Teachers' Perceptions Toward Required and Self-Directed Professional Learning

Marla Kay Lambert Hutton
University of Southern Mississippi

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TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS TOWARD REQUIRED AND
SELF-DIRECTED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

by

Marla Kay Lambert Hutton

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

December 2011
ABSTRACT

TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS TOWARD REQUIRED AND SELF-DIRECTED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

By Marla Kay Lambert Hutton

December 2010

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a difference in the opinions of elementary, middle, and high school teachers concerning teacher required or self-directed professional learning. Additionally, the study investigated differences in teaching experience, professional development in a series compared to in a single meeting, workshop, or conference, rather than ongoing professional learning, and whether the teachers’ perception for professional learning is similar to their administrators’ perception for teachers’ learning.

Research findings indicated there was a relationship between teachers’ preference for professional learning and their years of teaching experience and their level of teaching (elementary, middle, or high). There were significant findings for all three sub-groups including the choice of required or self-directed or type of professional learning, the mode of professional learning including participation in a single meeting, workshop or conference rather than ongoing training, and the teachers’ perception for administrative support for their professional learning.

Statistical analyses revealed there was a main effect of teaching level on required or self-directed professional learning with the high school teachers scoring much lower than the elementary or middle school teachers indicating they preferred required professional learning rather than self-directed professional learning. In addition, teacher
level revealed an interaction where the effect of teacher’s experience on mode of professional learning was different than the effect of teacher’s level on mode of professional learning. Additionally, there was a main effect with teacher’s experience and mode of learning with the teachers with 11 or more years of experience scoring higher than the teachers with one to ten years of teaching experience. This indicated the teachers with 11 or more years preferred their professional learning in a single meeting, workshop, or conference rather than ongoing professional learning. Lastly, there was a main effect between teacher level and administrative support with the middle school teachers scored higher than the elementary and high school teachers. This indicated the middle school teachers felt more support from their administrators for their professional learning than the elementary and high school teachers. In addition, there was a main effect between teachers’ years of experience and administrator support where the teachers with one to five years of teaching experience scored much higher than the teachers with six or more years of teaching experience.
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Approved:

Rose McNeese  ____________________________
Director

Tammy Greer  ____________________________

David Lee  ____________________________

Wanda Maulding  ____________________________

Susan A. Siltanen  ____________________________
Dean of the Graduate School

December 2011
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Professional learning includes the activities and processes designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers so they might improve their students’ learning. High quality professional learning is at the core of all modern proposals to improve schools. Regardless of how schools are organized or reorganized, the renewal and improvement of staff members’ professional skills is considered fundamental to school improvement (Guskey & Huberman, 1995).

Professional development is a powerful and deliberate process designed to cause positive change and improvement. Real professional development is guided by a clear vision of purpose and planned goals, where the content and materials are selected, the processes and procedures developed, and the assessments and evaluations prepared. When the purposes and goals are clear, evaluation of the professional development is easier (Guskey, 2000).

Learning should be the goal for adults as well as students. On-going learning and adult development is necessary for growing and changing adults and children (Levine, 1989). According to Gabriel (2005) administrators should provide meaningful professional development designed for department and individual needs. These needs should be matched with the teacher’s desire to learn (Gabriel, 2005).

During the 1970s isolated workshops trained teachers to use teacher-proof curriculum. Participants were trained to deliver the curriculum and strategies intact without understanding how the curriculum could fit with current teacher practices. The
teachers set up a program using new and innovative practices. These new roles were
difficult and challenging for teachers (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

In the 1980s policy makers impatient with the lack of school reform sent in
external trainers who seldom taught in classrooms to “fix” the teachers. When student
performance did not improve, school governance structures shifted to shared leadership.
Organizational development interventions, a form of professional development suggested
strategies for group work (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). During the late 1990s
professional learning communities originated as an organizational structure to engage
teachers and staff in collaborative learning and for improved student learning
(Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

The foundation of professional development should be research-based strategies.
Research suggests when professional development efforts are focused on a few elements
such as improving classroom feedback, assessment practices, and cross-curriculum
nonfiction writing, student achievement is significantly greater than when professional
developers yield to fad approaches. Guskey (2000) reminds us the goal of professional
development should impact professional practices that ultimately improve student
achievement (Reeves, 2006).

According to Guskey (2000), professional development is an intentional, ongoing
and systematic process. Intentional professional development includes clear, worthwhile
goals and purposes that can be assessed with evidence from intended outcomes.
Professional development should not only be ongoing but should go beyond what the
presenters or trainers are expected to do. Stated briefly, the focus should include what
actions are expected from each participant after the presentation.
Educators need to be continuous learners throughout their professional careers. For example, these educators must constantly analyze the effectiveness of their actions, make adaptations when necessary, and continually explore new alternatives and opportunities for improvement (Guskey, 2000). In like manner, every time a lesson is taught, an assessment administered, a curriculum reviewed, a professional journal or magazine read, a classroom activity observed, or a conversation with another professional, the educator has opportunities to reflect and be a continuous learner.

Lastly, systematic professional learning includes the structures and organizational support within the school necessary for individual improvement. Unless individual learning and organizational changes are considered simultaneously and support each other, the gains made in one area may be cancelled by continuing problems in another area (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

The culture of professional development should be based on teacher desires and improved student performance provided to satisfy bureaucratic mandates (Gabriel, 2005). Staff development does not always need to be formal; informal staff development can occur at lunch or wherever teachers gather (Gabriel, 2005). Occasionally gossip or complaints can dominate lunch conversation but eventually teachers will share, question, and discuss teaching and students (Gabriel, 2005).

Although teachers may attend a workshop to learn the process, according to Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001), the actual learning takes place at the school with teachers learning together. These teachers seem to learn best with job-embedded learning at the school site during the school day. An example of job-embedded professional development is the inquiry study group where teachers analyze their students’ work
(Glickman, 2002; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Additionally, instead of waiting to learn in the future, teachers are supported daily with new strategies when needed (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

According to Guskey (2002b), a professional learning expert, “high quality professional development is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education” (p. 381). Professional development is a purposeful and intentional process intending to create positive change and improvement. Additionally, professional development has a clear vision of purposes and planned goals (Guskey, 2000). Effective professional development is a series of extended job-embedded learning experiences. These include opportunities for educators to discuss, reflect, experiment, and develop new inquiry and experimentation (Guskey, 2000).

According to Bellanca (1995), Fullan should be given credit for asking educators to link personal development to organizational development (Bellanca, 1995). Instead of offering professional development opportunities to correct or change teacher behavior, districts began to spread the idea that learning is a lifelong process for both the teachers and the students. Consequently, the teacher learning issues have created new changes for professional development (Bellanca, 1995).

An organization’s failure to focus on specific learning goals inhibits the learning of both adults and students (Reeves, 2010). Evidence suggests teachers, school leaders, and students are better served when professional learning is focused on deep and consistent implementation of a few goals rather than working on many ideas (Reeves, 2010). However, the trend in professional learning is characterized by the introduction of many ideas but the deep implementation of few ideas. Years of practice on the same area
of professional learning focus creates a vastly superior professional work and student results (Reeves, 2010).

New studies indicate a positive relationship between professional development and improved student learning. For example, teachers cannot teach content they have not learned nor can teachers use methods or strategies they do not know (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). Professional development should be a purposeful endeavor whether it includes attending conferences or workshops or less formal job-embedded professional development activities like study groups, book studies, collaborative planning, peer coaching, and so on (Guskey, 2002a).

Even though teachers are required to participate in school and district level professional development and the research shows a positive relationship between teacher learning and student achievement, it is not unusual for a teacher to return from professional development training and experience little or no change in their teaching practices (Reeves, 2006). Many times the teachers have very little input into their own professional learning. As a result many teachers bring little or no enthusiasm for professional learning. If teachers could help choose their professional learning, maybe the teachers would see the learning is more relevant to their daily teaching. If the learning is more relevant to the teacher, perhaps their students would benefit from having teachers practicing current strategies and using current technology daily in the classroom.

With the increased emphasis on school improvement, improving teacher’s skills for instruction is at the heart of school improvement. The current emphasis on professional learning does not come from teacher deficiencies but from the growing recognition that education is a dynamic, professional field. Educational researchers are
constantly discovering new knowledge about the teaching and learning process. As the professional knowledge expands, new skills are required from educators at all teaching levels. Like in other professional fields, educators must add to their knowledge base and be prepared to use and refine their talents and skills.

The research in this study explored teacher directed and teacher required professional development at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The study examined information about perceptions toward professional learning intended to improve teacher performance. With high stakes testing, teacher accountability, budget cuts, and increasing stress, it is important to find economical ways to improve teacher performance. If teachers come to professional learning with enthusiasm and see the relevance of the learning, perhaps their teaching will improve benefitting their students. Will teachers’ prefer self-directed professional learning or will the teachers’ prefer required professional learning organized by the school district or their administrators?

Statement of the Problem

Historically professional learning has been required by the district or by the school administrators without much teacher input. The problem of this study was to determine whether there was a difference in the opinions of elementary, middle, and high school teachers concerning teacher required or self-directed professional learning. Additionally, the study investigated differences in teaching experience, professional development in a series compared to professional development in a one-time workshop or conference, and whether the teachers’ perception for professional learning was similar to their administrators’ perception for teachers’ learning.
Hypotheses

Professional development can help teachers use current instructional techniques, strategies, technologies all necessary to have a positive impact on student achievement. In general, this study will investigate teachers’ preferences for professional learning. This study will examine the following questions:

The study contained the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no relationship between the level of teachers (elementary, middle, or high school) and their preference for required or self-directed professional learning.

2. There is no relationship between the teacher’s years of teaching experience and their preference for required or self-directed professional learning.

3. The effect of level of teacher on their preference for required or self-directed professional learning will not change as a function of teacher’s years of teaching experience.

4. Teacher level (elementary, middle, or high school) is not associated with preference for participation in a single meeting, workshop or conference rather than ongoing training.

5. Teacher’s years of teaching experience is not associated with preference for participation in a single meeting, workshop, or conference rather than ongoing training.

6. The effect of level of teacher on their preference for participation in a single meeting, workshop or conference rather than ongoing training will not change as a function of teacher’s years of teaching experience.
7. There is no impact of teacher level (elementary, middle, or high school) on teacher perceptions of administrator support toward self-directed professional learning.

8. There is no impact of teacher’s years of teaching experience on teacher perceptions of administrator support toward self-directed learning.

9. The effect of level of teacher on their perceptions of administrator support toward self-directed learning will not change as a function of teacher’s years of teaching experience.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are given to assist the reader in understanding the use of these terms throughout the study:

*Collaboration* - A group of people working together systematically and interdependently to improve results (Haberman, 2004).

*In-service education* - A training session for teachers designed to improve in their individual areas of educational need (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006).

*LPC* - Leadership Practice Community - Teams of school and district leaders who meet regularly for the purpose of improved teaching and learning (Hesling & Lemons, 2008).

*Learning community* - A focus by a group of teachers on the commitment to each student’s learning (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Many, 2010).

*Mentoring* - An experienced teacher who helps another teacher improve their teaching skills through observation and feedback, tutoring, or coaching (Guskey, 2000).
**PLC-** Professional Learning Community - Ongoing process where educators work collaboratively with collection and action research designed to achieve better results with the students they serve (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Many, 2010).

*Professional development-* The processes and activities intended to increase the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators (Guskey, 2000).

*Sustainability* - The ability of an organization to maintain over time the initiatives to improve student achievement (Sparks, 2005).

**Assumptions**

The following basic assumptions will be made for this study:

1. The researcher assumes the responses given by the teachers are honest and accurate reflections of their attitudes and opinions toward professional learning.
2. The researcher assumes the teachers will follow the directions on the questionnaire.
3. The researcher assumes the time of the year will not be a restricting factor in the study and will not significantly alter attitudes and opinions.

**Delimitations**

The following steps will be taken voluntarily in order to limit the scope of the study:

1. The study will involve only certified teachers in public school in a county located in metropolitan Atlanta.
2. This study is limited to the 2011-2012 school year.
3. The findings and conclusions reached in this study are restricted to elementary, middle, and high schools in metropolitan Atlanta.

4. The study will involve approximately 10 randomly selected public schools a metropolitan Atlanta school system.

Rationale

All teachers are required to participate in professional learning. Many times the professional learning opportunities are chosen at the district level or by the school administration without much input from the teachers. When teachers return from professional learning at the county level and after school driven professional learning, teachers complain about the type and effectiveness of the learning. If teachers could help choose their professional learning, maybe the teachers would see the learning is more relevant. If the learning is more relevant to the teacher, perhaps their students would benefit from having teachers practicing current strategies and using current technology daily in the classroom.

Also, when the same professional learning is chosen for a staff or by subject at the county level, does the one size fits all approach work when the teachers have varying levels of teaching experience? Effective adult learning needs a combination of individual and collective practice. When teachers take a personal interest in the learning topic and a personal commitment in the selection of new teaching strategies, they are apt to learn more. Collaboration within a department and grade level can allow for teacher learning but is this learning effective for teachers of all teaching levels and years of experience.

