials to student needs); and (c) assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation (assessing students and matching instruction, communicating results to parents and stakeholders). (Barone & Morrell, 2007, p. 171)

### *Ethnicities and Student Achievement*

Many countries around the world have strong disparities in the number of students from ethnic minorities in their schools. In the United States, over 70% of African American and Hispanic students attend schools in which the majority of the population consists of ethnic minorities. It is not uncommon for people to believe that high numbers of ethnic minority students may lead to negative educational and social experiences. However, strategies have been developed from policy makers worldwide in the last decades to obtain more equality in students' ethnicities. These strategies are still debated and include busing, redrawing attendance zones, and magnet schools setting quotas for admissions; however these strategies have been shown to have limited effects and attendance quotas may draw legal attention if they predominantly refer to ethnicity. Other attempts to improve the quality of high ethnic minority share schools are increasing funding to those schools or increasing the salaries of teachers to keep effective teachers in these schools (van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010).

Several different ethnic minorities all over the world have been studied for their compositional effect (the arrangement of the situation) on schools and

education. A substantial amount of school segregation along ethnic lines exists in most of the countries that were studied. Ethnic minorities from around the world also encounter similar gaps and issues other than educational inequalities. These issues include wage-gaps, ethnic employment discrimination, and racism (van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010).

The situations of disadvantaged ethnic minorities are broadly analogous across countries, but there are also some notable differences. Of course, the width of academic achievement gaps and the amount of segregation and discrimination vary. Histories and situations of three specific minority groups are examined. These groups are immigrants, African Americans and indigenous people. Immigrants stand out from the other two groups because of their decision to move to another country for better opportunities, such as better economic prospects, liberty from tyranny, family members in the new country, or a combination of these. Immigrants in different countries face similar challenges, such as difficulties adapting to new culture and unfamiliarity with new languages. African Americans are notable through the compulsory way in which their ancestors had to immigrate and through a long history of obvious and legal discrimination. The achievement gap with the ethnic majority is bigger for African Americans than for most other groups. "Indigenous people" are defined as the original inhabitants of countries once colonized by Europeans and now dominated by their descendants (van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010, p. 240). This group shares a history of oppression by the dominant population group and is often in denial of their own culture. They may not receive any education in their

own language or may experience overt or unspoken discouragement of the practicing of their old cultural habits (van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010).

There are four proposed categorical causes about why a student would perform poorer as part of an ethnic minority. They are: direct peer interaction, teacher practice, school quality, and research artifacts. Direct peer interaction occurs inevitably when students interact with each other on a daily basis. They can possibly influence each other's attitudes, behavior, and school performance. Students who are not very well motivated may persuade others not to do their best. Disorderly students may keep others from learning, while students with more understanding may help their classmates. The ways in which ethnic composition affects achievement are mostly unrelated to students' ethnicities; however peers' ethnicity is applicable because of its correlation with variables such as motivation, socioeconomic status, and ability. It is nearly impossible to disconnect effects of ethnicity from effects of its correlates; therefore, researchers are usually interested in the effects of peer ethnicity and its correlates. There are two means of direct peer interaction that are completely tied to ethnicity. They are:

- “ 1. Tensions between races that may interfere with learning
2. Differences between the ethnic minority students' mother tongue and the country's official language” (van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010, p. 241)

The greater the minority rate, the higher the chances are that those students will mainly speak their mother tongue among themselves in school, have less interaction with the majority's language and will therefore not learn the new

culture's language as well. This is mostly true for immigrant students (van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010).

Teachers may deliberately adjust their teaching style to the group of children in the class in order to adapt their style to the many academic and emotional needs of the students. Unfortunately, a phenomenon known as the "Pygmalion Effect" may take place. When this happens, teachers may unintentionally have baselessly low expectations of ethnic minority students that may be conveyed to the entire class. This can cause students to believe less of their own competence and consequently lower their performances. Additionally, teacher quality and the teaching staff may be related to the number of ethnic minority students in the school. It is very common in many countries for schools with high minority rates, or at least a less fortunate student population, to have difficulties in attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers. This typically results in the schools ending up with less-qualified or less experienced teachers and has to contend with higher teacher-turnover rates (van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010).

Finally, even without a causal effect of composition, students in a school or class with a high proportion of ethnic minorities will generally score lower on achievement tests because of artifacts. There are student attributes that concurrently increase the expected rate of ethnic minority students in their school or class and that negatively affect their achievement. An example of this would be an ethnic majority child going to school with many ethnic minority children and getting low test scores, or the child may perform poorly because of a composition

effect or because his parents are poor and consequently lives in a poor neighborhood where the ethnic minority rate is high and where the schools also have a high ethnic minority rate (van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010). Other literature notes that “when racial and economic gaps combine with gender achievement gaps in reading, the result is disturbingly low achievement for poor, Black, and Hispanic boys,” (Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010, p. 357).

#### *Socioeconomic Status and Student Achievement*

In 2005, EdSource, Stanford University, University of California-Berkley, and American Institutes for Research completed a 2-year study to determine which K-5 instructional practices yielded the highest levels of student performance among some schools in California. The intention of this investigation was to try to explain the large gaps in California’s Academic Performance Index (API) with focus on schools serving a large amount of low-income students. The API scores are derived from student performance on the annual California Standards Tests. This study was conducted using 257 California elementary schools, and more than 5,500 teachers from those schools completed surveys that inquired about various classroom, school, and district procedures. A high degree of focus was placed on “effective schools”, which were identified by previous literature that described specific practices leading to success (Williams et al., 2006).

The study established four specific areas that were most strongly related to higher API scores:

- “1. Prioritize student achievement

2. Implement a coherent, standards-based instructional program
3. Use assessment data to improve student achievement and instruction
4. Ensure the availability of instructional resources” (Williams et al., 2006, p. 2)

Three other areas that were explored-“involving and supporting parents, encouraging teacher collaboration and professional development, and enforcing high expectations for student behavior” (Williams et al., 2006, p. 2)

- yielded positive correlations with student achievement as well, but these correlations were much more ineffective. Data also suggested that student achievement is greater in schools in which there is alignment between the actions of teachers, principals, and district officials regarding academic performance. Teachers who worked in successful schools reported instructional consistency and curricular alignment among grades within their schools. They also reported strong communication by the principal regarding the school’s vision, high expectations for student education, and teacher standards for meeting academic achievement goals (Williams et al., 2006).

The conclusion of this study states that, “The range of API scores in our sample suggests that while the socioeconomic background of students is one predictor of academic achievement, it is not the sole factor. (Williams et al., 2006, p. 20)” Schools can make a difference with their approaches and resources. This study also suggests that schools serving low-income families may benefit from coordinating parent involvement strategies that are centered on the school’s instructional program and their children’s progress. This approach may fit well

with the four successful schools practices because they all focus on student learning and achievement (Williams et. al, 2006). Collins, Kenway, and McLeod (2000) found that “socio-economic status makes a larger difference than gender to Year 12 performance even...where girls generally do better than boys” (p. 4). An “analysis of the data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of 2000 shows that there is a significant relationship between the results from the student assessments and the students’ SES [socio-economic status]” (OECD, 2004, p. 162). These data is explicit in the fact that gender is by not the only factor influencing literacy achievement and that the way that gender crosses with other social and cultural factors such as SES must be looked into further (Watson et al., 2010).

#### *Gender and Student Achievement*

Much concern has been given to boys’ literacy underachievement by journalists, educational policy makers, and scholars in the field of education. It is well-known that boys do not perform as well as girls on literacy benchmark or standardized tests. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (2009), female students steadily score higher than boys on average in both reading and writing. This is held up by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results. The largest gender gap was found in reading during 2006. In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, girls outperformed boys on average. Using test scores and achievement gaps, such as those described above, a sense of “moral panic” has

developed concerning boys' literacy skills and engagement (Watson et al., 2010, p. 257).

