

**THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF A  
WHOLE LANGUAGE TEACHER:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF  
MASTER WHOLE LANGUAGE TEACHERS**

**Submitted to:**

**The Department of Teacher Education**

**University of Dayton**

**in Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Science in Education**

**by**

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**December 5, 1997**

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## **DEDICATION**

This research project is dedicated to my husband and parents, who have supported me in my journey of becoming a lifelong learner. It is also dedicated to the teachers who participated in this study. I thought research would make me smarter somehow; yet I am humbled by their deep respect for the students they teach and their belief that learning takes a lifetime!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

**Teacher one:** Nina, a veteran teacher of sixteen years, describes herself as a learner first and a teacher second. Nina is fluent in both English and Spanish. She grew up with Spanish as her first language and her first teaching assignments were in a bilingual area. By her third year of teaching, Nina was mentoring preservice teachers in her classroom and by her fifth year of teaching she became a clinical supervisor. All of this was entangled with a divorce, the birth of her first child, the death of her mother and grandmother, and the completion of her Master's Degree. Over her sixteen year tenure as an educator, Nina has taught and learned from first, second, third, fourth and fifth graders. Some years her classes have been multi-age classes and some years she has worked with heterogeneous traditional age-level groups.. Nina continues to be a leader in her classroom, her school, and her community.

**Teacher two:** Before teaching a multi-age class of five and six year olds, Bobbie taught sixth grade and *readiness*, a transition level between kindergarten and first grade for children who are developmentally young, in Germany. Following her experiences with the *Bay Area Writing Project* and *Math Their Way* training, Bobbie constructed her philosophy of how children learn through reading, writing, and problem solving experiences. Bobbie is not only a leader in her school and a recognized expert in whole language and *Math Their Way*, but Bobbie has also spoken on the national level about developmentally appropriate practices in mathematics. She has recently published a book connecting mathematics and writing for young learners. Bobbie is an expert mentor for beginning readers and writers. She weaves real life experiences into all subject areas to

provide meaningful contexts from which her children learn. Bobbie respects diversity in her learning community, and she understands the different experiences and learning styles each learner brings to that community. She is a master at looking at student responses as opportunities for growth and understanding. She makes the most of teachable moments when they emerge.

**Teacher three:** Judy is a veteran teacher of thirteen years. She is unique in that her teaching career began after raising three sons. Judy holds a master's degree in education and has received little formal training in whole language. Yet, she is reputed to be one of the best whole language teachers in the city. Judy teaches sixth grade in a middle school setting. She teaches reading and writing in an integrated fashion, developing her students into strong readers and writers. Judy not only hosts student and teacher observers on a regular basis, she also teaches graduate level courses in Young Adult Literature and whole language at a local university. Judy is an active member of several national organizations. She speaks regularly at local and national conventions on topics related to whole language theory and practice. Judy participates in professional learning communities, including recent participation writing for the periodical *Primary Voices*.

Administrators and colleagues alike agree that Nina, Bobbie and Judy are all expert teachers who use whole language theory effectively. They are mentors for those teachers who are transitioning from “part” to “whole” language experiences in their classrooms and for those teachers just starting out. Their classroom communities, instruction, and knowledge support excellence. Although, they remember well the

frustrations of being a beginning teacher trying to learn, understand, and apply whole language theory, they are now examples of lifetime learners and master teachers.

Many teachers who struggle to implement effective whole language programs stand in awe of Nina, Bobbie and Judy. The whole language philosophy, however well grounded in research, is difficult for many teachers. Some give up trying to apply it, while others scoff at the theory -- just another fad. What is different about Nina, Bobbie, and Judy? Why is it that they have been able to implement successful whole language programs while others fail? Is it experience? Is it training? While these may seem to be the logical conclusions, there are many teachers with more teaching experience who are not as successful implementing whole language programs. Furthermore, research indicates that "length of employment and experience without training appears to have relatively little influence on those teacher beliefs" (Smith, K and Parnell, M.K. 1997). When comparing attitudes, conceptual skills and classroom practice, the National Center for Research on Teacher Education (NCRTE, 1991) reached the same conclusion as Nate Gage (Sprinthall, 1995), "...experience by itself bore almost no relationship to either teaching effectiveness or student achievement."

So the questions remain; *How* have these teachers risen to the level of master teacher? What motivates them to move beyond the realm of the traditional teacher role? What is it exactly that makes them different?



### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to identify common events, ideas, and methods among master whole language teachers' professional development to establish a model of professional development for beginning whole language teachers.

### **Limitations**

This study contains some limitations. There was a limited sample of master whole language teachers. This small sample does not allow me to make any general statements about the whole population of master whole language teachers. The data collected among these teachers indicate a need for further investigation in this area.

### **Definition of Terms**

Coding Categories are terms used by the researcher to identify topics and recurring themes throughout the study.