Additionally, is it important for the administrators at the school level and county level to support their teacher’s choices for professional learning? Adult learning and the
application of the learning takes more time than student learning. Teachers need professional learning so during their career they add to their practice and body of knowledge. Will teachers apply the professional learning more effectively and more often if their administrators support them with their choice of professional learning?

With the increased emphasis on school improvement, improving teacher’s skills is at the heart of school improvement. The current emphasis on professional learning does not come from teacher deficiencies but from the growing recognition that education is a dynamic, professional field. Educational researchers are constantly discovering new knowledge about the teaching and learning process. As the professional knowledge expands, new skills are required from educators at all teaching levels. Like in other professional fields, educators must add to their knowledge base and be prepared to use and refine their talents and skills during their entire career. Do teachers’ years of experience and teaching level impact their decisions about the type and mode of professional learning? Could teachers come to professional learning with a better attitude if we match the professional learning to their years of experience and teaching level?

Since professional learning is so important to teacher learning, perhaps a study investigating to see if there is a connection between professional learning and teacher’s years of experience and level of teaching could help improve learning for the teachers.  

Summary

With the increased emphasis on school improvement, refining and upgrading teacher’s skills for classroom instruction is at the core of the target. Mostly, the current emphasis on professional learning comes from the growing recognition that education is a dynamic, ever-changing, professional field. Educational researchers are constantly
discovering new knowledge about the teaching and learning process. When the professional knowledge expands, teachers’ skills need to expand at all teaching levels. Like in other professional fields, educators must add to their knowledge base and be prepared to use and refine their talents and skills.

All teachers are required to participate in professional learning. Some professional learning opportunities are chosen at the district level or by the school administration and others are more informal and chosen by the local teachers. Therefore, sometimes teachers have very little input into their own professional learning. When teachers have very little control of their learning, teachers may bring little or no enthusiasm for professional learning. If teachers could help choose their professional learning, maybe the teachers would see their learning is more relevant. Furthermore, if the learning is more relevant to the teacher, perhaps their students would benefit from having teachers practicing current strategies and using current technology daily in the classroom.

Historically professional learning has been required by the district or by the school administrators without much teacher input. The problem of this study is to determine whether there is a difference in the opinions of elementary, middle, and high school teachers concerning teacher required or self-directed professional learning. Furthermore, the study will investigate differences in teaching experience and professional learning, professional learning in a series compared to in a single meeting, workshop or conference, and whether the teachers’ perception for professional learning aligns with their administrators’ perception for teachers’ professional learning.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In the review of literature statements and opinions of many prominent educators and administrators are collectively and individually included. Also included in this literature review are a few examples of successful professional learning at the different school levels. This review is divided into eight sections: theoretical framework, history of professional development, professional learning programs, adult learning, teachers as learners, teacher attitudes, leadership impact on professional development, and professional development and student achievement.

Theoretical Framework

Maslow’s theory of hierarchy of needs has been widely used to study schools. Maslow (1970) identified five basic groups of human needs with a hierarchy of importance. Once one need is satisfied, another emerges and demands satisfaction. The five levels of need in order are psychological safety and security, social esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). The reason these needs are related to morale is reflected in a teacher’s positive or negative confidence. According to Whitaker, Whitaker and Lumpa (2000) only when basic needs are met, people can move towards fulfilling their esteem and self-actualization needs. When people move toward self-actualization, they are motivated for recognition, self-respect, and maximizing individual potential. Educational leaders can take advantage of opportunities to build morale when they consider daily decisions about schedule, teaching assignments, room locations, parking, and teacher planning (Whitaker, Whitaker & Lumpa, 2000).
Danielson (1996) developed a teaching framework to identify what teachers should know and be able to do within the profession. The origin of the identified components of professional practice lies in the combination of Madeline Hunter’s work and research in process to product and cognitive science. Furthermore, according to Danielson, Hunter was the first to persuasively argue that teaching is both an art and a science. Hunter felt some demonstrable teaching practices were clearly more effective than others. Danielson combined Hunter’s work with the research when she developed her teaching framework. The four domains in the teaching framework included planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Danielson, 1996).

In like manner, according to Bellanca (1995), learning transfer is an important key to individual and organizational change. Constructivist theoreticians view this learning transfer as the most important element in the learning process. Transfer of learning is selected and planned before actively changing. Fullan (1993) asserts organizational changes cannot happen without individual change but on the contrary Bellanca briefly states there is no individual change without organizational change (Bellanca, 1995).

Successful transfer of learning happens when the learner collects new information, combines the new information with prior knowledge, and selects the best use of the information (Bellanca, 1995). Successful transfer allows the organization to capture and promote further learning transfer. Sometimes, however, the culture can be hostile, difficult, or indifferent to transfer. When this happens, new learning for the learner can become frustrating and overwhelming even if the learner is determined (Bellanca, 1995).
According to Danielson (2006), professional development applies to teacher preparation in programs organized to increase teacher knowledge and raise higher levels of student learning. Most professional development involves instruction and student learning (Danielson, 2006). Participation in professional learning should be considered by all teachers as relevant to teaching. In effect, one form of relevant professional development according to Danielson, characterizes the engaging teachers in professional conversations, encouraging teachers to use new approaches in their classrooms, supporting teachers collaborative learning with follow-up and coaching, including job embedded work that contributes to school improvement (Danielson, 2006).

Professional development thrives in a school when the learning initiatives are supported at the district and state levels. Support refers to the resources to pay for release time or external consultants (Danielson, 2006). New instructional strategies without sufficient time, support, and reinforcement are placed in desk drawers or on the shelf (Bradley, Kallick & Regan, 1991). Unfortunately, these new content and teaching strategies quickly gather dust rather than improve student and teacher learning (Bradley, Kallick, & Regan, 1991).

Transformational leadership in education includes four necessary skills for principals to lead in the 21 century (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Sometimes the skills are referred to the Four I’s including individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Individual consideration refers to the principal who needs to pay personal attention to the needs of individual staff members and especially those who might feel left out. The effective school leader will assist staff members to look at old situations in a new way which is
called intellectual stimulation. A principal needs to communicate high expectations to the teachers and students using one’s powerful and active presence is like inspirational motivation. Idealized influence occurs when the school leader provides a model for the behavior of teachers through demonstrated character and personal accomplishments (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Instructional leadership is a concept not well-defined even though instructional leadership is the most frequently mentioned form of educational leadership in the United States. The description of instructional leadership occurring the most often in the literature is by Smith and Andrews (1989). They identify four dimensions of an instructional leader as resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence (Smith & Andrews, 1989). The principal as resource provider makes sure all teachers have the materials and supplies necessary to perform their job. As an instructional resource, the principal actively supports day-to-day instructional activities in the building by modeling best practices. The communicator principal has clear goals for the staff and articulates them to all. For this to work, the principal should have a visible presence in the school building by visiting classrooms and engaging students and teachers in the hallways (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005).

Fullan’s (2003) contribution to the theory on leadership is broad and focuses on the process and need for leadership changes. His suggestions for new ways to think about change have created opportunities for professional learning and leadership changes (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005). Lately, his suggestions for school change include an organizational change designed to create learning communities in schools (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005).
Each school can adapt a structure to meet the needs of the students, teachers, and school community (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Schools can structure ways to promote autonomous teams of teacher working together. Structural systems may include the way we organize for teaching and learning, the way time and resources are allocated, and the way decisions in schools are made, the way information is shared, and the types of incentives offered (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). The leaders inside the school and the policy makers outside the school influence the organizational structure. Instead of providing collaboration and support, schools’ structures often isolate teachers and divide their time which contributes to professional distance (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

The isolation of teachers created by the organizational structure of schools may show why staff development does not necessarily lead to desired change (Bradley, Kallick, & Regan, 1991). Many schools plan faculty meetings to engage teachers in collaborative discussion rather than the typical principal-dominated meeting with a long list of announcements (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). In contrast, with a little creative thought and planning by school leaders, structures can be modified to enhance the changes where teachers can learn and lead together. Cooperatively school and teacher leaders can develop organizational structures that work for the culture of their specific school (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Teachers need to know how decisions are made within a school. School leaders need to build structures for teachers to learn, lead, and collaborate so a positive environment will be established (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Savvy school leaders learn early who the formal and informal teacher leaders are within a school and invite them to contribute to changes. According to Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), teachers will
be motivated to stay in leadership roles if they experience control over their work and if the organizational structure supports their efforts to make changes. Systems inside the schools should include recognition, communication, and participation. In some cases, school districts and states allow for site-based strategies to empower each school to develop a governance plan (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

History of Professional Development

Staff development has traditionally been delivered by outside experts. In a growing number of school districts the teacher leaders are taking on the role of teaching other teachers. This happens through teacher mentors where teachers recognized as content area specialists lead curriculum writing teams and staff development programs (Blankstein, 2004). For example, professional development includes opportunities for educators to discuss, reflect, experiment, and develop new practices in an environment that values inquiry and experimentation (Guskey, 2000).

Barth (1990) feels staff development is least effective when it is a planned, deliberate program. When principals decide to train teachers, run workshops, and deliver in-service training or direct faculty meetings only modest professional change comes to teachers. In sharp contrast, he finds professional development most likely occurs as a result of teacher and principal innovatively solving regular school issues or functions together (Barth, 1990).

The foundation of professional development should be research-based strategies. Research suggests when professional development efforts are focused on a few elements such as improving classroom feedback, assessment practices, and cross-curricular nonfiction writing, student achievement is significantly greater than when professional
developers yield to fad approaches (Reeves, 2006). Teachers are attracted to professional development because teachers believe they will broaden their knowledge and skills, increase their effectiveness with students, and cause professional growth (Guskey, 2002b). Staff development should be school-wide, long-term with follow-up, encourage collegiality, nurture agreement on school vision and goals, have administrative support, and adequate funding (Richardson, 2003).

Using the collaborative approach, both the principal and teachers would work together aligning the staff development around the expertise of everyone and creating a central purpose with documented results (Bradley, Kallick, & Regan, 1999). The collaboration among teaching staff should enhance teaching and learning. To accomplish these objectives teachers work interdependently toward a common goal. The goal supports the larger school’s vision and values. As a result, the school’s mission, vision, values, and goals provide direction and guidance for all team members. Teams look at data to improve school goals with a commitment for continual improvement (Blankstein, 2004).

Many in-service experiences seem to be contrary to the learning principles. Professional practice includes analyzing what is working and making adjustments for what is not working. Foremost, departments or grade levels should routinely analyze assessments and devise a plan to remediate weaknesses in student performance (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). Furthermore, many in-service programs do not personalize the learning or focus on the teachers’ need to transfer the learning to their classrooms. Much of what is labeled in-service is neither professional nor adequate for developing new staff
learning. In the worst cases, the in-service is a day filled with a variety of interesting tidbits the teachers can try or ignore (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006).

Oftentimes teachers feel they participate in professional development experiences which are meaningless and wasteful. These programs are not well planned or well supported. Instead of focusing on research-based ideas, the professional development tends to represent the latest fad ideas. Consequently, educators often regard professional development as having little effect on their daily responsibilities. The teachers participate in professional development mainly for contractual obligations (Guskey, 2000).

Professional development should customize the learning focus to address individual teaching needs while allowing educators to participate actively and share with colleagues (Buenaflor, 2009). According to Heitin (2009), her recommendation to change professional development begins with creating a positive school culture. She feels professional development will not change unless teachers trust other teachers to come into their classroom. For that reason, school leaders need to create a supportive, caring, risk-taking environment where people feel comfortable to grow, learn, and make mistakes (Heitin, 2009).

According to Doerr (2009), even the most experienced content based professional learning team hits a limit in what they know about their area so outside experts need to be consulted to deepen the teacher’s knowledge and continue their growth (Doerr, 2009). However, according to Barth depending on outside experts to improve student learning has been an unsuccessful approach to professional development (Barth, 1990). Usually a few teachers attend training sessions with outside experts and are expected to share the
new ideas with their colleagues at school. Many times the notes from the training session sit on the teacher’s shelves gathering dust with the other professional development resources brought back from other sessions or conferences (Baron, 2008).

Mike Schmoker (2006) tells a story about Dennis Sparks, who deeply understands effective professional learning. Sparks said that any faculty could begin improving performance if they never attended another workshop. The faculty could improve simply by deciding what each teacher wanted the students to learn and then working collaboratively to prepare, to test, and to refine lessons and develop strategies toward improved results (Schmoker, 2006).

Other professional development programs fail because they do not consider what motivates teachers to engage in professional development and how teachers change as a result of professional development. In particular, many professional development activities are designed to initiate change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes. These programs presume teachers’ beliefs and attitudes will lead to changes in their classroom instruction which will result in improved student achievement (Guskey, 2002b). If the goal is improved classroom instruction and student achievement, are teachers asked what they would like for their professional learning?