It is essential to keep in mind that not all boys are at risk and poor performance is not guaranteed. Populist explanations depict boys' underachievement in literacy as part of their biological make-up and lack of male role models. Gender gaps vary in size from country to country, as reported by PISA 2000. This suggests that some countries are doing a more efficient job of dealing with boys' literacy underachievement than other countries. Since not all boys are at risk, the question of which boys and girls are at greatest risk for failure must be asked and reflected on how other serious contributing factors influence boys' engagement and achievement (Watson et. al, 2010). Boys and girls appear to have natural or fixed characteristics that describe who they are and establish their natural interests and behaviors. Essentialist arguments concurrently believe that the biological composition of boys is the cause of their behavioral differences from girls. Masculinity and femininity are inherent, so educational success depends upon recognizing and accommodating these qualities. It has become common beliefs that "boys will be boys," and we should cater to the way boys are mentally wired if we are ever to improve their achievement in literacy. It can be difficult to modify learned behaviors from social contexts, but those behaviors are still only learned-not inborn-behaviors. It is hard to argue against the fact that gendered identities are not influenced by cultures and society; however, these influences are commonly silenced when they contribute to boys' understandings of academics and affect their

engagement in literacy activities. International research on masculinities is also ignored when it examines the ways in which societal expectations control what it means to be a “normal” boy and when significant impacts fall upon students’ lives and engagement with learning. If boys score higher than girls, a new order is realized. When girls outperform boys, expression is used to create claims of victimization and feminization, which can be understood as a threat to social order. Stories of victimization that currently surround the boys’ literacy crisis are flooded in antifeminist reactions, gender binaries, and issues of power (Watson et al., 2010).

The feminization of schooling is a part of the blame for the underachievement of boys, as indicated by mainstream media and educational policies. Boys may be disadvantaged by the feminized teaching styles and resources of their female teachers. Proponents of essentialist thinking declare that the feminization of schooling gives girls a greater and unfair advantage, and this must be corrected. Boys’ declining achievement levels have pushed concern for their academic performance ahead of concern for girls’ performance. Strategies such as hiring more male teachers, using more boy-friendly strategies and resources are presented as logical solutions. However, research has shown that there may not be a significant correlation between gender and preferred learning styles, and caution has been giving to not look at boys too simply and lose sight of them as individuals (Watson et al., 2010).

Boys’ literacy underachievement remains attributed to female teachers’ failure to become accustomed to boys’ interests and learning styles. It can be

argued that male teachers as role models are better equipped policy makers, thus rendering them a common-sense approach to boys' literacy issues, particularly in elementary school and in feminized subjects such as English; however qualifications of teachers should be given priority over their gender (Watson et al., 2010).

In order to properly address boys' literacy underachievement, we should look outside of school walls at the governing and oppressive societal images of masculinity. Evidence suggests that many teenage boys view reading as "uncool" and may face retorts from classmates if they associate themselves with literature. Similarly, at-risk boys may become immune to labels of failure and spend their time looking for other ways to feel power and privilege in their lives. It may be more beneficial to confront culturally and socially created understandings of masculinity through educational reforms than to strengthen and provide for them through a boy-friendly environment. Ideas that literacy is feminized and is not a subject that "real" boys will be good at must also be challenged in order to engage boys in literacy. What many boys must do to raise their literacy achievement is to:

- read more;
- listen and focus more to teachers and other students;
- demonstrate greater meticulousness;
- be more thorough and take more pride in their work; and
- work collaboratively and express themselves better in all areas of communication.

As long as these activities are viewed as feminine, some boys will remain lagging behind their girl counterparts, not because they are boys, but because social and cultural ideas of gender continue to be accepted (Watson et al., 2010).

### Meeting Today's Challenges: Teacher Professional Development and Reading Instruction

Thomas R. Guskey (2000) defines professional development as “those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students” (p. 12). The typical goals for professional development sessions are to bring awareness and change in teacher practices and to improve student learning (Bean, 2004). Professional development is vital to the formation and the improvement of reading instruction (Cobb, 2005). Nearly all educators would agree that professional development is essential in the teaching profession. Continuous learning and professional development offer a shared community of teachers as learners where intricate areas of learning standards, instructional materials, and a range of assessments can be organized (Dole & Donaldson, 2006). According to research, every dollar spent on professional development for teachers generates higher student achievement results than any other spending of district funds. The lowest-performing students are the most vulnerable to classroom instruction and require the most skilled teachers (Lose, 2007).

The standard of excellence in professional development should be set by educators. Values and information learned should be intertwined, and there should also be a strong relationship between resource investment and supporting research. Our daily professional lives and the education we give to our students must be flawless. However, we know this to be true, but often times there is an enormous gap between this and what is actually done in many school systems. There are three criteria mostly responsible for successful professional development standards: integrity, efficacy, and diligence (Reeves, 2000)

### *Integrity*

The word “integrity” can be an emotionally-charged word. To insinuate that a professional development program may lack this can cause major issues. Still, a violation of integrity expectations is when the practice of a system cancels out its values. An example of this would be if a professional development program was promoted based on the values of the system, but it was actually evaluated based on the popularity with the staff. Making sure integrity is present can be an uncomfortable and unpopular ordeal, but the activities must be compared to the goals. Dissatisfaction should be welcomed, and obsolete or possibly harmful practices should be removed. At that time, new, successful practices can be implemented (Reeves, 2000).

It is not difficult to determine if your professional development programs have integrity. Begin by comparing the activities to the goals. Collaboration among faculty is always valued, but most professional development programs consist of a speaker who lectures, and the faculty has very little time to actually

collaborate about the information presented. Student work can be incorporated into staff development programs to focus on their needs. Many times staff development programs are used to validate decisions and incorporate students who are selected based on their previous learning instead of the difference that could be made toward them. As mentioned above, many professional development programs are evaluated based on staff popularity instead of the challenge of new and promising practices which retains staff within their comfort zones. In this way, survival can become a reinforcement of the status quo instead of tackling feeble practices (Reeves, 2000).

### *Efficacy*

Efficacy is very important to professional development because it is “the power to make a meaningful difference in the lives of the students we serve” (Reeves, 2000, “Efficacy-Making a Difference” para.1). Improved student achievement is involved with research indicating that certain practices in teaching, assessment, classroom organization, and curriculum are all required to help students reach academic success. One must understand that “truth and reason, rather than personal taste, will determine the acceptability of professional development enterprises” (Reeves, 2000, “Efficacy-Making a Difference” para.1). In many districts, the notion of academic freedom is linked with efficacy as a matter of personal taste. Academic freedom protects teachers’ welfare as they discover new ideas and hypotheses, but it does not protect destructive practices. An example of this is a school nurse believing that academic freedom releases her from the mundane task of vaccinations. Another example is a sports coach

who believes academic freedom liberates him from holding practice. Research and possible agreement is put by the wayside and replaced by the current trend of the moment (Reeves, 2000).

### *Diligence*

Diligence must be practiced in conjunction with integrity and efficacy in professional development programs. A program is still ineffective without diligence, which is “the application of lessons learned to the classroom” (Reeves, 2000, “Diligence-The Application of Learning” para.1). An example of this is teachers’ use of a six-trait writing practice program within their district, which has integrity because it matched the goals of the system, it has efficacy because research supports the idea that improving writing is linked to higher student achievement, but students’ writing abilities decline over the next year. The answer lies in the fact that a small percentage of teachers actually utilized the six-trait writing practice within their classrooms. Diligence is about action. The only professional development programs that can change rhetoric into action are the ones that are based on data and practice and that expect the participants to dive into this work rather than to be entertained (Reeves, 2000).

Professional development is mandated and evaluated by districts to ensure its success with student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Schools that manage their professional development sessions (rather than the sessions managing them) typically take charge and assess effectiveness relative to student achievement. In order to do this, schools must evaluate primarily during planning stages, formatively during the sessions as the implementation is

presented and summatively to examine teacher growth and student achievement (Cobb, 2005). A larger focus on implementation of efforts rather than the amount of training sessions may be the key to successful professional development. If teachers do not accept what is being taught in these sessions, there is a greater chance that the information will not be implemented successfully or correctly (Bean, 2004). Teachers must be able to connect what they have learned in professional development to their classroom practices. They can deepen their understanding and use what they have learned in innovative ways, because instructional moments require adaptive teaching (Kinnucan-Welsch et al., 2006). Teachers should also perceive professional development as their responsibility and a necessary element throughout their career. In order for teachers to stay apprised of new knowledge in literacy and maintain the appropriate tools for placing the information into their instructional framework, ongoing preparation is necessary (Avalos et al., 2009).