An alternate change to professional learning for teachers is presented in Model for Change. This model suggests a significant change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes occurs after they gain evidence of improved student learning. These improvements usually result from a new instructional approach, the use of new materials, or a modification of a teaching or classroom procedure (Guskey, 2002b). However, many programs of professional development do not help teachers and schools make lasting
improvements (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). Most of the K-12 staff development comes from the short-term transmission model which disregards what is happening in a particular classroom or school, offers little participant conversation, and provides no follow-up (Richardson, 2003). Sadly, there is a gap between professional development and the actual implementation of those teaching practices (Reeves, 2006).

High quality professional learning by all the teachers is necessary if the goal is high-quality learning in all the classrooms to maintain and sustain teachers throughout a career (Sparks, 2005). Professional development should require cognitive demands on teachers and administrators and include progressive use of increasing higher-order thinking skills (Sparks, 2005). One of the most powerful and understood sources of professional learning and instructional improvement is continuous teacher-to-teacher communication about and learning that is rich and deep in content and processes (Sparks, 2005).

Job-embedded staff development has three major advantages including relevance, feedback, and transfer. Relevance means the learning becomes a daily activity and addresses current challenges. Training is scheduled at the workplace as a part of the normal work routine (Zepeda, 1999). The training can include sharing best practices in teaching and reflection on the student and teacher learning needs. Feedback provides and encourages a variety of resources such as peer coaches, mentoring, study groups, and administrators (Zepeda, 2008). Benefits of feedback include an increase in teacher self-esteem through recognition and reduced feelings of isolation because of teacher interaction. When the learning takes place on the job, the transfer of new skills into daily
practice is also embedded in the practice. Transfer of the practice finalizes the process; the more transfer that occurs, the more learning becomes embedded (Zepeda, 2008).

Effective professional development requires the collection and analysis of participants’ reactions, participants’ learning, and participants’ use of new knowledge and skills to improve student learning outcomes (Guskey, 2002a). In order to achieve effective professional development, school leaders need to provide their staff with ongoing, organized opportunities to learn about student learning and the effects their teaching has on student learning. This would include providing time and support for collaborative staff research and development (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). According to Kennedy (2006) schools might be better off using part of their professional development budgets to pay for paraprofessionals to monitor hallways, lunchrooms, and playgrounds. The additional time would provide teachers the opportunity to form study groups to address problems and have more time to think about teaching (Kennedy, 2006).

Professional development can be a powerful tool that allows teachers to grow as they practice teaching (Buenaflor, 2009). In these professional development programs teachers need learner activities to practice using the new ideas in the classroom (Buenaflor, 2009). At the same time, the professional development should lead teachers to critically examine their practices, select alternative practices, and discard practices (Cranton, 2003).

One of the most important roles of staff development is the collection, analysis, and discussion of success stories inside the school (Schmoker, 1999). Meaningful professional development must involve educators’ values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching (Cranton, 2003). Climate for staff development shifts with the changes in
technology, economic trends, and forecasts, leadership models, politics, culture, and community (King & Lawler, 2003). Moreover, the goal in professional development is to change the teacher’s classroom practices, to change the teacher’s beliefs and attitudes, and to increase individual student achievement (Guskey, 2002b).

Professional Learning Programs

The primary way teachers are supported in personal and professional growth is through professional learning programs (Drago-Severson, 2004). There are several general categories of professional learning programs. To illustrate professional learning programs, examples of the following will be reviewed including study groups, classroom observations, collaborative teacher research, critical friends groups, lesson study, book clubs, mentoring, task force, mini-lessons, and professional learning communities and online opportunities.

Using professional study groups, teachers’ research, summarize, and present articles and books to colleagues including information of professional interest (Guskey, 2000; Blankstein, 2004). This gathering can also be used to share information gathered at seminars or conferences. Periodically the teacher study groups may invite guest speakers or experts from outside the school to discuss matters of interest to the group (Blankstein, 2004).

One form of professional learning includes using classroom observation for teachers to observe colleagues’ classes who are experimenting with new teaching strategies or techniques. During the observation and post-conference the observing teacher help the observed teacher determine how well the innovation is working.
Likewise, teachers can regularly observe classes of teachers having specific problems to produce constructive suggestions and ideas (Blankstein, 2004).

Under the collaborative teacher research model for professional learning, teachers work together to develop questions about their teaching practice. These questions can be probed through a research process. Often teachers implement an innovative practice and then reflect on how student learning changed as a result of the practice. When these lessons are shared at a school site, effective practices can spread throughout the entire school (Cody, 2009). A great deal of research shows the most powerful forms of professional development create opportunities for teachers to collaborate and reflect on student learning. Teachers are not only expected to teach the students but to function as leaders for innovation and change. Fortunately, there are a variety of processes that can provide structures to build these teaching skills (Cody, 2009).

A critical friends group of professional learning is described by the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) as a professional learning community of about 8-12 teachers who voluntarily meet at least once a month for about two hours. During the meeting the members are committed to improving their practice through collaborative learning. At the NSRF website, teachers can find resources, discussion ideas for examining student work, and explore equity issues (Cody, 2009).

Lesson Study for professional learning was originally developed in Japan and is now practiced across the country. In lesson study teachers think about long term goals of education such as love of learning and respect for others, explain to the students why they are learning the material and what is important about the learning, plan “research units” in subject areas to combine the long term goals and specific subject goals, and study how
students respond to the lessons including learning, engagement, and treatment of other students. This allows teachers to study how instruction impacts student thinking and learning (Cody, 2009).

Professional learning can include book clubs allowing teachers to discuss books with colleagues for new ideas within the profession. According to the Michigan Teachers Book Club, teacher book clubs provide opportunities to build camaraderie with one’s colleagues and form bonds which force instructional and personal changes. Teachers are allowed to explore teaching ideas while gaining encouragement from book group members (Cody, 2009). According to Heitin (2009), in her school, Chets Creek Elementary School in Jacksonville, the school leadership team chooses a list of books, describes them to the faculty, and then teachers sign up for the book of their choice. To support the teachers in their learning, their principal ordered a book for every teacher to study. When the groups met, they chose a facilitator and met with their group once a week for four to six weeks (Heitin, 2009).

The mentoring model of professional learning typically involves pairing an experienced and highly successful teacher with a less experienced colleague. Usually, these teachers meet regularly to share ideas and strategies, to discuss professional goals, and to reflect on current methods or observations. Experienced mentors have great credibility among their colleagues and are recognized as highly competent in their subject areas. Mentoring offers a highly individualized approach to professional learning and can benefit both individuals (Guskey, 2000). If mentors are skilled in the areas of working with adult learners, problem solving, and giving constructive criticism,
The process can foster lifelong, highly productive professional relationships (Drago-Severson, 2004).

Task forces are teams selected from all areas of the school to study and develop a plan for a specific problem affecting the entire building such as the best way to eliminate students from being tardy to class. The people inside the group meet, discuss, gather ideas from outside the school, make a plan, implement the plan, and evaluate the plan. When the task is accomplished, the task force ends (Blankstein, 2004).

According to Erkens (2009), professional development should be designed with mini-lessons focusing on one aspect of quality at a time. For example, her idea includes different teams of teacher studying what they choose to study such as student work together while another teacher team studies common assessments. The administrator’s responsibility is to provide the time for teachers to work such as creating common time, freeing up time, or purchasing time. Mini-lessons can create a timely professional development system differentiated for the staff learning needs. As a result, a culture for learning and continual improvement is established (Reeves, 2008).

Another type of professional learning program gaining popularity each year is the professional learning community (PLC). Reeves contends even when principals and teachers are organized in professional learning communities they cannot provide evidence such as common benchmark assessments or monitored and improved student achievement (Reeves, 2006). Therefore, according to Reeves, professional learning communities need to focus on the learning rather than the teaching (Reeves, 2006).

Educators building a professional learning community recognize the importance of working together to achieve common goals in order to create structures to promote a
collaborative culture (Dufour, 2004). Collaboration characterizes professional learning communities as a systematic process where teachers work together to analyze and improve classroom instruction. Teachers engage in an ongoing circle of questions to promote deep team learning. In summary, this process leads to higher levels of student achievement (Haberman, 2004).

Professional learning communities determine their effectiveness on the basis of results; working together to improve student achievement becomes the common goal of everyone in the school. Each teacher team identifies the current level of student achievement, establishes a goal to improve the current level, and provides evidence of the progress (Dufour, 2004). Moreover, these professional learning community members must work collaboratively to clarify what each student must learn, monitor student learning on a timely basis, provide students additional time and support when they struggle, and enrich the learning of students when they have already learned the material (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

Members of a professional learning community create and are guided by clear vision of what the organization must become to enhance student learning (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). Simply stated, a learning community is a focus on a commitment to the learning of each student. When a school or district functions as a professional learning community, educators must choose high levels of learning for all students as their fundamental responsibility and the reason for the organizations existence (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). Subsequently, in a school learning community teachers pursue two goals including professional development and learning for the enjoyment of learning (Haberman, 2004).
There is an assumption with a professional learning community that if the organization effectively helps all students learn, the adults in the organization must also be continually learning. Accordingly, standards need to be created to ensure staff members are engaged in job-embedded learning as part of their routine work performance (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). For job-embedded staff development to be successful, active participation of school leaders at all levels within the district is necessary. Each person in the district from the teachers to the superintendent becomes a leader and a learner if the learning is job-embedded. To summarize, job-embedded staff development includes modeling, reflection, and ongoing dialogue (Zepeda, 1999).

An example of a professional learning community in action is at Pioneer Middle School in Tustin, California where the teachers in a PLC meet regularly setting goals and committing to shared vision. In the vision, the teachers’ purpose is to make sure all students are learning. To achieve the vision, teachers share ideas and teaching strategies working together to help students. In addition, they share problems and find solutions, and review student assessments together (Adams, 2009).

Typically a learning community consists of a group of teachers and administrators who agree to work together regularly to improve student achievement (Baron, 2008). Members of a PLC as a group publicly state student learning goals, help one another choose better teaching practices, look closely at curriculum and student work, and identify school wide issues affecting student achievement (Baron, 2008). Inside the PLC effective teachers can share best practices with their co-workers and can learn about other effective techniques to continue their teaching improvements (Doerr, 2009).
At Nobel Street College Prep in Chicago, Hunefeld (2009) stated that they gave up the old professional development and organized the teachers into professional learning communities so the teachers could work collaboratively with their departments. The PLC began by examining student data from the previous year to set clear goals for student achievement. Later, each PLC chose action-research models including new learning, choosing a strategy to meet the goal, experimenting with the new strategy, and monitoring progress against the goal. At the end of the semester, they held a “share fair” where teachers shared their strategies and the results. The results were teachers learned from each other and student learning improved (Hunefeld, 2009).

Within the PLC learning is a habitual activity where the group learns how to continuously learn (Hord, 2009). Collaborative teams are the building blocks of the professional learning community where members work interdependently to achieve common goals. Building a school’s capacity to learn takes everyone involved working together. People who participate in collaborative team learning can learn from each other and can create momentum for continued improvement (Dufour, 2004).

Educators in PLCs review the instructional practices and procedures to assess alignment so all students can learn. These teachers focus on student learning while moving the school toward their shared vision (Dufour, 2004). For this to work, the PLC assumes a focus on a shared purpose, mutual regard and caring and an insistence on integrity and honesty (Hord, 2009).

PLCs are by no means perfect, and implementation is not always easy, Hunefeld (2009) shared that in his Chicago high school the initial problems included how much structure to provide; he felt they spent too little time on team-building and establishing
group norms. He also cited there was a struggle to find time in the workday for meetings and they had difficulty determining the best way to measure progress. The teacher feedback helped them to continually adjust and improve the system. In conclusion, he still feels the flexible, collaborative approach to a PLC although not easy can be implemented in any school (Hunefeld, 2009).

If there is not a clearly defined focus for a learning community, the meetings can go off course and become about administrative duties and behavioral problems (Doerr, 2009). The goal of a professional learning community is not simply to create a new system but to create conditions for endless learning. PLC implements an environment where experimentation and innovation are not viewed as mundane tasks to be completed; rather they become traditional ways of conducting daily business. According to Dufour (2004), a learning community is a commitment to an essential example of teaching. In conclusion, the success or failure of the effort to build a PLC depends on the ability of school personnel to make some profound cultural shifts (Dufour, 2004).

Another new marketplace is the online professional development programs. An increasing number of teachers are logging on to web-based training programs tailored to their schedule. Although there is no solid data available about how many teachers receive staff training partially or exclusively online there is a multitude of offerings. In the beginning the teacher had their computer and the content without an instructor or facilitator, according to Jamey Fitzpatrick, the president and executive officer of the Michigan Virtual University which hosts a professional development program for the state’s teachers called Michigan Learnport (Sawchuk, 2010). The facilitated format is gaining popularity where the teachers are given more opportunities to reflect on their
practices with an expert. Teachers are expected to assess certain materials, such as readings, complete related assignments, and post threaded discussions (Sawchuk, 2010).