If the professional development content meaningful and of high-quality, student learning goals should be connected, and the goals should be clear. Content standards and district courses of study for student learning should drive the purpose for professional development sessions. As a result, these sessions must be based on theory and practice essential to content knowledge. Clear statements of what teachers and students should understand ought to guide the professional development objectives. Sessions should also persuade and support teachers to become more thoughtful and reflective in their instruction. However, it is not enough to be active in seeking professional development;

teachers should also analyze the instruction and refer back to their own teaching (Kinnucan-Welsch et al., 2006).

Professional development sessions may take many forms such as lessons presented to teachers by teachers, college course work, sessions organized by schools or companies to increase knowledge about a certain topic, or a mentoring approach. It may be difficult to settle on the amount and style of professional development needed for a particular situation (Bean, 2004).

Professional development in reading instruction may also be done with the use of literacy coaches. (L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010).

Learning new techniques and strategies for teaching Reading is difficult; however teachers can get support and assistance in the classroom when Reading coaches help with professional development. Advantages to using literacy coaches are that it provides continual service, on-the-job training, and mentoring. Research has shown that if professional development training occurs within the school setting it will transfer to their classroom practices and become more effective than would training outside the school setting (Dole & Donaldson, 2006).

Literacy coaches may provide service to teachers in the form of group presentations, small teacher groups, grade-level meetings and individualized support of instructional and assessment skills. Coaches must possess a great deal of knowledge about their content area as well as understand how to work effectively with teachers. Teachers are most likely going to be open to coaching when they are involved in the planning process, see an immediate use for the

information, and know that the support is problem-centered. This form of professional development must begin with successful classroom experiences of the literacy coach. Typically, coaches have continuously participated in professional development sessions themselves to build on the knowledge and skills acquired during their beginning certification programs. Advanced degrees also help gain deeper knowledge about literacy, which in turn helps coaches understand how to work with teachers to improve classroom practices (L'Allier, Elish-Piper & Bean, 2010).

Professional development, teacher learning, and teacher change has been the focus of a great deal of literature during the past decade, such as large- and small-scale studies, case studies of classroom teaching, assessments of detailed approaches to advancing teaching and learning, and surveys of teachers about their preservice development and in-service professional development experiences. Characteristics of high-quality professional development have emerged from research. James Hiebert draws attention to the need for high standards, subject matter focus, and in-depth learning prospects for teachers (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). According to Hiebert (1999):

Research on teacher learning shows that fruitful opportunities to learn new teaching methods share several core features: (a) ongoing (measured in years) collaboration of teachers for purposes of planning with (b) the explicit goal of improving students' achievement of clear learning goals, (c) anchored by attention to students' thinking, the curriculum, and pedagogy, with (d) access to alternative ideas and

methods and opportunities to observe these in action and to reflect on the reasons for their effectiveness. (p. 15)

Lists of characteristics, much like the one above, appear frequently in the literature on effective professional development; however there few instances of exact evidence about the extent to which these characteristics correlate to positive results for teachers and students. Some studies conclude that professional development experiences that contain at least most of these characteristics can possibly have a considerable and positive influence on teachers' classroom instruction and student achievement. However, few studies have clearly evaluated the effects of different characteristics of professional development, and no specific list of characteristics has been determined to be the most effective (Garet et al., 2001).

According to the National Staff Development Council (2001), there are three context standards for professional development:

- Learning Communities
- Leadership
- Resources

### *Learning Communities*

A goal of high levels of learning for all students, teachers, and administrators from staff development must include a form of professional learning that is specifically dissimilar from the workshop-driven method. Ongoing teams that meet regularly for learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving are the most effective. These teams enable their members to improve their daily

work to improve the success of school district and school goals for student achievement. These teams also run with a commitment to constant improvement and experimentation. Administrator learning communities can also be established to meet on a regular basis. The goals for administrator learning communities are “to deepen participants' understanding of instructional leadership, identify practical ways to assist teachers in improving the quality of student work, critique one another's school improvement efforts, and learn important skills such as data analysis and providing helpful feedback to teachers” (Reeves, 2000, Learning Communities section, para. 4).

### *Leadership*

Effective leaders create policies and organizational structures that encourage ongoing professional learning and constant improvement. They continuously enhance the school or district's work through the ongoing evaluation of staff development's effectiveness in achieving student learning goals. Skillful leaders also make certain there's an equal distribution of resources to accomplish district goals. They make certain that employee contracts, annual calendars, and daily schedules provide ample time for learning and collaboration as part of the workday. Additionally, they also align district motivational systems with knowledge and skill and improvements in student success rather than items such as courses fulfilled or continuing education units earned.

### *Resources*

Professional learning may be considered an investment that will pay future bonuses in better staff performance and student learning or it may be viewed as

an expense that lessens a school district's ability to meet financial needs in other areas. Many school districts may consider the latter to be true; however, the National Staff Development Council's (2001) opinion is that well designed and executed professional development for school employees is "an essential long-term investment in successfully teaching all students to high standards" (Resources section, para. 1).

Professional development resources may fund trainers who aid teachers and administrators in implementing new instructional techniques and successfully use technology for student achievement. They may provide instructional coaches who help teachers and principals execute standards-based curriculum in classrooms. In addition, these resources may also support the use of outside consultants who aid the schools and teams in planning and evaluation of program efforts. The National Staff Development Council (2001) also believes that at least 30% of the technology budget be spent on teacher development in the area of technology. District investments in technology will not produce the planned benefits for students without opportunities to learn, plan, and practice what they have learned from technology training (National Staff Development Council, 2001).

The National Research Council argued in a review of recent research on the cognitive sciences that:

Research studies are needed to determine the efficacy of various types of professional development activities, including pre-service and in-service seminars, workshops, and summer institutes. Studies should include

professional development activities that are extended over time and across broad teacher learning communities in order to identify the processes and mechanisms that contribute to the development of teachers' learning communities. (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999, p. 240)

Unfortunately, professional development sessions may be rendered ineffective because of a lack of strong training programs, highly complicated and varied classroom needs, time constraints, and complex content areas. Teachers often receive only one or two sessions and do not acquire the full understanding needed to implement the practices that were taught. Teachers may not have adequate time to devote to tasks beyond lesson planning, teaching, assessing, paperwork, and meetings. One-time workshops are usually the norm for districts that want to utilize professional development; however by utilizing this method, teachers and administrators are lacking an understanding of how to refine and improve their plans over time. Thus, an adequate amount of follow-up from the trainer(s) or support for implementing changes is not given (Avalos et al., 2009). Consequently, initiatives may fall through the cracks, encouraging the title of "wasteland of education" given to professional development (Bean, 2004, p. 12).

The International Reading Association (IRA) deems teacher professional development as one component of the key to student success. According to IRA's president, Kathryn Au, who argues that teachers and their perspectives have not been the forefront of the United States' standards initiative: "Teachers are the critical element in any push to improve student learning." (IRA, 2009,

“Focus Should,” para. 1) She also believes the direction taken by the standards initiative is not consistent with the belief that professional development is the key to improving literacy learning for students. “Teachers want the best for their students,” Au commented, “and it is not yet clear whether the standards initiative will provide the kind of guidance and support for teachers that will help them do a better job” (IRA, 2009, “Focus Should,” para. 5). Au is publically explicit about her vision for a focus on “strong programs of multi-year support for the professional development of teachers and the creation of a transparent process that includes teachers as members of key working groups” (IRA, 2009, “Focus Should,” para. 6). Au states, “After all, it is teachers who make a difference with students in the classroom. Let’s give teachers the respect and support they need and deserve” (IRA, 2009, “Focus Should,” para. 7).

Kathryn Au has outlined three areas necessary for success:

- challenging goals that raise the bar for academic achievement,
- assessment to examine students’ progress toward meeting these goals,  
and
- professional development that aids teachers in providing students with the instruction needed. (IRA, 2009)

Au also says:

Research shows that states already successful in improving student achievement through standards are those that have made substantial, multi-year investments in the professional development of their teachers. Common sense, as well as research, tells us that merely setting the bar

higher, and then publicizing the results when students fail to clear the bar, does nothing to help students, teachers, schools, and communities in the long run. We already know that new standards and new tests alone, no matter how rigorous, are not enough to give us the higher levels of student achievement we desire as a nation. The professional development of teachers is the missing ingredient needed for success. (IRA, 2009, "Requirements for Success," para. 4)

### *A Case Study Analysis*

The Eisenhower program is a foundation of funding for professional development activities, not an exact method to professional development. The program allows encouragement for activities that include workshops and conferences, study groups, collaborative professional networks, task force work, and peer coaching. Professional development activities aided by funding from the Eisenhower program may also obtain funding through states, school districts, and other federal programs. As a result, this study about the results of Eisenhower-assisted activities on teacher instruction also applies to professional development funded through other sources (Garet et al., 2001).

During a national evaluation of the Eisenhower Professional Development Program, a federal program which supports professional development for teachers, mainly in mathematics and science, a study was conducted to examine the relationship between "features of professional development that have been identified in the literature and self-reported change in teachers' knowledge and skills and classroom teaching practices" (Garet et al., 2001, p. 918). "Best

practices” identified by literature on professional development were integrated to create a set of scales describing the characteristics of activities supported by the Eisenhower program. Those practices were then tested to investigate their effects on teacher outcomes. Data was collected from a Teacher Activity Survey administered as part of the national evaluation of the Eisenhower Professional Development Program (Garet et al., 2001).

A nationally representative sample of teachers was surveyed in 1998. These teachers had attended Eisenhower-assisted activities over a period from July 1 through December 31, 1997. The survey was carried out by using a national probability sample of school districts and SAHE (State Agencies for Higher Education) recipients receiving Eisenhower funds. Responses were received from 1,027 teachers, on behalf of activities sustained by Eisenhower funds in 358 districts and SAHE recipients. The overall teacher response rate was 72%. Responses were self-reports of teacher experiences and activities (not direct judgments from participant opinions) based on specific professional development activities that were drawn in a random sampling process (Garet et al., 2001).

These results of this survey suggested many ways for enhancing professional development. First, they provide confirmation on a national probability sample on “best practices” in professional development, based on literature. The results pointed out that:

Sustained and intensive professional development is more likely to have an impact, as reported by teachers, than is shorter professional

development. Our results also indicate that professional development that focuses on academic subject matter (content), gives teachers opportunities for “hands-on” work (active learning), and is integrated into the daily life of the school (coherence), is more likely to Produce enhanced knowledge and skills. (Garet et al., 2001, p. 935)

The effects of traditional and reform activities are generally not direct effects on teacher outcomes. Reform activities tend to yield more favorable outcomes mostly because they usually consist of a longer duration. Traditional activities outcomes can measure up to the outcomes of reform activities if they are of the same duration of time. Therefore, to advance professional development, it is more significant to concentrate on the length, overall involvement, and the core features (i.e., content, active learning, and coherence) than type. The data also provides substantial support that “the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, subject, or grade is related both to coherence and active learning opportunities, which in turn are related to improvements in teacher knowledge and skill and changes in classroom practice” (Garet et al., 2001, p. 936).

Finally, the results propose a clear track for schools and districts:

In order to provide useful and effective professional development that has a meaningful effect on teacher learning and fosters improvements in classroom practice, district funds should be focused on providing high-quality professional development experiences. This would require schools and districts either to focus resources on fewer teachers, or to invest

sufficient resources so that more teachers can benefit from high-quality professional development.” (Garet et al., 2001, p. 937)

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Overview

In this study the researcher surveyed teachers employed by District A and District B in southern Mississippi. The purpose of this survey was to analyze the perceptions of four levels of teachers: third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade regarding their experiences with the professional development sessions they attended during the 2009-2010 school year. Also, the purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between Language Arts MCT2 state test scores in grades 3-6 and the utilization of the information presented in professional development sessions for teacher instructional practices during the 2009-2010 school year. Finally, this study was written to analyze the relationship between teachers who received follow-up training after initial professional development sessions, those who did not, and MCT2 Language Arts scores. This project was reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensured that this project involving human subjects followed federal regulations (see Appendix A).

#### Research Design

This study was conducted using quantitative research data. The dependent variable in this study was MCT2 Language Arts test score data from the 2009-2010 school year. MCT2 data “measures a student’s knowledge of grade-level curriculum” (Mississippi Department of Education, 2009, “Introduction,” para. 1). One purpose of teacher professional development is to

enhance classroom instruction and practices to maximize student learning.

According to the Mississippi Department of Education (2009):

The Mississippi Curriculum Test, Second Edition, (MCT2) is a measure of student achievement in Language Arts and Mathematics in grades 3-8 (including special education students) based on the *2006 Mississippi Language Arts Framework - Revised* and *2007 Mississippi Mathematics Framework - Revised*. In addition to being the basis for state accountability in these grades, the MCT2 is designed to meet the federal testing requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), 2001*.

(Mississippi Department of Education, 2009, "Introduction," para. 1) The results of these assessments will be used in the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System, specifically the Achievement, Growth, and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Models. The results will also provide information that will be used for the purpose of improving instruction and accelerating student achievement. (Mississippi Department of Education, 2009, "Overview of the MCT2," para. 1).

Status variables included in this research are race, age, number of years of experience, and class size during reading instruction. The independent variables in this study were how many times the teacher used information in his/her classroom from professional development sessions, how many sessions included some sort of follow-up training after the initial session, the amount of time professional development takes from the teacher, and teacher perceptions

of Reading professional development. These variables were collected only once to complete this study.

### Participants

The participants in this study were elementary reading teachers who taught third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students in District A and District B. Approval of the survey instrument and the project was given by the superintendents of District A and District B (see Appendix B). Teachers must have had at least one year of prior teaching experience to participate in this study. Participants were grouped according to the grade level they taught during the 2009-2010 school year.

### Instrumentation

Through the use of a written survey (see Appendix C), the perceptions of the teachers regarding professional development in reading instruction were collected. The researcher produced the survey, which was distributed and collected from each elementary school in the participating districts. The results were then analyzed to determine the teachers' perceptions of the professional development sessions they attended during the 2009-2010 school year, to find relationships between teachers who used information in professional development, those who did not use the information, and MCT2 Language Arts scores, and to find relationships between teachers who received follow-up training for professional development, those that did not, and MCT2 Language Arts scores.

A panel of experts reviewed the written survey designed by the researcher. The three experts included two principals holding doctoral degrees in Educational Administration and a National Board Certified teacher who also holds awards such as the 2002 5th Congressional District Teacher of the Year and 2002 Teacher of the Year for District B. The experts answered six questions about the survey:

- Does the survey contain language that can be understood by the participants?
- Does the survey address specific and appropriate issues?
- Do you find any statements obtrusive or offensive?
- Are there any statements that you would exclude from the survey?
- Are there other statements that you would include that are not part of the survey?
- Would the participants understand the response choices?

The panel of experts did not find any issues with the survey. The survey was then given to 12 third-sixth grade elementary teachers in the District A for a pilot study. These teachers took the survey to help determine its validity and to give feedback about any discrepancies or confusion they encountered while completing the survey.

### *Reliability*

Once the pilot study had been completed, the researcher determined the survey's reliability by using the SPSS program for Windows, version 18, to run a Cronbach Alpha analysis. This scale was used to determine the reliability of the

15 Likert-type questions. According to this analysis, the researcher needed to delete four questions from the survey and reverse six questions in order to obtain a reliable Cronbach scale. Those four questions were removed, and the Cronbach's Alpha scale was used again. A reliability score of .830 was reached, indicating the remaining 11 Likert-type questions were 95.5% reliable for this study. The researcher was then able to proceed with surveying teachers for the actual study.