To conclude, the most important aspects of any professional learning approach centers on building communication, cooperation, and collegiality within a teaching staff. These processes are less expensive and sometimes more powerful than hiring outside consultants. Equally important, according to Cody (2009), teachers should be compensated or given dedicated time for engaging in professional learning designed to make them more effective (Cody, 2009).

Adult Learning

The art and science of helping adults learn is called andragogy (Brock & Grady, 1997). Adult motivation to learn is primarily intrinsic. The adult motivation to learn centers around interests and the information they need to know for self-improvement. When seeking knowledge for self-improvement, many adults choose learning opportunities to strengthen a known weakness in their performance or to overcome an immediate problem. Hence, adults prefer self-directed and performance based learning (Brock & Grady, 1997).

Adult developmental theory provides adults with continued, predictable change throughout their lives according to their age, their environmental demands, and their individual characteristics and interests (Gordon, 1990). Like many adult learners, educators prefer the application of learning. Therefore, during professional development a link should be established between the curriculum development theory and practice (Cranton, 2003). Typically, adults commit to learning when they discover something important and relevant to their personal and professional needs (Brock & Grady, 1997).
Consequently, professional growth has the most success when participants perceive a need and the information provided is relevant to their personal and professional interests (Brock & Grady, 1997).

Successful schools use the resources of every adult in the system. Professional development is shared among all the adults in the system (Reeves, 2004). Adult learning is more self-directed and the reasons for learning are to share information and to generate ones need for learning. Furthermore, adults seek knowledge which applies to their current life situation. In other words in a school setting, the teachers and staff want to know if the new information will help them in their development (Zepeda, 2008).

Adults have different levels of readiness to learn. Knowles (1975) identified that adult learners unlike children needed to be engaged in learning with a clear, direct job application. The adult’s individual life experiences shape their readiness for learning (Knowles, 1975). For example, beginning teachers want new information they can immediately apply to their work (Brock & Grady, 1997; Zepeda, 1999). School staffs who voluntarily attend in-services, workshops, and seminars usually have decided they want additional learning concerning a specific topic (Zepeda, 2008).

Adult experiences are a rich resource for learning. Likewise, these adults learn more effectively through experiential techniques such as discussion or problem solving than they do though passive techniques. Many adults are competency-based learners, meaning they want to learn a practical skill or acquire knowledge that they can apply to their immediate circumstances (Zepeda, 1999).

Attending to the developmental needs of adults requires patience. Adult development is complex, slow, and messy. Patience and persistence are demanded of
staff developers and principals who are committed to supporting and promoting adult development (Levine, 1989). Reeves contends that the adult learning experience can be nothing more than an illusion, disguised in the desert of indifference (Reeves, 2006). Some approaches for adult learning which are more successful include situations with real experiences, continual guided reflection, continuity, and reinforcement, challenge and support (Bradley, Kallick, & Regan, 1991). An example of real experiences might include teaching, counseling, supervision skills, or using new teaching strategies. Cross-role training in the form of real experiences stimulates growth for teachers; teachers can use continual guided reflection using both learning by doing and reflecting on the doing (Bradley, Kallick, & Regan, 1991).

Occasionally teachers are offered small study groups to practice reflecting on teaching practices. For new content and strategies to produce significant change usually at least one year of ongoing group support is needed. Teachers and administrators should have opportunities to work with one another in study groups, peer coaching relationships, and in research groups. Teacher instruction must provide for the challenge of new learning and the support to practice the new learning (Bradley, Kallick, & Regan, 1991). Therefore, when considering professional development for adults, the adult learners should have a follow-up to make sure the new knowledge and skills transfer into the “land of practice” (Zepeda, 2008).

Educators are being guided to question their purpose and meaning of providing and selecting information for their classes (Cranton, 2003). Likewise, research shows the faculties in successful schools always question existing instructional practices and do not blame the lack of student achievement on external factors (Glickman, 2002).
Consequently, there is a need for adult educators to engage in dialogue about their questions and thoughts. This reflective practice can lead educators to develop new understandings (Cranton, 2003).

Active listening is an important component of professional development and school leadership. The adult developers in the school must listen closely to understand the various adult learning needs. Surprisingly few adults in school talk and listen to one another about important issues including teaching and learning. A major professional development and school leadership goal should create a school culture that supports sharing (Levine, 1989).

Researchers identify many teachers lack a professional tradition of sharing and are often reluctant to discuss professional knowledge because of a culture of isolation (Sagor, 1997). Teachers learn just like students by studying, doing, and reflecting. New learning is affected by prior knowledge, previous experience, and current beliefs. Professional development plans need to be built including these considerations (Linn, 2006). Linn suggests three strategies for the foundation of professional development program including inquiry, reflection, and sharing. Teachers should use critical thinking skills when they are learning answers. Inquiry and reflection are limited without sharing (Linn, 2006).

School principals and staff developers need to match the adult supports needed at different stages of development. When the supports offered are different from the supports needed; adults can feel threatened, undermined, attacked, or abandoned. Likewise when appropriate supports are lacking, adults seem to get stuck or even regress and when appropriate supports are present, adults thrive (Levine, 1989).
Lambert (2007) studied 94 schools in the Small School Project from 2003-2006 in Washington state and found what is true for student transformational learning is also true for adult transitional learning. Furthermore according to Wiggins and McTighe (2006) instruction must take place within a community of learners, providing participants with opportunities to build on each other’s knowledge, offer feedback, and refine thinking. Instruction must be personalized honoring learners’ interests and strengths, as well as eliciting and challenging learners preexisting understanding of the subject matter. This instruction must include frequent formative assessment, which helps make learners’ thinking visible to themselves and their peers. (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006)

Effective adult learning needs a combination of individual and collective practice. Individual adult learning is defined as growth in a teacher’s relationship with the teacher adjusts instruction based on the student needs and achievement. These teachers take a personal interest in the learning topic and a personal commitment in the selection of new teaching strategies and inviting feedback. On the other hand, collective adult learning incorporates a growth in teachers’ relationship with each other as a part of a strong professional community, a connection between the school vision and group goals, and a group agreement to collaborate on their teaching practices to improve student learning (Lambert, Wallach, & Ramsey, 2007). According to Lambert, the adult learning process becomes transformative when the teachers’ practices and beliefs are challenged or changed and student achievement is increased (Lambert, Wallach, & Ramsey, 2007). For schools to create the transformative learning requires collaboration, risk taking and both individual and group commitment (Lambert, Wallach, & Ramsey, 2007).
Lawler and King (2000) present six adult learning principles to guide professional developers: “create a climate of respect, encourage active participation, build on experience, employ collaborative inquiry, learn for action, and empower the participants” (p. 21-22). Using these principles, Lawler and King help professional development programs to ensure effectiveness and transfer of learning. Additionally, according to Lawler, adults learn more effectively and efficiently when they are actively involved in the educational activity (Lawler, 2003).

Adult learners are diverse in life experiences, education, personalities which increase with age and influence their outlook on educational experiences (Lawler, 2003). These same adult learners come with the valuable quality of a wealth of experience incorporating their active participation in professional development settings. However, this experience can be a barrier because some teachers have experienced poor, ineffective learning experiences (Lawler, 2003). Even though some teachers have poor learning experiences, most adults are interested in immediately applying their learning and making connections between their educational experience and their lives (Lawler, 2003).

Teachers as Learners

Teacher learners are more productive if they actively engage in mutual planning of the learning opportunity (Gordon, 1990). Mutual professional learning planning includes diagnosing the learning needs, determining the learning objectives, designing the learning plans, and evaluating the progress of the learning. Furthermore, teachers learn by reflecting on their experiences when they are encouraged to try new ideas (Gordon, 1990). As teachers age, they prefer tasks including a call for judgment, knowledge, and experience (Gordon, 1990). In addition to different learning based on age and
experience, teachers learn differently based on their conceptual development. Teachers have different levels of conceptual development. Individuals with low levels of conceptual development are concrete thinkers; these teachers tend to view things as black and white, right or wrong. For instance, they can struggle defining a problem and often repeatedly respond to a situation the same way even though they unsuccessfully solve the problem. Teachers need assistance at this level with problem solving (Brock & Grady, 1997).

Teachers who have a moderate conceptual level can define the problem, generate a limited number of solutions, and need assistance with developing a plan or solution. Still other teachers with a high level of conceptual development are independent, autonomous thinkers who are flexible in their thinking and able to integrate information. These professionals enjoy making decisions and accepting responsibility for those choices. Experienced teachers thrive in situations where their role is facilitative rather than directive (Brock & Grady, 1997). Besides the support for learning, advanced teachers need site and district job-embedded support to develop leadership capacities (Bossi, 2009).

Whatever path teachers follow into teaching, teachers need ongoing professional development experiences to continue developing, nurturing, and expanding base knowledge and skills (Bohen, 2001). Educators want professional learning activities to be motivating and engaging for students (Blackburn & Williamson, 2010). Additionally, teachers learn to develop instructional skills and collaborative leadership skills from interactions with other experienced professionals (Bossi, 2009). According to Barth (1990) suggested when he wanted to improve teacher professional growth and work he
would rearrange the conditions and structures where the teachers worked. In addition, principals can influence many elements surrounding the teachers’ professional life such as time, coverage, space, money, materials, personnel, and consequently have an extraordinary opportunity to work with teachers shaping a school environment where teachers become learners (Barth, 1990). According to Barth (1990), teachers can be effective in stimulating and promoting the development of other teachers. Together these practices can have a significant impact on the school culture. Additionally, these practices suggest the principal can provide conditions to encourage teacher learning. Finally, these experiences suggest schools can make great strides toward becoming a community of learners (Barth, 1990).

Barth reluctantly categorized teachers into three groups when considering staff development. One group are teachers are unwilling and incapable of critically examining their teaching practices and are unable to have other adults examine what they are teaching. Most schools have teachers that seem to go through the motions and seem to grow defensive if others begin to examine the motions (Barth, 1990).

Another group contains teachers who are able and willing to continually inspect and reflect on what they do. These teachers use the reflections to make periodic changes. However, these teachers are uncomfortable accepting analysis of their practice from other adults. This large group of teachers does not view other adults as supportive but rather they see these adults as a “hindrance” (Barth, 1990). The last small group of teachers is able and willing to critically survey their teaching practices and very willingly invite other teachers for their support. These teachers are the ones staff developers, teaching centers, universities, and principals enjoy assisting. Ironically, even though these
teachers seek staff development, they probably need professional learning the least (Barth, 1990).

Just like students, teachers are individuals and consequently have special learning needs (Buenaflor, 2009). Giving teachers a choice in professional development allows them to select programs to offer teaching strategies while increasing their knowledge (Buenaflor, 2009). However, teacher choices may have no effect or a negative effect on motivation and performance (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Mixed findings and conflicting theoretical perspectives suggest the relationship between choice and motivation may be more complex and include the type of choice, the number of options and choices, the reward, and the control condition (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Choice needs to be considered with the opportunities and strategies for empowering the teacher learner and forcing teachers to change and grow to ultimately accommodate the goal of adult learning (Lawler, 2003).

Learning communities of colleagues who share similar ideas and support with nonjudgmental feedback deepen the learning process for all (Buenaflor, 2009). Most teachers learn their craft through experience, modeling themselves to others, and reflecting on their teaching practices (Cranton, 2003). Instead of automatically accepting new teaching techniques, educators can explore, discuss, practice, and develop new material that is related to their classes (Cranton, 2003). Years of practice on the same area of professional learning focus creates a vastly superior professional work and student results (Reeves, 2010).

Teaching quality is improved through continuous professional development (Hord, 2009). The staff takes collective responsibility for learning new content,
strategies, or approaches to improve teacher effectiveness (Hord, 2009). Unfortunately, according to Hord (2009) teachers do not improve instruction by listening to someone tell them how to improve the instruction in their classroom. The teachers learn by working with others to solve problems identified in their classroom (Hunefeld, 2009). Collaboration allows teachers to share expertise within a school giving veteran teachers the opportunity to assume leadership roles. Collaboration is not a gift, but a skill requiring effort and practice (Reeves, 2010).

Teachers can also work together to learn about areas where the school has no existing expertise (Hunefeld, 2009). Professional learning becomes more authentic as teacher learners choose their own learning topics and proceed at a comfortable pace addressing their student’s needs. Experimentation with the new teaching methods happens in a classroom setting so the implementation is almost automatic (Hunefeld, 2009).

Professional developers recognize the demands facing them in their roles as guides, leaders, mentors, and problem solvers (King & Lawler, 2003). By viewing teachers as adult learners, the focus shifts to the educators’ individual, organizational, and personal needs (King & Lawler, 2003). The broad integrated view on staff development includes preparing teacher to function well in the classroom and leads to development of the teachers as professionals. Integrated approach to professional development includes adult education, is learner centered, is transformative learning, needs to address motivation, and needs to address technical learning (King & Lawler, 2003).

Lawler (2003) shared that at Mt. View Alternative High School in Fairfax, Virginia teachers fill out online surveys to identify teachers’ staff development needs.
Teachers were asked to join a small group to focus on professional development in one of six areas that they identified on the survey. Groups met at least once a month for the school year and used online computers for communication. After the year, most teachers felt this was the most successful professional development program (Lawler, 2003).