The survey was duplicated on 8.5-inch X 11-inch white paper. The twenty statements to be answered were contained on two sheets of paper stapled together along with the teacher cover letter (see Appendix D). The survey was distributed to teachers by the researcher and used to collect data. The instrument consisted of three subgroups:

- how many times the teacher used information in his/her classroom from professional development sessions they attended during the 2009-2010 school year-question 8;
- how many professional development sessions included some sort of follow-up training after the initial session-question 9;
- time-survey questions 12, 19, 20; and
- perceptions-survey questions 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

In the "time" subgroup, survey questions 12, 19, and 20 were negatively stated.

In the "perceptions" subgroup, survey questions 10, 11, 13, 14, and 17 were positively stated, while questions 15, 16, and 18 were negatively stated.

### *Survey Items*

The first of these subgroups asked teachers how many sessions they attended during the 2009-2010 school year.

The second of these subgroups asked teachers to report how many professional development sessions included follow-up training to help teachers implement the ideas from the session(s).

The third subgroup provided the teachers with the opportunity to report their perceptions of the amount of time professional development has taken from them. The following is a list of the statements used on the survey to determine the teachers' perceptions concerning this subgroup:

- Professional development sessions take too much time away from my classroom instruction/duties.
- I feel it is difficult to implement new ideas from professional development because it may require recreating/changing lesson plans.
- I was required to travel too much for professional development opportunities last year.

The fourth subgroup consisted of ten statements dealing with the teachers' perceptions of the professional development sessions they attended during the 2009-2010 school year and whether or not the information they gathered was useful and applicable to their classroom situation. The following is a list of the statements used on the survey in order to determine the teachers' perceptions concerning this subgroup:

- I feel that, overall, professional development has made a positive impact on my level of understanding of teaching reading.
- I feel comfortable and confident implementing ideas that I learned while attending professional development sessions.
- My students have been positively impacted through the training and information I received during professional development according to informal observations and classroom assessments.
- I believe professional development in reading instruction has increased my students' state test scores.
- The professional development sessions I attended were not relevant enough to my classroom situation.
- It is difficult for me to understand how to incorporate ideas presented in professional development sessions with my own instruction.
- The presenters for professional development sessions were well-qualified and knowledgeable about their topic.
- I am hesitant to attend professional development because it was not beneficial enough to me in the past.

### *Scoring*

A Likert-type scale of 1 to 6 was used to determine the level of agreement or disagreement that each teacher had for each question. A rating of 1 identified the teacher's *strongly disagree* status, while a rating of 5 identified statements in which the teacher holds a *strongly agree* status within each subgroup. A rating

of 6 indicated *No Answer*, and the teacher could not properly answer the question.

### Procedures

The researcher was granted permission by the Human Subjects Review Committee (see Appendix A) to conduct this study. An approval letter (see Appendix B) was sent to superintendents of District A and District B in southern Mississippi. The Teacher Professional Development Questionnaire (see Appendix C) was hand-delivered to the elementary schools that participated in this study. An introduction letter for teachers with instructions on completing and returning the survey was included (see Appendix D). At this time, the teachers accepted or declined to participate in this study. The volunteering participants completed the written survey, which took approximately 10 minutes to complete within the participants' school settings. The surveys were then collected by the researcher for analysis of the data. The data was organized using SPSS for Windows, version 18, for statistical analysis.

### Limitations

This study is limited to only those teachers who have at least begun teaching during the 2009-2010 school year. First-year teachers of 2010-2011 will not be able to complete the survey because they were not actively teaching during the 2009-2010 school year, nor did they attend any prior reading professional development sessions during that school year.

## Data Analysis

After the organized collection of data, the researcher used SPSS to identify the results of the teacher survey. These areas included how many times the teacher used information in his or her classroom from professional development sessions they attended during the 2009-2010 school year, how many professional development sessions included some sort of follow-up training after the initial session, the teachers' perceptions on the professional development sessions they attended, and the amount of time it takes for teachers to attend sessions and implement strategies.

This quantitative study tested the following research questions and hypothesis:

1. Are there differences in reading standardized test scores between teachers who utilize professional development in reading instruction and those that do not?

*(The term "utilization" is used in question 8 of the survey instrument: Of the professional development sessions you attended for reading instruction during the 2009-2010 school year, from how many sessions did you actually utilize information given by the trainer for your classroom practices?)*

Hypothesis: There will be no significant relationship between standardized test scores and utilization of professional development in Reading instruction.

This hypothesis was explored through the use of an Independent Samples T-test and its findings. The purpose of this procedure was to analyze teachers' classroom use of professional development training to determine if

there was a relationship between this usage and Language Arts standardized test scores for the 2009-2010 school year. An alpha value of .05 was used.

2. Are there differences in reading standardized test scores between teachers who received follow-up training for professional development and those that did not?

Hypothesis: There will be no significant relationship between standardized test scores and the amount of follow-up training after the initial professional development session in Reading instruction.

This hypothesis was explored through the use of an Independent Samples T-test and its findings. The purpose of this procedure was to analyze data concerning the number of professional development sessions that included on-going or follow-up training after the initial session to determine if there was a relationship between follow-up training and Language Arts standardized test scores for the 2009-2010 school year. An alpha value of .05 was used.

The following questions were analyzed using frequency, mean, and standard deviation tables in SPSS to determine the number of teachers who agree or disagree with the statements concerning these research questions found on the survey instrument:

2. What are teachers' opinions about effectively being able to utilize the information presented in the professional development sessions?

3. What are teachers' opinions about the belief that professional development in reading instruction is a worth-while cause and a good use of their time?

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### Introduction

This chapter provides descriptive and statistical findings from the completed study. In order to complete the study, the researcher hand-delivered 89 surveys to teachers from District A and District B for completion. The results of this study may help bring insight as to how much of an impact professional development may have on Language Arts MCT2 scores.

#### Demographics

The group of participants included 39 third grade teachers, 25 fourth grade teachers, 16 fifth grade teachers, and nine sixth grade teachers. Participants included a majority of white teachers at a rate of 95.5% with a very small amount of minority representation among the faculty. The participants also included 55 District A teachers and 34 District B teachers. Most class sizes were within the 19-24 range, and 61.8% of teachers were from District A. The majority of teachers had between 5 and 10 years of teaching experience as of the 2009-2010 school year and were between the ages of 41-50 at that time. See Table 1 for complete demographic information.

Table 1

*Characteristics of Participants*

Variable	n	%
Grade Level		
3	39	43.8
4	25	28.1
5	16	18.0
6	9	10.1
Race		
Caucasian	85	95.5
African American	4	4.5
District		
A	55	61.8
B	34	38.2
Class Size		
12-18	4	4.5
19-24	57	64.0
25-32	5	5.6
33-40	6	6.7
41-48	9	10.1

Table 1 (continued).

Variable	n	%
49-56	2	2.2
>65	6	6.7
Years of Experience		
<5	14	15.7
5-10	24	27.0
11-15	22	24.7
15-20	10	11.2
20-25	10	11.2
>25	9	10.1
Age		
21-30	14	15.7
31-40	32	36.0
41-50	33	37.1
>50	10	11.2

This study required an understanding of how many professional development sessions for Reading instruction that were attended by teachers during the 2009-2010 school year. The researcher counted any sessions that provided information for teaching Reading or supplementing Reading instruction, such as technology training to aid in classroom practices for Reading. This study also asked teachers to provide insight as to how many of these trainings were

actually utilized in the classroom for instructional purposes. A rate of 43.8% of teachers attended two professional development sessions in 2009-2010, and 38.2% utilized information from two sessions as well. See Table 2 for information on number of sessions and how many teachers used the information in their classrooms.

Table 2

*Reading Professional Development*

Variable	n	%
Sessions attended in 2009-2010		
0	3	3.4
1	9	10.1
2	39	43.8
3	20	22.5
4	15	16.9
5	0	0
>5	3	3.4
Use of Information in the Classroom		
0	5	5.6
1	22	24.7
2	34	38.2
3	20	22.5
4	6	6.7

Table 2 (continued).