The single most important step a school will take on a journey to become a PLC will be the adaptation of learning as the central focus of the school. Traditional school cultures have focused on teaching rather than learning (Dufour, 2004). Additional effort may be needed to engage teacher in shifting from their old educational paradigms; collaboration can enhance their motivation for professional development (Lawler, 2003).

Teacher Attitudes

Attitudes are the beliefs, feelings and behaviors toward people, objects, or events. Attitudes include judgments including conscious logical reasoning and attitudes hold stable over time. Emotions are experiences that operate without our knowledge and emotions can happen briefly (McShane & Von Glinow, 2010). Another emotional factor, resilience identifies people who possess personality traits that “generate” more optimism, confidence, and positive emotions. Furthermore, with the emotional factor of resilience people can respond and adapt more effectively to stressors. Usually teachers with resilience have higher emotional intelligence and are good problem solvers. Many times, these people apply coping strategies such as analyzing the stress source and identifying ways to minimize the problems (McShane & Von Glinow, 2010).

Efficacy is a powerful psychological variable long associated with improved achievement by adults and students (Shaughnessy, 2004). Self-efficacy refers to a person’s belief about successfully finishing a task (Bandura, 1997). People with high
self- efficacy display a “can do” attitude since they believe they possess the energy, resources, understanding, and competency to perform the job. Self-efficacy is the individual’s perceptions to complete a specific task or handle a particular situation (McShane & Von Glinow, 2010). Generally, self-efficacy is a perception of one’s competence to perform across a variety of situations (Bandura, 1997).

Teachers with efficacy want to feel their actions make a difference (Reeves, 2008). Efficacy gives them a sense of personal empowerment and teachers feel confident to take actions, appropriate risks, and transfer confidence to others (Reeves). Building teacher’s sense of efficacy is critical to improving schools with regard to student test scores (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Connecting teacher leadership to efficacy in their classrooms helps teachers realize how they can touch the lives of more children (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

According to Reeves (2008) efficacy’s evil twin is blame. For example, when teachers blame present or future failures on conditions they cannot control such as student attendance, efficacy is replaced with a victim status (Reeves, 2008). When teachers feel confident as teacher leaders they will assume responsibility for the learning of all students (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Teacher leadership provides opportunities for teachers to participate in school-wide decision making and to become active members of a professional community. When teacher leaders participate in promoting change, there is less resistance to change (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

When Fullan (2001) cited research and theory on emotional intelligence, he described the importance of the school leaders to form emotional bonds with their staff and teachers especially during times of uncertainty. He felt leaders should be informed
about personal issues within the lives of staff members, be aware of the personal needs of teachers, acknowledge significant events in the lives of staff members, and maintain personal relationships with teachers (Fullan, 2001). For example, the school leader could send flowers to faculty members or make an effort to speak to each teacher at least once a day (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Teacher motivation and morale is usually not based on pay and benefits. According to Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman (1993) motivational factors are recognition, achievement, responsibility, and intrinsic factors. Praise, acknowledgement and positive reinforcement would be other examples of motivation factors. His theory should empower school leaders since these intrinsic factors are easy to control. Understanding interpersonal factors that can impact morale provides leaders with a great opportunity and responsibility (Whitaker, Whitaker & Lumpa, 2000).

The greatest frustration for leaders and teachers is the difference between what we know and what we do. According to Reeves (2010), effective professional learning is intensive and sustained, and provides opportunities for application, practice, reflection, and reinforcement. When people young and old focus, they improve their performance. Improvement does not necessarily involve new ideas for instance, a generation of teachers were led to believe that “drill and kill” was a terrible idea; the truth is deliberate practice develops skills in students and adults (Reeves, 2010).

Leadership Impact on Professional Learning

When teachers are the center of the learning, ongoing administrative support needs to be embedded in learning goals to create momentum for growth. Additionally, when the organizational and individual learning goals are paired; staff development has
the ability to transform any school into a learning community. The goal is for all the teachers, support staff, students, and parents to be engaged as learners so the organization grows (Zepeda, 1999). The school leader or principal plays a pivotal role in creating and maintaining a positive school culture (Brock & Grady, 1997). School leaders communicate what they value as important when they comment, ask, praise, and criticize. Principal’s core values are revealed in times of conflict and through modeling. Additionally, leaders send a powerful message when they act on their beliefs. A school’s culture is influenced when leaders select and promote individuals who possess certain values, skills, and talents (Brock & Grady, 1997).

There are four major areas of responsibility for the principal including curriculum, instruction, management, and staff development. All school leaders set the course for staff development in the building (Bradley, Kallick, & Regan, 1991). Additionally, principals have the responsibility to help increase the learning opportunities for all teachers (Fullan, 1993). Successful principals create innovative, ongoing opportunities for staff development to occur in their schools. These principals have the confidence to identify the right risks and opportunities. Just like business leaders, principals who are entrepreneurs encourage teachers and create cost effective time for professional learning (Zepeda, 1999).

Principals can promote collegiality within their schools by stating their expectations, collaborating with faculty for making school improvements, providing rewards such as recognition, funding, materials, or space to teachers who collaborate and supporting teachers when they begin collegial behaviors. Collegial behaviors provide the conditions for continuous professional development. The most successful schools foster
collegiality and improved school culture resulting from continuous staff development. In a community of learners, students, principal, and all teachers become committed, lifelong, learners (Brock & Grady, 1997).

The key to meaningful change at the school level is the responsibility of the principal. Principals need to identify the needs of the faculty, support the new training and implementation, and sustain maintenance of desired change (Zepeda, 1999). According to Brock and Grady (1997), administrators should serve two primary functions in supporting teachers and students. First, they should be available to deal with seriously disruptive behaviors that interfere with the teaching and learning process. Second, when a teacher refers a student for “minor” offenses, sometimes the teacher is feeling frustrated and angry with the student and needs administrative support to change the student’s attitude (Brock & Grady, 1997).

The purposes and needs of professional learning are varied. The principal’s obligation is to maintain a current knowledge of research based staff development, share leadership for staff development, and be an agent for change in the school (Zepeda, 1999). Principals are expected to be instructional leaders, building managers, culture builders, and visionaries. Principals must be adult professional developers (Levine, 1989). A principal’s participation in professional learning is valuable to improved instruction and student learning but cannot be the primary form for learning interactions for teachers (Sparks, 2005). The best approach to curriculum design is a bottom-up or a top-down process in which administrators and teachers recognize the need to improve the curriculum. Either the principal or teachers may lead the curriculum design efforts as
long as whoever leads the process understands and supports the need for curriculum change (National Staff Development Council, 2004).

An effective principal encourages teachers to set learning goals and provides help with the development of the plan. Additionally, the principal secures resources for the teachers and meets periodically to discuss progress and give feedback (Zepeda, 1999). Zepeda (1999) explained that with some teachers, the principal should foster creativity. With other teachers, the principal should help connect teachers to other teachers who have chosen to work on similar learning goals. However, with other teachers, the principal should help connect teachers to other teachers who have chosen to work on similar learning goals. At the end of the year the principal should link the teacher’s learning with a new learning opportunity the following year (Zepeda, 1999).

Baron (2008) implied that principals who understand the need for sustained job-embedded professional development should model these practices for their staff members. One of the most effective ways to model professional development is for the principal to be an active participant in an administrator learning community. Administrators learning communities meet on a regular basis to deepen participants understanding of instructional leadership; identify practical ways to assist teachers improve the quality of student work, critique one another’s school improvement goals, and practice data analysis, strategic planning, and provide helpful teacher feedback (Baron, 2008).

Hawaii has a new type of school leader professional development called the leadership practice community (LPC). LPCs are teams of school and district leaders who meet regularly with the purpose of improved teaching and learning in all district schools.
LPC meetings are not bogged down with managerial issues. Instead members collaborate to develop individual and collective leadership practice. The leaders are taking responsibility for their learning and therefore they can focus on specific problems at their school (Helsing & Lemons, 2008).

Bossi (2009) shared that directly linked to leadership is the attitude of school staff concerning sharing learning. Leaders need clearly defined core values and beliefs with the capacity for growth, with the energy and dedication, with the courage to face reality and the confidence through development and shared leadership with others to achieve success (Bossi, 2009). The willingness of teachers to collaboratively work together for increased student vigor reflects the school culture and school leadership (Blackburn & Williamson, 2010). This strong leadership is a key component to effective professional development leadership and should include both teacher leaders and administrators (Blackburn & Williamson, 2010). A well-developed program for all groups will deepen and broaden the capacities of site leaders (Bossi, 2009).

In addition, the educational leader’s most important calling might be as a developer of people. This includes taking people from where they are to where they should or could be with a focus on solutions rather than problems (Bossi, 2009). Leaders must be better listeners, must communicate positively, and provide skillful, growth-oriented reflective feedback to professional educators. These must be trusting relationships; where the leader is able to influence, act as collaborative builder, and be focused on future solutions (Bossi, 2009).

Future solutions or instructional change has a better chance when the principal and the teachers work together to implement new practices with the faculty (Schmoker,
Administrators need to be open and patient with establishing learning goals and communities. In addition, school leaders need to be a supportive of the community but not overbearing or prescriptive (Doerr, 2009). A principal who establishes a climate where collaboration is both encouraged and expected has the best chance of success (Doerr, 2009).

According to Cody (2009) our teachers will improve when they are actively engaged in a collegial dialogue over the issues they face daily. School leaders need to support the challenge of teacher learning. During the tough economic times, school leaders need to explore ways to continue professional growth for the teachers without the expense of high profile professional speakers. Perhaps the answer lies within the school using teacher leaders to promote professional learning (Cody, 2009).

If leaders expect teachers to improve, there must be a school willingness to overlook the newest idea and focus on the disciplines related to expertise. The disciplines include focus, repetition, and effective practice. Since professional learning time is limited, choices need to be made to support teacher learning. Before a new focus is adopted Reeves (2010) suggest leaders need to decide if they are willing to displace a previous professional learning goal before they add another focus. Additionally, are the students better served with teachers and administrators who have deep, insight and knowledge of last year’s skills or a shallow exposure to this year’s fads (Reeves, 2010). If a teachers’ use of current educational practices and knowledge are important to school leaders, are these provisions reflected within the school improvement plan and teacher professional development plan.
Professional Learning and Student Achievement

High impact professional learning is directly linked to student learning (Reeves, 2010). For example, documentation of the link to student learning occurs in the classroom, linking specific student gains in learning to specific teaching strategies. Professional learning should have challenges and opposition. High-impact professional learning partners a measurement of student learning with instructional decisions made by teachers and leaders (Reeves, 2010). Staff development influences what is taught, how the information is taught, and the social climate for learning within the school environment. A curriculum or instructional change supported through well-designed staff development can have a major and rapid effect on student learning (Joyce, 2002). In addition, according to Reeves (2004) the keys to improved student academic achievement were the teachers and leaders professional practices not the economic, ethnic, or linguistic student characteristics (Reeves, 2004).

Wiggins and McTighe (2006), feel all faculty members should engage in deep, broad study learning as professional learners for a school to be a model learning organization. In a true learning organization, staff members should create their common principles (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). Educators at all levels must be continuous learners throughout their own professional careers. Teachers must analyze the effectiveness of what they do, reflect on current practices, make adjustments when difficulties arise, and continuously find new opportunities for improvement (Guskey, 2000). Guskey (2000a) further states the goal of professional learning is to ultimately improve student achievement. The teacher’s professional development alone does not directly affect students’ learning. However, high quality professional development is
important to student learning. The relationship between professional development and student learning is accomplished primarily when teacher’s increase their knowledge and practices in the classroom (Guskey, 2000). According to Reeves (2006), research suggests when professional development efforts are focused on a few key elements such as improving classroom feedback, offering varied assessments, and nonfiction cross-disciplinary writing, the result in student achievement is significantly greater than when professional developers support a fad approach (Reeves, 2006).

A teacher’s beliefs about a student’s opportunity to successfully learn will influence the teacher’s action with students which impacts students’ achievement (Marzano, 2007). For example, if the teacher believes students can succeed, the teacher behaves in ways to help and support student success. Likewise, if the teacher believes the students cannot succeed, the teacher involuntarily subverts student success. These are undercurrent, hidden dynamics that can affect student learning in an unconscious way (Marzano, 2007).

Most schools have a gap between the professional learning that impacts teaching and improves student achievement and the professional learning teachers and principals regularly experience (Sparks, 2005). According to Sparks (2005), all teachers should participate in team-focused professional learning incorporated in daily work. Effective, sustained professional development should target achieving student-learning goals with clear, high expectations for all learners (Sparks, 2005).

Blackburn and Williamson (2010) proclaimed that teachers should be held accountable for using new ideas in their classroom that increase student achievement. The first aspect of accountability includes how the information about rigor will be used in
the classroom and what student results are planned (Blackburn & Williamson, 2010). The fact that teachers collaborate will not automatically improve a school. The purpose of collaboration can only be reached if the professionals participate in collaboration with a specific focus on improving student learning (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

When a culture for learning is established in a school teachers model collaborative learning for their students (Doerr, 2009). The ideal goal of a learning community should be to improve student achievement but the community can decide what direction to take and what defines success (Doerr, 2009). According to Finn (2001), the best way to measure teacher quality is to directly compare their student’s performance results back to each individual teacher (Finn & Madigan, 2001).

Most educators have not evaluated their professional development efforts. Some reasons for not evaluating staff development include time, cost, and a lack of expertise. According to Guskey (2000) good evaluations require thoughtful planning, good questions, and a basic understanding of how to extract valid answers. The information gathered could allow for thoughtful and responsible decisions about the professional development process (Guskey, 2002a).

Powerful professional development focuses on content knowledge and instructional processes that most affect student learning (Sparks, 2005). When teachers study the subjects they teach and expand their teaching strategies to teach the content; teachers improve their teaching and student learning (Sparks, 2005). Members of PLC give “meticulous attention” to the academic areas where students do not perform successfully (Hord, 2009). When teachers work together toward the common goal of raising student achievement for all students, the teachers can change their attitudes about
their role as a teacher (Doerr, 2009). Professional learning becomes more authentic as teacher learners choose their own topics to emphasize and proceed at a comfortable pace addressing their student’s needs (Hunefeld, 2009).

Summary

The goals of teacher professional learning include improving teaching practices, understanding the practices, and improving the implementation of new teaching practices. In school districts today, the trend for professional learning needs to move away from district wide design toward site-based approaches. District requirements for professional learning need change in order to avoid the poor record of success from previous district wide professional development design. Too often, these designs consist of one shot presentations with little relevance to the daily problems and issues teachers and administrators face. Furthermore, these programs seldom include sufficient follow-up and support for the successful implementation of new practices. Site-based designs can offer greater relevance and flexibility because their content and procedures are determined by the local educators.

Site-based designs offer several obvious advantages for educators including common goals, content, models and evaluation procedures. These decisions are typically made by teacher committees and school leaders with input from parents and community members. At this level consensus on issues related to professional learning are easier to reach because fewer individuals are involved. When the learning is ongoing at the local level, there is an opportunity for sustained professional learning by the entire school community.
With the increased emphasis on school improvement, improving teacher’s skills for instructions is at the heart of school improvement. The current emphasis on professional learning does not come from teacher deficiencies but from the growing recognition that education is a dynamic, professional field. Educational researchers are constantly discovering new knowledge about the teaching and learning process. As the professional knowledge expands, new skills are required from educators at all teaching levels. Like in other professional fields, educators must add to their knowledge base and be prepared to use and refine their talents and skills.

All teachers are required to participate in professional learning. Many times the professional learning opportunities are chosen at the district level or by the school administration. Therefore, the teachers usually have very little input into their own professional learning. As a result sometimes teachers bring little or no enthusiasm to their professional learning. If teachers could help choose their professional learning, maybe the teachers would see the learning as more relevant. When the learning is more relevant to the teacher, perhaps their students would benefit from having teachers practice the use of current strategies, techniques, and use current technology daily in the classroom.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Professional learning includes the activities and processes designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers so they might improve the learning of their students. High quality professional learning is at the core of all modern proposals to improve schools (Guskey, 2002b). Regardless of how schools are organized or reorganized, the renewal and improvement of staff members’ professional skills is considered fundamental to school improvement (Guskey & Huberman, 1995).

The primary way teachers are supported in personal and professional growth is through professional learning programs (Drago-Severson, 2004). A great deal of research shows the most powerful forms of professional development create opportunities for teachers to collaborate and reflect on student learning. Teachers are not only expected to teach the students but to function as leaders for innovation and change. Fortunately, there are a variety of processes that can provide structures to build these teaching skills (Cody, 2009).

All teachers are required to participate in professional learning. Some professional learning opportunities are chosen at the district level or by the school administration and others are more informal and chosen by the local teachers. Sometimes teachers have very little input into their own professional learning. When teachers have very little control of their learning, teachers may bring little or no enthusiasm for professional learning. If teachers could help choose their professional learning, maybe the teachers would see their learning is more relevant. If the learning is more relevant to
the teacher, perhaps their students would benefit from having teachers practicing current strategies and using current technology daily in the classroom.

The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers prefer required or self-directed professional learning, if preferences change based on the level of teaching or years of teaching experience, and whether teachers prefer professional learning delivered in a series or delivered in a single workshop, conference, or learning opportunity. Also, teachers’ preferences about professional learning were compared to what the teachers think their administrators prefer for professional learning. The study was implemented in a large, metropolitan Atlanta school system in the fall of 2011. Once permission was received from the superintendent and principals, the study was carried out in the district schools. A survey was completed by the elementary, middle, and high school teachers of random schools. The survey included questions about teacher directed professional learning and about their beliefs and attitudes toward professional learning.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formed from the research questions:

H$_{01}$: There will be no relationship between the level of teachers (elementary, middle, or high school) and their preference for required or self-directed professional learning.

H$_{02}$: There will be no relationship between the teacher’s years of teaching experience and their preference for required or self-directed professional learning.

H$_{03}$: The effect of level of teacher on their preference for required or self-directed professional learning will not change as a function of teacher’s years of teaching experience.
H_{04} : Teacher level (elementary, middle, or high school) will not be associated with preference for participation in a single meeting, workshop or conference rather than ongoing training.

H_{05} : Teacher’s years of teaching experience will not be associated with preference for participation in a single meeting, workshop or conference rather than ongoing training.

H_{06} : The effect of level of teacher on their preference for participation in a single meeting, workshop or conference rather than ongoing training will not change as a function of teacher’s years of teaching experience.

H_{07} : There is no impact of teacher level (elementary, middle, or high school) on teacher perceptions of administrator support toward self-directed professional learning.

H_{08} : There is no impact of teacher’s years of teaching experience on teacher perceptions of administrator support toward self-directed learning.

H_{09} : The effect of level of teacher on their perceptions of administrator support toward self-directed learning will not change as a function of teacher’s years of teaching experience.

Design

This is a quantitative study with a cross sectional research design. Surveys were Likert scaled. Demographic information such as gender, grade levels taught, college degree, years of teaching experience, and teaching level were also ascertained.
Participants

Elementary, middle, and high school teachers from a large, metropolitan Atlanta school system were recruited for participation in the study. Participants in the study included 540 certified public school teachers from randomly selected schools including two high schools, two middle schools, and four elementary schools. Each teacher provided demographic information and responded to questions about their preferences for professional learning. For their participation in the study, each teacher received a small token of appreciation (a pen).

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was created by the researcher to provide a more comprehensive assessment of teacher preferences as well as teacher perceptions of principal support for professional learning than was supplied by earlier surveys. The survey (Appendix D) consisted of 22 statements regarding professional learning with Likert-type response options. These questions contained specific examples of types of professional learning generally available to teachers and questions about their supervisors’ support of those professional learning options.

Initial development of the instrument began during the fall of 2010. An expert panel consisting of metropolitan Atlanta school system professional development trainers was given the opportunity to review the questionnaire. Information concerning face validity and content validity were ascertained during the piloting process. The questionnaire was refined based upon feedback from the expert panel. The initial questionnaire consisted of 22 items with the first section including eight items measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale with anchors ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly
agree (4). The second section included 14 items that were measured a 5-point Likert-type scale with anchors including never, rarely, infrequently, frequently, and often. The experts grouped the questions into three sub-domains indicating whether the questions addressed type of professional learning (extent to which professional learning is self-directed), mode of professional learning (series, one activity, workshop, conference), and administrator support for professional learning. Scores were averaged in each major area. Questionnaire responses were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analyses.

The instrument was piloted to a group of teachers (N=21) from a large, metropolitan Atlanta public school system in the spring of 2011. The attached cover letter explained the study and the questionnaire piloting process (Appendix A). These teachers in the pilot study were not included in the main study sample. The majority of the pilot participants ranged in age from 40-59 years with at least a master’s degree.

Table 1

*Demographics on Pilot Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
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<td>High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher’s Age in years</td>
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Demographics on Pilot Participants

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<td>Master’s degree</td>
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</table>

Cronbach’s alpha was computed to determine internal consistency with each sub-domain. Cronbach’s alpha of .73 for mode of professional learning (the average of items 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 21, and 22), .75 for type of professional learning (the average of items 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7) and .73 for administrative support for professional learning (the average of items 13-20). Cronbach’s alpha indicated an adequate level of internal consistency for the sub-domains. Face and content validity were informally assessed using feedback from participating teachers.

Procedures

An IRB packet was submitted to the assessment office of the participating school district. The county reviewed the request and approved the research within the district (Appendix C). Prior to addressing the principals of the participating schools for permission to conduct the study in their school, informed consent (IRB) was received by The University of Southern Mississippi (Appendix B). After approval was received, the researcher and the principals chose a meeting time and place for the teachers to complete the survey. A copy of oral directions were read prior to the survey administration was provided on brightly colored paper (Appendix E). The instructions explained the purpose of the study, indicated who should participate, explained voluntary participation,
addressed informed consent, and provided contact information for potential questions and comments. An envelope was provided for convenience of collecting the completed questionnaires. After the directions were read, the faculty and the teachers completed the survey at the meeting. Since all participants are adults, it was assumed that their consent to participate was provided when they agree to complete the survey. All administration of the instrument (Appendix D) occurred at faculty meetings during August or September of 2011. Anonymity was ensured as the instrument did not ask for identifying factors such as name or unique identifying numbers.

Data Analysis

In order to address hypotheses 1-3, a two-way ANOVA (teacher level x teacher experience) was conducted with mode of professional learning as the DV.

Hypothesis 1. There will be no relationship between the level of teachers (elementary, middle, or high school) and their preference for required or self-directed professional learning. The main effect of teacher level from the two-way ANOVA addressed this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. There will be no relationship between the teacher’s years of teaching experience and their preference for required or self-directed professional learning. The main effect of teacher experience from the two-way ANOVA addressed this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3. The effect of level of teacher on their preference for required or self-directed professional learning will not change as a function of teacher’s years of teaching experience. The level x experience interaction term from the two-way ANOVA addressed this hypothesis.
In order to address hypotheses 4-6, a two-way ANOVA (teacher level x teacher experience) was conducted with type of professional learning as the DV.

*Hypothesis 4.* The main effect of teacher level from the two-way ANOVA addressed this hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 5.* The main effect of teacher experience from the two-way ANOVA addressed this hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 6.* The level x experience interaction term from the two-way ANOVA addressed this hypothesis.

In order to address hypotheses 7-9, a two-way ANOVA (teacher level x teacher experience) was conducted with administrative support as the DV.

*Hypothesis 7.* The main effect of teacher level from the two-way ANOVA addressed this hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 8.* The main effect of teacher experience from the two-way ANOVA addressed this hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 9.* The level x experience interaction term from the two-way ANOVA addressed this hypothesis.

**Summary**

With the increased emphasis on school improvement, improving teacher’s skills for instructions is at the heart of school improvement. The current emphasis on professional learning does not come from teacher deficiencies but from the growing recognition that education is a dynamic, professional field. Educational researchers are constantly discovering new knowledge about the teaching and learning process. As the professional knowledge expands, new skills are required from educators at all teaching
levels. Like in other professional fields, educators must add to their knowledge base and be prepared to use and refine their talents and skills during their careers. Additionally, many schools and school districts currently struggle to secure the funding for professional speakers to support professional learning. Is there a cheaper way to make sure teachers are changing to meet the new research and challenges? Can administrators and teachers agree on what the teachers need for successful professional learning inside their school?
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

Surveys were sent to 701 teachers from two high schools, two middle schools, and four elementary schools in a metropolitan Atlanta public school system. Of those, 540 teachers returned completed surveys. The survey instrument included 22 items assessing perceptions of different aspects of professional development. The items were categorized by expert raters into three sub-domains: mode of professional learning, type of professional learning, and administrative support for professional learning. A Likert-type response format was used to ascertain responses on each item.

Descriptive Data

Participants were teachers (N=540) who participated in a study to examine the relationships between teacher level or years of teaching experience and professional learning, types of professional learning, and administrative support for the professional learning. The majority of the participants were female (83.1 percent), many had master’s degrees (46.9 percent), and most had taught more than ten years (59.4 percent).

Table 2

*Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables*

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Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables

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Teacher’s Age in years

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Education Level

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<tr>
<td>16 or more years</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive statistics and correlations among items indicating mode of professional development, type of professional development, and administrative support
for professional development are located in Table 3. Questions 3, 4, and 8 were left off the survey because their correlations were low and they were not correlated with their individual domains.