Variable	n	%
5	0	0
>5	2	2.2

In order to understand the type of professional development training that was given, the researcher asked participants to provide information about how many sessions provided follow-up training once the initial session was over. The researcher included this information to try and find a relationship between follow-up training and increased standardized test scores. At a rate of 36%, most teachers received no follow-up training after their professional development sessions had ended. See Table 3 for information on how many teachers received follow-up training.

Table 3

*Follow-up for Professional Development*

Variable	n	%
Number of follow-up trainings		
0	32	36.0
1	24	27.0
2	23	25.8
3	8	9.0
4	1	1.1

Table 3 (continued).

Variable	n	%
5	0	0
>5	1	1.1

The dependent variable in this study was MCT2 Language Arts standardized test scores for the 2009-2010 school year. These scores were reported by the Mississippi Department of Education's web site. The researcher noted MCT2 scores for each school that was surveyed to try to find a relationship between test scores and the amount of professional development teachers attended. The researcher also looked for a relationship between these scores and the amount of follow-up training teachers received after their initial session.

Following the demographics section, the participants were asked 11 questions on a Likert-type scale of 1-6, with one indicating a strong disagreement with the statement, 5 indicating a strong agreement with the statement, and 6 indicating the participant was unable to answer the question. These questions asked the participants about their perceptions regarding the professional development they attended for Reading instruction during the 2009-2010 school year. See Table 4 for frequencies regarding each of the 11 Likert-type questions on the survey instrument.

Table 4

*Frequencies of Likert-Type Questions Concerning Teacher Perceptions*

Variable	n	%
Question 10-Overall Impact of Professional Development		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.1
Disagree	1	1.1
Neutral	15	16.9
Agree	48	53.9
Strongly Agree	21	23.6
Cannot Answer	3	3.4
Question 11-Comfortable and Confident Implementing Ideas		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	2	2.2
Neutral	7	7.9
Agree	52	58.4
Strongly Agree	25	28.1
Cannot Answer	3	3.4
Question 12-Too Much Time Away From Classroom		
Strongly Disagree	7	7.9
Disagree	44	49.4
Neutral	13	14.6

Table 4 (continued).

Variable	n	%
Agree	17	19.1
Strongly Agree	5	5.6
Cannot Answer	3	3.4
Question 13-Positively Impacting Students		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	4	4.5
Neutral	15	16.9
Agree	55	61.8
Strongly Agree	12	13.5
Cannot Answer	3	3.4
Question 14-Increased State Test Scores		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.1
Disagree	7	7.9
Neutral	38	42.7
Agree	28	31.5
Strongly Agree	12	13.5
Cannot Answer	3	3.4
Question 15-Not Relevant Enough to Me		
Strongly Disagree	11	12.4
Disagree	52	58.4

Table 4 (continued).

Variable	n	%
Neutral	16	18.0
Agree	5	5.6
Strongly Agree	2	2.2
Cannot Answer	3	3.4
Question 16-Difficult to Incorporate Ideas		
Strongly Disagree	14	15.7
Disagree	49	55.1
Neutral	12	13.5
Agree	10	11.2
Strongly Agree	1	1.1
Cannot Answer	3	3.4
Question 17-Presenters were Well-qualified		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	2	2.2
Neutral	7	7.9
Agree	38	42.7
Strongly Agree	39	43.8
Cannot Answer	3	3.4

Table 4 (continued).

Variable	n	%
Question 18-Hesitant to Attend Sessions		
Strongly Disagree	20	22.5
Disagree	43	48.3
Neutral	15	16.9
Agree	6	6.7
Strongly Agree	3	3.4
Cannot Answer	2	2.2
Question 19-Difficult to Change Lesson Plans to Fit Training		
Strongly Disagree	12	13.5
Disagree	51	57.3
Neutral	16	18.0
Agree	6	6.7
Strongly Agree	2	2.2
Cannot Answer	2	2.2
Question 20-Required to Travel Too Much for Training		
Strongly Disagree	37	41.6
Disagree	41	46.1
Neutral	5	5.6
Agree	1	1.1
Strongly Agree	2	2.2

### Descriptive Statistics

A descriptive analysis was used to find the mean and standard deviation of each perception question on the survey. See Table 5 for descriptive statistics on each individual perception question about the surveyed teachers' experiences with the professional development sessions they attended. Note the standard deviations for the descriptive survey questions are very low. This indicates very little variance in the respondents' answers.

Table 5

#### *Descriptive Statistics-Individual Perception Questions*

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Question				
10-Overall Impact	1.0	5.0	4.01	.76
11-Implement Ideas	2.0	5.0	4.16	.67
12-Time Away	1.0	5.0	3.36	1.07
13-Positive Impact	2.0	5.0	3.87	.70
14-Increase Scores	1.0	5.0	3.50	.88
15-Not Relevant	1.0	5.0	3.76	.84
16-Hard to Use Ideas	1.0	5.0	3.76	.91
17-Well-Qualified	2.0	5.0	4.33	.73
18-Hesitant	1.0	5.0	3.82	.98
19-Change Lessons	1.0	5.0	3.75	.87
20-Travel Too Much	1.0	5.0	4.28	.82

Table 6 shows the means and standard deviations for all the participating schools' MCT2 Language Arts scores for the 2009-2010 school year and all 11 perception questions on the survey. See Table 6 for descriptive statistics on the combined MCT2 scores and teachers' perceptions of professional development sessions they attended.

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics-Standardized Scores and Teacher Perceptions*

Variable	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
MCT2 Language Arts scores (2009-2010)	89	148.6	157.1	151.7	2.25
Professional Development	87	2.73	5.0	3.88	.512

Statistical Analysis

The researcher gathered the data from the surveys and organized it using SPSS for Windows, version 18. An Independent Samples t-test was used to identify a significant relationship between standardized test scores and 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade elementary Reading teachers' classroom usage of professional development training for Reading instruction during the 2009-2010 school year. An Independent Samples t-test was also used to identify a significant relationship between standardized test scores and 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade elementary Reading teachers' follow up training after their initial professional development sessions.

*Hypothesis I*

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between standardized test scores and utilization of professional development in reading instruction.

Table 7 provides information about means, standard deviations, and standard errors of the mean when MCT2 Language Arts test scores for 2009-2010 are compared between those that used professional development information and those that did not.

Table 7

*Group Statistics-Using Professional Development*

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Not Utilize Professional Development	5	152.54	3.38	1.51
Utilized Professional Development	84	151.61	2.18	.238

Hypothesis I was explored through the use of the Independent Samples T-test and its findings. The variables analyzed were how often the 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers actually utilized information presented in the professional development sessions they attended and standardized test scores for Language Arts during the 2009-2010 school year. The purpose of this analysis procedure was to determine if there was a relationship between using information from professional development for teacher instructional practices and MCT2 Language Arts standardized test scores for the 2009-2010 school year.

Table 8 gives the results of the T-test regarding teachers who incorporated professional development training within their classroom instruction. Results are not significant at the .05 level. The given value of significance is .371

indicating no significant difference between means of the two groups. The null hypothesis of equal means is not rejected.

Table 8

*Independent Samples T-test for Equality of Means-Utilizing Information*

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
MCT2 Language Arts scores					
Equal Variances Assumed	.900	87	.371	.930	1.04

In testing Hypothesis I, the Independent Samples T-test found no statistically significant difference among the utilization of professional development and higher MCT2 scores,  $t(87)=.900$ ,  $p=.371$ . An alpha value of .05 was used. Therefore, Hypothesis I was not rejected.

Table 9 provides information on the Spearman's rho correlation test for analyzing a correlation between standardized test scores and utilization of training information in classroom practices. With a negative correlation and a .443 p-value (alpha value set at .05), there is no correlation between using professional development information and higher MCT2 scores.

Table 9

*Spearman's rho Correlation Test-Utilizing Professional Development Information*

Variable (2-tailed)	N	Correlation Coefficient	Sig.
Standardized Test Scores	89	-.082	.443

*Hypothesis II*

H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference between standardized test scores and the amount of follow-up training after the initial professional development session in Reading instruction.

Table 10 provides information about means, standard deviations, and standard errors of the mean when MCT2 Language Arts test scores for 2009-2010 are compared between those that received follow-up training after initial professional development sessions and those that did not.

Table 10

*Group Statistics-Follow-Up After Professional Development*

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Received Follow-up Training	57	151.50	2.27	.390
Did Not Receive Follow-up Training	32	151.95	2.20	.390

Hypothesis II was explored through the use of the Independent Samples T-test and its findings. The variables analyzed were how often the 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers received follow-up training after the initial professional development

sessions they attended and standardized test scores for Language Arts during the 2009-2010 school year. The purpose of this analysis procedure was to determine if there was a relationship between receiving additional training information for implementation efforts regarding Reading professional development for teacher instructional practices and MCT2 Language Arts standardized test scores for the 2009-2010 school year.

Table 11 provides the results of the Independent Samples T-test regarding teachers who received follow-up training after the initial professional development sessions. Results are not significant at the .05 level. The given value of significance is .362, indicating no difference between the variances in the population. The null hypothesis of equal means is not rejected.

Table 11

*Independent Samples T-test for Equality of Means-Follow-Up Training*

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
MCT2 Language Arts scores					
Equal Variances Assumed	.916	87	.362	.455	.497

In testing Hypothesis II, the Independent Samples T-test found no statistically significant difference among the amount of professional development follow-up training and higher MCT2 scores,  $t(87)=.916$ ,  $p=.362$ . An alpha value of .05 was used. Therefore, Hypothesis II was not rejected.

Table 12 provides information on the Spearman's rho correlation test for analyzing a correlation between standardized test scores and follow-up training from Reading professional development. With a negative correlation and a .472 p-value (alpha value set at .05), there is no correlation between receiving follow-up training and higher MCT2 scores.

Table 12

*Spearman's rho Correlation Test-Follow-Up Training*

Variable	N	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
Standardized Test Scores	89	-.077	.472

#### Ancillary Findings

Although there were no significant differences found in this study, the researcher did note some areas of interest. Most teachers reported attending professional development between 2-4 times during the 2009-2010 school year. A smaller majority of teachers, between 1-3, reported actually using the information learned in professional development. Finally, the smallest majority, 0-2 teachers, reported having any kind of follow-up training or help implementing ideas in the classroom after initial sessions. However, even though these differences were present, the standard deviations of MCT2 Language Arts scores and the tested variables were very low. Question 14 of the survey instrument states, "I believe professional development in reading instruction has increased my students' past MCT2 state test scores." According to Table 5, 42.7% held a neutral opinion of this statement, while 31.5% agreed with this statement

regardless of the low standard deviation between MCT2 scores among the two districts surveyed.

The researcher also found that Reading teachers in District A were much more willing to participate in this study. According to Table 1, the rate of District A participants (61.8%) was close to double that of District B participants (38.2%). Third grade teachers in either district were also more willing to participate at a rate of 43.8%, which is 15.7% higher than the next highest grade level, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, who responded at a rate of 28.1%.

Finally, although 3 respondents did not attend any professional development, two of the three did feel they could adequately answer perception questions 18 and 19 of the survey instrument. Question 18 states, "I am hesitant to attend professional development in reading instruction because it was not beneficial enough to me in the past." Question 19 states, "I feel it is difficult to implement new ideas from professional development in reading instruction because it may require recreating/changing lesson plans." One of the three respondents felt they could not answer any perception questions on the survey instrument.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary

In this study the researcher surveyed 89 teachers in District A and District B in order to gather and analyze their perceptions on the professional development training they had attended during the 2009-2010 school year for Reading instruction. This study was designed to see if the teachers felt that the time and money spent on organizing and attending professional development sessions helped increase MCT2 Language Arts standardized test scores. The study also explored the issue of whether or not actually utilizing the information from professional development was beneficial toward increasing standardized test scores. Finally, this study analyzed whether or not follow-up training for teachers after the initial professional development session was advantageous toward increasing standardized test scores.

#### Conclusions

The findings of the study showed no significant relationship between standardized test scores and utilization of professional development in reading instruction. Using a scale of one to six, with one being a more negative perception of the professional development, five being a more positive perception of the professional development, and six being an inability to properly answer the perception question(s), the majority of 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers appeared to believe that professional development was beneficial and worth their time and district funds. The teachers also perceived professional development to be beneficial

toward their students' education and in increasing standardized test scores. Dole and Donaldson (2006) believe that nearly all educators would agree that professional development is essential in the teaching profession. Continuous learning and professional development offer a shared community of teachers as learners where intricate areas of learning standards, instructional materials, and a range of assessments can be organized. These findings support the related literature that professional development should be an integral part of the school curriculum.

The findings of this study also found no significant relationship between standardized test scores and the amount of follow-up training after the initial professional development session in Reading instruction. The amounts of follow-up training that teachers received were varied and possibly open to interpretation. Some teachers may believe that the professional development coordinators should be the ones considered doing follow-up training, while other teachers may believe that help from their administration was considered follow-up training. The related literature commented on the actuality that most professional development sessions were one-day trainings and included no follow-up training to help teachers implement their strategies. However, many respondents reported having follow-up training of some sort. Literature on the amount of follow-up training states that:

Professional development sessions may be rendered ineffective because of a lack of strong training programs, highly complicated and varied classroom needs, time constraints, and complex content areas. Teachers

often receive only one or two sessions and do not acquire the full understanding needed to implement the practices that were taught. Teachers may not have adequate time to devote to tasks beyond lesson planning, teaching, assessing, paperwork, and meetings. One-time workshops are usually the norm for districts that want to utilize professional development; however by utilizing this method, teachers and administrators are lacking an understanding of how to refine and improve their plans over time. Thus, an adequate amount of follow-up from the trainer(s) or support for implementing changes is not given. (Avalos et al., 2009, p. 120)

Based on the literature, little evidence exists about what specific professional development characteristics will correlate to positive results for teachers and students. Few studies have clearly assessed the effects of different characteristics of professional development, and no specific list of characteristics has been determined to be the most effective (Garet et al., 2001). According to The National Research Council:

Research studies are needed to determine the efficacy of various types of professional development activities, including pre-service and in-service seminars, workshops, and summer institutes. Studies should include professional development activities that are extended over time and across broad teacher learning communities in order to identify the processes and mechanisms that contribute to the development of

teachers' learning communities. (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999, p. 240)

This supports the idea that professional development may not be understood well enough to effectively utilize presentations' information in the classroom to fully benefit student achievement.

Overall the perceptions of teachers from District A and District B concerning the use of professional development to aid in classroom instructional practices was a favorable one. Very few teachers had negative opinions toward their experiences with professional development and standardized test score results, although there were very small differences among standardized test scores between the schools that were surveyed, most teachers felt that professional development was worth attending and implementing in their classrooms.

#### Limitations

One limitation to this study is financial issues during the 2009-2010 school year. These two districts' funds, like so many other districts in the state of Mississippi, were in very difficult situations during the time the researcher was asking teachers to report information. Severe budget cuts had gone into effect, possibly impacting the amount of professional development that was more normally available to teachers (initial sessions and/or follow-up training). There may have been more information available from teachers if budgets had been more stable at the time.

Another limitation of this study is that it was conducted in only two school districts in southern Mississippi. A wider range of information may have been available if districts beyond these had been surveyed. Districts outside of southern Mississippi may have been surveyed as well to include information from districts that do not normally receive as much funding as southern Mississippi districts and/or historically have lower standardized test scores. This would further investigate the amount of professional development training opportunities and its relationship toward standardized test scores in lower-funded districts.

A third limitation to this study is the fact that the researcher only surveyed 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade students. Students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade also take the MCT2 state test; however the researcher decided to stop surveying at 6<sup>th</sup> grade to keep grade levels closer to the “elementary status” where reading classes are still in place. More information could be available if further studies were completed using more grade levels and covering more subject areas.

The final limitation to this study is that the researcher only gathered MCT2 Language Arts scores for the participating schools. The researcher did not collect individual teachers’ scores to compare with their professional development experiences. This could have limited the amount of information that could be drawn from analyzing individual teachers’ experiences and how much they really incorporated professional development into their classroom practices.