Table 3

*Descriptives and Simple Correlations of Teachers’ Preference for their Choice for Professional Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Prof. Learning</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1 Prefer professional learning in one day</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>(.92)</td>
<td>.358</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>-.305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 Prefer profess. learning in multiple meetings throughout year</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>(.81)</td>
<td>-.152</td>
<td>-.190</td>
<td>.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5 Prefer one day district speakers</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>(.87)</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6 Do not like same prof. learn. for entire staff</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>(.79)</td>
<td>-.117</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7 Prefer monthly professional learning</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Prof. Learning</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Q10</th>
<th>Q11</th>
<th>Q12</th>
<th>Q21</th>
<th>Q22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q9 Teacher invited others to observe them teach</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>(1.16)</td>
<td>.927</td>
<td>.899</td>
<td>.888</td>
<td>.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10 Teacher chose to observe another teacher</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>(1.10)</td>
<td>.909</td>
<td>.889</td>
<td>.870</td>
<td>.943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11 Teacher collaborated with another teacher</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>(.77)</td>
<td>.970</td>
<td>.932</td>
<td>.943</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued).

*Descriptives and Simple Correlations of Teachers’ Preference for their Choice for Professional Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q12</th>
<th>Teacher shared lesson plans with another teacher</th>
<th>4.29</th>
<th>(0.88)</th>
<th>0.922</th>
<th>0.950</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q21</td>
<td>Teacher used student data to influence prof. learning</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
<td>0.950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q22</td>
<td>Teacher matched their prof. learning with the needs of their students</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>(0.81)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adm. Support for Prof. Learning²</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Q14</th>
<th>Q15</th>
<th>Q16</th>
<th>Q17</th>
<th>Q18</th>
<th>Q19</th>
<th>Q20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q13</td>
<td>Principal requires book study/ school focus</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.947</td>
<td>0.946</td>
<td>0.940</td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>0.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>Prin. provides opportunity to observe</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>(1.06)</td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>0.961</td>
<td>0.969</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td>0.966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>Prin. requires specific prof. learn. coursework</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>(1.12)</td>
<td>0.961</td>
<td>0.955</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.963</td>
<td>0.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
<td>Principal requires teachers time to share</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>(0.77)</td>
<td>0.983</td>
<td>0.985</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>Prin. encourages mentoring or peer coach.</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>(0.75)</td>
<td>0.985</td>
<td>0.987</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18</td>
<td>Prin. encourages prof. learning communities</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>0.953</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q19</td>
<td>Prin. encourages collaboration</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>(0.57)</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued).

Descriptives and Simple Correlations of Teachers’ Preference for their Choice for Professional Learning

| Q20 Prin. requires grade level/subject logs | 3.75 | (1.18) |

** All numbers on the chart are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
1 Items have a maximum value of 4.
2 Items have a maximum value of 5.

Table 4 indicates item total correlations between each item and the total for the parent domain without the item included in the total as well as the total for the non-parent domains.

Table 4

Items from Mode of Professional Development Domain, Items from Type of Professional Development Domain, and Items from Administrative Support for Professional Development Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Preferences for Professional Learning</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mode of Professional Learning Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q₁ Prefer profess. learning in one day</td>
<td>.696**</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q₂ Prefer prof. learning in multiple meetings / year</td>
<td>.484**</td>
<td>.128**</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q₅ Prefer one day district speakers</td>
<td>.490**</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>-.177**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q₆ Do not like same prof. learn. for entire staff</td>
<td>.156**</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>-.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q₇ Prefer monthly professional learning</td>
<td>.747**</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Professional Learning Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q₉ Teacher invited others to observe them</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.945**</td>
<td>.282**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q₁₀ Teacher chose to observe another teacher</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.949**</td>
<td>.286**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 (continued).

*Items from Mode of Professional Development Domain, Items from Type of Professional Development Domain, and Items from Administrative Support for Professional Development Domain*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
<td>Teacher collaborated with another teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12</td>
<td>Teacher shared lesson plans w/another teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q21</td>
<td>T. used student data to influence prof. learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q22</td>
<td>T.matched prof. learning w/ stud. needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Admin. Support for Prof. Learning Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q13</td>
<td>Principal requires book study/ school focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>Prin. provides opportunity to observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>Prin. requires specific prof. learn. coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
<td>Principal requires teachers time to share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>Prin. encourages mentoring or peer coach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18</td>
<td>Prin. encourages prof. learning communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q19</td>
<td>Prin. encourages collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q20</td>
<td>Prin. requires grade level/ subject logs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

**Statistical Results**

In order to address hypotheses 1 through 3, a two way ANOVA was conducted with mode of professional development as the dependent variable (DV) and teacher level (elementary, middle, or high school) and experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, and > 16 years) as the independent variables (IV). Results indicated no level x experience interaction. There was, however, a main effect of teaching level, $F(2,527) = 11.234$, $p < .01$ with
high school teachers ($M = 2.15$, $SD = .64$) scoring much lower than the elementary ($M = 2.48$, $SD = .75$) or middle school ($M = 2.50$, $SD = .52$) teachers (Tukey’s HSD = 2.125, $n = 188$). The lower score for high school teachers indicted that they preferred required professional learning over self-directed professional learning. There was no main effect of years of teaching experience.

In order to address hypotheses 4 through 6, a two way ANOVA with type of professional development as the DV and teacher level (elementary, middle, or high school) and experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, and > 16 years) as the IVs. Results indicated a level x experience interaction, $F(3,525) = 6.693, p = .006$. Analysis of simple effects indicated a significant effect of experience for elementary ($F(3,524) = 2.99, p = .03$), middle ($F(3,524) = 4.37, p = .005$) and high school teachers ($F(3,524) = 4.44, p = .004$). Tukey’s HSD follow-up analysis did not reveal any pairwise differences for elementary school teachers. However, for middle school teachers, Tukey’s HSD indicated that teachers with 0-5 years of experience ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .50$) and 6-10 years of experience ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .34$) did not differ from one another but preferred ongoing training to a greater extent than teachers with 11-15 years ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .38$) and more than 15 years of experience ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .44$; all $p$ values < .05), with the latter two groups having no significant difference between them. For high school teachers, Tukey’s HSD indicated a significant difference between teachers with 6-10 years of experience and teachers of all other experience levels (all $p$ values < .05). Teachers with 6-10 years of experience ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .57$) preferred ongoing training to a greater extent than the other groups ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .45$) for 0-5 years of experience, ($M = 3.86$, $SD = .63$) for 11-15 years of experience, ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .61$) for > 15 years of experience. See Figure
There was as well, a main effect of teaching experience, $F(3, 525) = 3.05, p = .006$, Tukey’s HSD indicated that teachers with greater than 16 years of teaching experience ($M = 3.92, SD = .56$), scored higher than teachers with 1-5 years ($M = 3.73, SD = .51, p = .023$) and 6-10 years ($M = 3.67, SD = .54, p = .002$) and 11-15 years of experience ($M = 3.86, SD = .54$) on that variable.

Higher scores on type of professional development indicate the teachers with more than 11 years of teaching experience preferred their professional learning in single meeting, workshop, or conference rather than ongoing training. There was no main effect of teacher level.

*Figure 1.* Teachers’ Years of Experience x Level Interaction effects on Preferences for the Process of Professional Learning (higher scores on Process indicate that teachers prefer professional learning in one day versus ongoing throughout the year).
In order to address hypotheses 7 through 9, a two way ANOVA was conducted with administrative support for professional development as the DV and teacher level (elementary, middle, or high school) and experience (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, and > 16 years) as the independent variables IVs. Results indicated no level x experience interaction. There was, however, a main effect of level, $F(2,524) = 13.492, p < .01$ with results from Tukey’s HSD indicating that middle ($M = 4.09, SD = .51$) teachers scoring higher than the elementary ($M = 3.81, SD = .60, p < .001$) and the high school ($M = 3.76, SD = .53, p < .001$) on their perceptions of administrative support. There was also a main effect of experience, $F(3,524) = 4.539, p = .004$. Tukey’s HSD indicated that teacher with one to five years of teaching experience ($M = 4.01, SD = .55$) perceived a higher level of administrative support for professional development compared to teachers with six to ten ($M = 3.77, SD = .59, p < .001$ years of experience ($p = .02$). Teachers with 16 or more years of teaching experience ($M = 3.95, SD = .59$) and those with eleven to fifteen ($M = 3.81, SD = .53$) years of teaching experience did not differ from the other groups.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Background Information

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a difference in the opinions of elementary, middle, and high school teachers concerning teacher required or self-directed professional learning. Additionally, the study investigated differences in teaching experience, professional development in a series compared to in a one-time workshop or conference, and whether the teachers feel support from their administrators for their professional learning.

Research findings indicated there was a relationship between teachers’ preference for professional learning, their years of teaching experience, and their level of teaching (elementary, middle, or high). There were significant findings for all three groups including the choice of required or self-directed professional learning, the process for professional learning including participation in a single meeting, workshop or conference rather than ongoing training and the teachers’ perception of administrative support for their professional learning.

Statistical analyses revealed there was a main effect of teaching level on required or self-directed professional learning with the high school teachers scoring much lower than the elementary or middle school teachers. This indicated the high school teachers preferred the required learning and the elementary and middle school teachers preferred the self-directed professional learning. In addition, teacher level revealed a significant main effect with teacher level and teachers’ perception for administrators’ support with
the middle school teachers scoring much higher than the elementary and high school teachers. The middle school teachers’ higher score showed they perceived their administrators supported their professional learning and the elementary and high school teachers did not perceive as much support for their professional learning from their administrators.

Another interesting and significant main effect was found with teaching experience and teacher’s perception of administrator support for professional learning where teachers with one to five years of teaching experience scored much higher than the teachers with six or more years of teaching experience. This indicated the teachers with one to five years of teaching experience perceived more administrator support for their professional learning than the teachers with more than five years of teaching experience. There was an interaction between teaching experience and the teachers’ preference for professional learning in a single meeting, workshop, or conference rather than ongoing training showing teachers with 10 or more years of teaching experience scored much higher than teachers with one to nine years of teaching experience showing teachers with one to ten years of teaching experience preferred ongoing professional learning and teachers with 11 or more years of teaching experience preferred their professional learning in a single meeting, conference, or workshop.

Conclusions and Discussion

Professional development can be a powerful tool that allows teachers to grow as they practice teaching (Buenaflor, 2009). In professional development programs teachers need learner activities to practice using the new ideas in the classroom (Buenaflor, 2009).
At the same time, the professional development should lead teachers to critically examine their practices, select alternative practices, and discard practices (Cranton, 2003).

The goals of teacher professional learning include improving teaching practices, understanding the practices, and improving the implementation of new teaching practices. In school districts today, the trend for professional learning needs to move away from district wide design toward site-based approaches. District requirements for professional learning need change in order to avoid the poor record of success from previous district wide professional development design. Too often, these designs consist of one shot presentations with little relevance to the daily problems and issues teachers and administrators face. Furthermore, these programs seldom include sufficient follow-up and support for the successful implementation of new practices. Site-based designs can offer greater relevance and flexibility because their content and procedures are determined by the local educators.

Site-based designs offer several obvious advantages for educators including common goals, content, models and evaluation procedures. These decisions are typically made by teacher committees and school leaders with input from parents and community members. At this level consensus on issues related to professional learning are easier to reach because fewer individuals are involved. When the learning is ongoing at the local level, there is an opportunity for sustained professional learning by the entire school community.

With the increased emphasis on school improvement, improving teacher’s skills for instruction is at the heart of school improvement. The current emphasis on professional learning does not come from teacher deficiencies but from the growing
recognition that education is a dynamic, professional field. Educational researchers are constantly discovering new knowledge about the teaching and learning process. As the professional knowledge expands, new skills are required from educators at all teaching levels. Like in other professional fields, educators must add to their knowledge base and be prepared to use and refine their talents and skills. With high stakes testing, teacher accountability, budget cuts, and increasing stress, it is important to find economical ways to improve teacher performance.

The research in this study explored teachers’ perceptions for required and self-directed professional learning at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The study found middle school and elementary teachers’ preferred self-directed professional learning much more than the high school teachers. Therefore, more choice in professional learning should be offered to elementary and middle school teachers and more required professional learning should be offered to the high school teachers. The middle school teachers scored much higher with their perception of administrative support for professional learning than did the elementary and high school teachers. Consequently, elementary and high school administrators should be more supportive of their teachers’ professional learning.

Influence of Teaching Experience

Teaching experience was included as a demographic item and as an independent variable to see if teaching experience might be a factor in teacher’s perceptions of professional learning. The expectation was that as a teacher’s experience increases, their desire for choice in professional learning would increase, their desire for ongoing professional learning would increase, and they would feel more supported by their school
administrators. According to the results of the survey, there was no significant relationship between teaching experience and the teachers’ preference for self-directed or required professional learning.

However, the two-way ANOVA results showed teachers who had more than 10 years of teaching experience scored significantly much higher than teachers with one to nine years of teaching experience preferring professional learning in a single meeting, workshop, or conference rather than ongoing training. Stated briefly, the teachers with the most experience preferred their professional learning in a one day, single meeting and the teachers with one to ten years of teaching experience preferred the ongoing professional learning. Using the survey results, administrators need to plan ongoing training for teachers with one to nine years of teaching experience and one day workshops, conferences, and training for teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience.