#### Recommendations for Policy or Practice

The researcher strongly recommends more in-depth attention to Reading professional development training and its implementation in the classroom.

When teachers travel away from their schools to attend training, it is solely up to the teacher to utilize the information if they feel it would be beneficial to their classroom situation. Teachers may attend training only for the purpose of obtaining Continuing Education Credits for licensure requirements, or they may not understand how to implement strategies, and thus disregard the information completely and return to their normal classroom instruction. When the district is using professional development funds, the money should be spent wisely and should have an impact on students' education.

The researcher also believes that districts should know in great detail about what information the training sessions are covering and who would benefit the most before allowing teachers to individually seek training that may not impact the students as well. Districts may consider more in-house training opportunities or training that includes follow-up implementation strategies to ensure teachers have the opportunity to be among a smaller group and have more questions answered. It should not be assumed that teachers are getting the most out of professional development training that is not on-site. There are many factors that may inhibit true understanding of the information and implementation in the classroom. A curriculum specialist could attend training sessions if another administrator, such as a school principal, is not available to critique the training and ensure teachers are benefitting from the session(s). A curriculum specialist would also be a more neutral judge of the training sessions so as not to rate sessions highly based on popularity among teachers.

Finally, the researcher suggests that teachers be an integral part of the professional development process. Some teachers may know what they want to learn more about but do not have the opportunity to voice their interests. Periodic surveys should be given to teachers about what training they want to see offered concerning classroom instructional techniques to better educate students.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include the replication of this study with the change of surveying more districts, preferably those outside of southern Mississippi where funding is less. The perceptions of teachers on the availability of professional development may be conflicting with that of southern Mississippi districts. This may find that standardized test scores do suffer more when less professional development is offered.

Another possible modification to this study is question 9 of the survey instrument. It is believed by the researcher that there may have been some misconceptions about what the researcher considered to be “follow-up training.” Teachers may have considered help from administration to be follow-up training, which the researcher did not. In the researcher’s opinion, the term “follow-up training” only included training from the original source of the professional development sessions. The researcher was hoping to prove that follow-up training was necessary to better help teachers understand how to implement practices in their own classroom situations; however it appeared that most teachers felt what training they did get was beneficial enough in the classroom and needed little or no further explanation.

Further studies could also include grades 7-8 for insight into the higher grade levels with older students. These grade levels are typically structured in a different way from elementary schools and may provide some insight into professional development needs for older students. This would also give researchers the opportunities to find professional development needs among different subject areas since Reading is usually not taught as a separate class in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

## APPENDIX A

## HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW COMMITTEE FORM



## THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147  
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
 Tel: 601.266.6820  
 Fax: 601.266.5509  
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE  
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **10110802**

PROJECT TITLE: **Teacher Professional Development  
 and its Effects on Reading Instruction**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **11/03/2010 to 03/23/2011**

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Kristen L. Suarez**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & School Counseling**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **01/24/2011 to 01/23/2012**

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.  
 HSPRC Chair

1-25-2011  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

## APPENDIX B

## SUPERINTENDENT PERMISSION LETTER

October 2, 2010

Dear Superintendent,

I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation in Educational Leadership at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am interested in finding out the relationships between teacher professional development and its effects on reading instruction and Language Arts standardized test scores. I am concerned about the rising importance of literacy skills in today's students, and this information will be important in improving understandings of how professional development impacts reading instruction and how professional development can be improved.

I would appreciate it if you would grant me permission to send a survey to your principals and reading teachers within your elementary schools, grades 3-6. Once they receive the survey, they can voluntarily participate or elect not to participate.

Please respond below with the appropriate choice, and send this letter back to me. I would greatly appreciate it if you could send it back within one week of receipt. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at work (228) 392-1387, at home (228) 875-3499, or contact my research advisor, Dr. David Lee, at 601-266-4580. A self-addressed stamped envelope has been enclosed for you, as well as a copy of the survey instrument.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Dr. #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820. Thank you in advance for your assistance in this research.

Sincerely,

Kristen Suarez, Researcher  
Dr. David Lee, USM Research Advisor

Enclosure

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I am granting permission for my elementary schools to participate in this voluntary survey.

\_\_\_\_\_ NO, I am not granting permission for my elementary schools to participate in this voluntary survey.

---

Signature of Superintendent

## APPENDIX C

## TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Please answer each of the following questions. Remember, this questionnaire is anonymous and ONLY for professional development in *reading instruction*.

1. Class size for reading instruction (total of all classes taught during the 2009-2010 school year):  12-18     19-24     25-32     33-40  
 41-48     49-56     57-64     other
2. Grade level in which you taught during the 2009-2010 school year \_\_\_\_\_.
3. District AND school in which you taught during the 2009-2010 school year: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Race:  Caucasian     African American     Asian     Native-American  
 Hispanic    Please specify \_\_\_\_\_
5. Number of years of experience during the 2009-2010 school year:  <5  
 5-10     11-15     15-20     20-25     >25
6. Age during the 2009-2010 school year:  21-30     31-40     41-50  
 >50
7. How many professional development sessions for reading instruction did you attend during the 2009-2010 school year?  
 0     1     2     3     4     5  
 More than 5
8. Of the professional development sessions you attended for reading instruction during the 2009-2010 school year, from how many sessions did you actually utilize information given by the trainer for your classroom practices?  
 0     1     2     3     4     5

\_\_\_\_ More than 5

9. Of the professional development sessions for reading instruction that you attended, how many of these sessions provided follow-up or on-going training to help you implement the strategies that were presented?

\_\_\_\_ 0      \_\_\_\_ 1      \_\_\_\_ 2      \_\_\_\_ 3      \_\_\_\_ 4      \_\_\_\_ 5

\_\_\_\_ More than 5

Complete the following questions in regards to Reading professional development you attended during the 2009-2010 school year. If you did not attend any professional development AND are unable to determine an answer for specific questions, please circle 6 for N/A.

#	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
10	I feel that overall professional development has made a positive impact on my level of understanding of teaching reading.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	I feel comfortable and confident implementing ideas that I learned while attending professional development in reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	Professional development sessions in reading instruction take too much time away from my classroom instruction/duties.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	My students have been positively impacted through the training and information I received during professional development in reading instruction according to results from my informal observations and classroom assessments.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I believe professional development in reading instruction has increased my	1	2	3	4	5	6

	students' past MCT2 state test scores.						
15	The professional development sessions I attended for reading instruction were not relevant enough to my classroom situation.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	It is difficult for me to understand how to incorporate ideas presented in professional development sessions for reading instruction with my own instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	The presenters for professional development sessions in reading instruction I attended were well qualified and knowledgeable about their topic.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	I am hesitant to attend professional development in reading instruction because it was not beneficial enough to me in the past.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19	I feel it is difficult to implement new ideas from professional development in reading instruction because it may require recreating/changing lesson plans.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20	I was required to travel too much for professional development opportunities in reading instruction last year.	1	2	3	4	5	6

## APPENDIX D

## TEACHER SURVEY INSTRUMENT COVER LETTER

February 5, 2011

Dear Teacher,

I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation in Educational Leadership at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am interested in finding out the relationships between teacher professional development and its effects on reading instruction and Language Arts standardized test scores. As a fellow teaching professional, I am concerned about the rising importance of literacy skills in today's students, and this information will be important in improving understandings of how professional development impacts reading instruction and how professional development can be improved.

I would appreciate it if you would take 5-10 minutes to complete the enclosed survey. All responses to the survey will be held confidential. **Once you complete the survey, please place it in the enclosed envelope. Be sure to seal the top of the envelope as well.** When the surveys are returned and data analysis is complete, the surveys will be destroyed by the researcher.

I have already contacted your superintendent for permission to survey elementary teachers within your school district. Your completion of the survey dedicates consent to participate in the study. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at work (228) 392-1387, at home (228) 875-3499, or contact my research advisor, Dr. David Lee, at 601-266-4580.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Dr. #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820. Thank you in advance for your assistance in this research.

Sincerely,

Kristen Suarez, Researcher  
Dr. David Lee, USM Research Advisor

Enclosure

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