Additionally, when the teaching experience and teachers’ perceptions of administrator support toward self-directed learning were compared using a two-way ANOVA, the results showed teachers with one to five years of teaching experience scored significantly much higher than the teachers with six or more years of teaching experience. Therefore, teachers with one to five years of teaching experience perceived their administrator supported their professional learning. Conversely, the teachers with more than six years of teaching experience did not feel as supported by their administrators for their professional learning. Clearly, administrators need to show more support of their teachers’ professional learning when they have more than six years of teaching experience at all levels including elementary, middle, and high schools.
Influence of Teaching Level

Teaching level including elementary, middle, and high school was included as a demographic item and as an independent variable to see if teaching level might be a factor in teacher’s perceptions of professional learning. The expectation one group (elementary, middle, or high school teachers) might prefer self-directed or required professional learning differently from the other groups, they might choose either professional learning in a single meeting, workshop, or conference or ongoing learning differently from the other groups, and they might feel administration support differently from the other groups. According to the results of the survey, there was no significant difference between the teaching level of elementary, middle, and high school teachers and the teachers’ preference for professional learning in a single meeting, workshop, or conference or ongoing learning.

However, the two-way ANOVA showed there was a significant difference between the teacher level and teacher preferences for self-directed or required professional learning. The high school teachers scored significantly much lower than the elementary or middle school teachers. The elementary and middle school teachers preferred self-directed professional learning compared to the high school teachers.

In addition, when the teacher’s level was compared to their perceptions of administrator support toward self-directed professional learning, the two-way ANOVA revealed there is a significant main effect of teacher level and the teachers’ perception for administrative support with the middle school teacher scoring significantly much higher than the elementary and high school teachers. Subsequently, the elementary and high
school teachers did not feel their administrators supported their choice in professional learning.

Interaction of the Teaching Experience and Teaching Level

In order to address both the teaching experience in years and the teaching level with regards to elementary, middle, or high school, a two-way ANOVA was conducted with the teaching experience and teaching level as the independent variables and the scores in groups including self-directed or required professional learning, teacher’s preference for participation in a single meeting, workshop, or conference rather than ongoing training, and teacher’s years of teaching experience as the independent variables. The two-way ANOVA revealed an interaction between the years of teaching experience and the teachers’ preference for professional learning in a single meeting, workshop, or conference rather than ongoing training. There was no interaction between teaching experience, teaching level, and self-directed or required professional learning and there was no interaction between teaching experience, teaching level, and administrative support for professional learning.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to the randomly selected schools in a metropolitan Atlanta public school system. Although this study exhibited adequate sample size (N = 540), the schools were randomly selected and the teachers who volunteered to participate in the study may not represent the attitudes of the general population. The survey instrument was developed by the researcher for the study and may need refinement to improve the validity of the results.
Additionally, all of the participating schools were located in a metropolitan area and did not include rural and private schools. If teachers from rural and private schools were added to the population, the hypotheses could be more adequately tested. When the researcher visited two elementary schools to complete the survey, the entire staff of the schools was assigned required professional learning following the survey. This setting could have biased their professional learning survey results.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Professional learning is important to the improvement of teachers and can impact student learning. Teachers’ attitudes toward professional learning can have an impact on successful professional learning. In this study, there were many statistically significant results with teachers’ perceptions toward professional learning. The teacher preferences need to be used at the school and district level when offering one day or ongoing training for teachers. For example, teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience should be offered one day professional learning and teachers with 1-10 years of teaching experience should be offered the ongoing training they prefer. Additionally, teachers with one to five years of teaching experience and teachers with 16 or more years of teaching experience felt supported by their administrator for professional learning. Teachers with six to fifteen years of teaching experience did not feel as much administrative support for their professional learning as the other groups. Using this research, administrators at all levels including elementary, middle, and high schools need to be more supportive of their teachers’ professional learning in the middle years of teaching experience. Another finding with administrative support found the middle school teachers felt their administrators supported their professional learning but the
elementary and high school teachers did not perceive administrator support. Consequently, using this information, administrators at the elementary and high school levels need to support their teachers’ efforts in professional learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study adds to the body of literature dealing with teachers’ perceptions for professional learning, there are certainly many questions that were not addressed, as well as questions that arose from conducting this study. There are opportunities for modification of this instrument, replication of the study, and longitudinal research. For example, the instrument could be adjusted to improve reliability. Individual statements could be discarded or replaced to provide a higher consistency for reliability. Future investigations with the instruments might include teacher’s education level and gender to see about these potential differences impact professional learning decisions.

Additional classifications could be added to the demographic information gathered from future study participants. Demographic factors such as teacher’s education level and gender could be examined for their influence on professional learning. Results such as these delve deeper into what causes teachers to prefer certain professional learning and what causes other teachers to prefer other professional learning. Schools could be grouped by socioeconomics to study teachers and their preferences for professional learning.

Replication of this study, as with any research, would add support to the findings. Refining the instrument and conducting a study in other areas of the state, region or country could provide a better representation for national professional learning. The study participants could be broadened to include counselors, administrators, and
paraprofessionals. The inclusion of these groups would also provide additional
demographic subgroups for comparison.

In the randomly selected public schools in a metropolitan Atlanta county, the
results should be used to drive professional learning decisions at the local school and
district level. For example, more choice in professional learning should be offered to
elementary and middle school teachers and more required professional learning should be
offered to the high school teachers. Additionally, since elementary and high school
teachers did not feel supported in their professional learning by their administrators,
elementary and high school administrators should be more supportive of their teachers’
professional learning. Teachers with more than six years of teaching experience did not
feel as much administrative support for their professional learning as the other group with
one to five years of teaching experience, so administrators at all levels including
elementary, middle, and high schools need to be more supportive of their teachers’
professional learning when they have more than six years of teaching experience. Lastly,
teachers with 10 or more years of teaching experience preferred their professional
learning in a single meeting, workshop, or conference rather than ongoing training; the
teachers with one to nine years of teaching experience preferred their professional
learning in ongoing training rather than in a single meeting, workshop, or conference.
The school and county should offer one day and ongoing training so all teachers can have
professional learning in the delivery model of their choice.

A longitudinal administration of the survey instrument would reveal how
teacher’s perceptions of professional learning change over time. This type of study could
be administered at regular intervals such as every five years when their professional
learning is recorded at the state level. The longitudinal study could benefit the individual schools and district because ultimately professional learning benefits not only the teacher but the school, district, and students. The district could use these surveys to select professional learning to benefit all stakeholders.

Currently our country is not keeping up with other countries with our student achievement. Veteran teachers in this study were beginning teachers when our country was successfully leading other nations with student achievement. What has changed in our country to lower our student achievement and what can our country do to remain competitive in the world? When our country was competitive academically were the teachers doing required and ongoing professional learning?

Experiments in systems are needed to find out if the professional training is working to improve the teachers and increase student achievement. For example, teachers could be randomly assigned to the type (required or self-directed) and mode (a single meeting, workshop, or conference compared to ongoing) of professional learning. Professional learning could be assigned for a period of time and compared to their student achievement on standardized testing. An experiment could show whether the ongoing training or one day training works as well as whether teachers need required learning. Can the teachers be trusted to choose the content learning they need or will they engage in the learning that is easier to implement and keep them in the profession?
Dear Participant,

My name is Marla Hutton and I am employed at Walton High School in Cobb County. Under the supervision of Dr. Rose McNeese of the University of Southern Mississippi, I am completing a doctoral dissertation entitled *Teachers’ Perceptions toward Required and Self-directed Professional Learning*. Teachers’ perceptions will be studied using a questionnaire that has never been pilot tested for reliability and validity. In order for me to utilize a new questionnaire, it is necessary for me to pilot it before having instructional personnel answer the survey. I would like your help; your knowledge and experience as a teacher is invaluable.

I am aware you are extremely busy, especially at this time of the year but without your help, I cannot move forward with my study.

Please complete the attached survey and return it to my mailbox by June 10. I have tried to make completing the questionnaire as convenient as possible for you. Your participation is completely voluntary, but very much appreciated.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marla Hutton
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6520 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board 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: 11052303
PROJECT TITLE: Teacher Perceptions Toward Required and Self Directed Professional Learning
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation
RESEARCHER/S: Maria Hutton
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership & School Counseling
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Approval
PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: 08/11/2011 to 08/10/2012

Lawrence A. Hoeman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

8-14-2011 Date
APPENDIX C

IRB PERMISSION FROM COUNTY

April 28, 2011

Ms. Marla Hutton

Dear Ms. Hutton:

Your application to conduct research in [Redacted] has been administratively approved. You may now contact the individual schools/Departments about their participation in the study. Listed below are the schools identified in your application, along with the name and phone number of the Principal. A copy of the Principal Agreement To Participate Form is included. After gaining approval from school principals, submit the original form to the Office of Accountability. Once the form has been received in the Office of Accountability and Research, a final letter of approval will be sent to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

BOARD OF EDUCATION

SUPERSINTENDENT

[Redacted]
Should modifications or changes in research procedures become necessary during the research project, submit changes in writing to the Office of Accountability and Research. If you have any questions regarding the final approval process, contact our office at [Contact Information].

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr. Judith A. Jones
Chief Accountability and Research Officer
APPENDIX D

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Professional Learning Teacher Questionnaire

The purpose of this study is to assess the opinions of elementary, middle, and high school teachers concerning professional learning. This survey is part of a study being conducted by a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi. Because your school has been randomly selected to participate in this study, some of your teaching colleagues will receive this same invitation to respond. Please do not discuss your answers with your colleagues. In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, do not put your name anywhere on this survey instrument. Thank you for participating in this study.

A. INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

1. Current position: _____ elementary _____ middle _____ high school teacher

2. Current position: ___ ___ ___ ___ grade(s) taught

3. Gender: _____ male _____ female


5. Highest level of education: _____ BS _____ MS _____ Specialist _____ Doctorate

6. Number of years teaching experience:
   _____ 1-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21-25 _____ 26-30
   _____ over 30

Please respond using the following scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree = SD</th>
<th>Disagree = D</th>
<th>Agree = A</th>
<th>Strongly Agree = SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. If given the choice, I prefer my professional learning in a one day workshop rather than ongoing, job-embedded professional learning. SD D A SA

2. I prefer professional learning with follow-up meetings to discuss outcomes or clarify questions. SD D A SA

3. I would rather choose my professional learning from a list of offerings than have required professional learning sessions. SD D A SA

4. If I did not have to attend in-service workshops, I would not. SD D A SA

5. I like professional learning with one day district level guest speakers. SD D A SA

6. I do not like the same professional learning required for the entire staff. SD D A SA

7. I prefer required professional learning that meets monthly throughout the year rather than in one day. SD D A SA

8. I prefer going to a mandatory in-service than to choose my own professional learning opportunity SD D A SA
Please answer the following questions using the following responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>never</th>
<th>rarely</th>
<th>infrequently</th>
<th>frequently</th>
<th>often</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. I invited other teachers to observe my teaching this year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. I chose to observe another teacher teaching this year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I chose to collaborate with another teacher in my subject area or grade level this year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. I chose to share lesson plans with another teacher this year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. My principal requires specific professional learning like a book study or annual school focus.</td>
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<td>14. My principal provides opportunities for teachers to observe each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. My principal requires teachers to complete specific professional learning coursework.</td>
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<td>16. My principal provides time for teachers to share ideas and activities.</td>
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<td>17. My principal encourages teachers to teach each other through shared experiences, mentoring, or peer coaching.</td>
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<td>18. My principal encourages teachers to participate in professional learning communities.</td>
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<td>19. My principal encourages teacher collaboration within grade levels or common subjects.</td>
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<td>20. My principal requires teachers to complete grade level or subject level collaborative reports.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. I use student data to influence my professional learning.</td>
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<td>22. My professional learning is targeted to the needs of the students in my school.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Dear Participant,

My name is Marla Hutton and I am employed at Walton High School in Cobb County. Under the supervision of Dr. Rose McNee of the University of Southern Mississippi, I am completing a doctoral dissertation entitled *Teachers’ Perceptions toward Required and Self-directed Professional Learning*. This study is designed to determine if teachers in elementary, middle, or high school prefer required or self-directed professional learning.

Certified instructional personnel in randomly selected Cobb County schools are being asked to complete a short questionnaire regarding professional learning. Your participation is strictly voluntary. You have the right to decline or discontinue participation at any point without penalty, prejudice, or consequence. Completion of the questionnaire should take no longer than 10 minutes. All of the individual responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

The analyzed data collected from the questionnaire will be shared with the participants and interested local and district administrators. Results of the study may be submitted for presentation at a conference and/or publication in a professional journal. By completing this questionnaire, you are giving consent as a participant for this information to be used for the purposes described above.

If you choose to participate, please place your completed questionnaire in the large envelope. As special thanks for helping, each participant may keep the pen provided for use next year.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marla Hutton
REFERENCES