Criteria refers to the standard on which a judgment can be based.

Master Teacher refers to an expert in the field of teaching according to established criteria.

Stage Development refers to a step in the process of developing towards a higher end.

Teacher Orientation to Reading Profile is a questionnaire which indicates a teacher's orientation towards the teaching of reading. For the purpose of this study, it will be used to identify the participants as having a holistic orientation towards the teaching of reading.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

Efforts to explain human behavior have resulted in a plethora of theories. Many theories suggest that professional development occurs in stages similar to Piaget's model of cognitive development. Stage development theories, like Piaget's assume a step by step development. Like a staircase, each step is needed to progress to the top level. In step development theory, one may at times regress, or have each feet divided between two different steps (Watts, 1980). Developmental stages, such as Kohlberg's stages are often connected to factors like age and experience; they do not assume that every individual will evolve to the highest level.

While studying adult behavior, learning patterns, and personal growth, researchers have developed theories that have run the gamut from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development, to Loevinger's Stages of Ego Development, to Fuller's "Concerns of teachers: A Developmental conceptualization" (1969) to Berliner's stages of teacher development. Studying adult [teacher] development from a variety of perspectives, researchers have been able to establish models that accurately predict the development of adults learners.

#### **Theories of Adult Learning**

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, reflects his belief that "an individual is responsible for becoming what he or she wants to become" (Whiting, S. et. al., 1988). Each individual has certain needs. The power of these needs to motivate behavior can best be described as hierarchical, with the needs on the bottom of the hierarchy needing attention

before those at the pinnacle. In other words, one must first fulfill basic needs before other needs can become significant motivators.

The lowest level needs are **physiological**. These needs relate to physical survival. Teachers need to address the physiological needs of their students, providing a classroom environment with comfortable furniture and comfortable temperature. The schedule should allow for breaks and movement for both the teacher and the children. The physical space needs to be rich with supplies needed for learning. In short, the environment needs to meet the physical needs of the teacher and the learners.

The next level concerns for **safety and security**. Here the individual focuses on feeling safe and secure. A teacher's personal life, an impending divorce, can affect the quality of the community. Likewise, the learning environment can be affected by a teacher's professional life and her willingness to take risks.

The third level is **love and belongingness**. Teachers, like students, need to feel that they are welcomed in the school. They need to establish relationships with their coworkers. Teachers also need to feel supported by their teaching peers.

The fourth level is **self-esteem**. The feeling of success with students is important for teacher's development. Teachers, like students, need to be challenged and supported when they are frustrated. Giving teachers the freedom, responsibility and trust to plan their schedules and curriculum allows teachers to experience success.

Maslow's highest level of need in his hierarchy is **self-actualization**. "These individuals accept themselves, are realistically oriented, are problem-centered rather than self-centered, judge others as individuals, are independent, and are creative," (Whiting, S. et.al.). This stage if ever reached takes an entire life.

Another example of stage theory stems from Kohlberg's work with moral development. Kohlberg believes people pass through sequential stages as they grow in moral reasoning. Kohlberg further believes that students can relate to lower stage reasoning, but cannot understand stage reasoning more than two levels above them (Whiting, S. et. al. 1988).

In Kohlberg's theory, he devised three levels of two stages each (See Table 1). The **preconventional level** involves the first two stages. Stage one being, a person does something to avoid punishment. In stage two, a person gives to or helps others for something in return. These stages reflect the lowest level, in which most people go through during childhood.

The second level is called the **conventional level**. This level reflects the individual's desire for approval over concrete rewards. Teachers in stage three seek approval from their peers and administrators. They may feel pressured toward the uniformity - converging interests with other staff members (Oja, S.N. and Smulyan, L., 1989). As teachers grow into stage four, they often become more goal oriented and focus on the social order of things. They begin to have more complex ways of understanding procedural knowledge. (Oja, S.N. et. al. 1989). They are concerned with doing what is right for the school, the class, the student as a whole. In relation to adult development, most Americans operate at this level, following laws in order to preserve social order.(Whiting, Susan, 1988).

**TABLE 1**  
**KOHLBERG'S STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Level One: Preconventional**

Stage One: A person does something to avoid punishment.

Stage Two: A person gives to or helps others for something in return.

**Level Two: Conventional**

Stage Three: A person needs to do what is right.

Stage Four: A person is concerned with doing what is right for  
society as a whole.

**Level Three: Postconventional**

Stage Five: A person begins using abstract reasoning. He/she can  
understand more than one point of view at a time.

Stage Six: A person makes a moral judgment based on principles of  
justice, equality for all human rights, and respect for  
the dignity of individuals.

(Whiting, Susan, 1988)

The final level of Kohlberg's moral development is the postconventional level.

"In order to move from conventional to postconventional reasoning the individual considers what society "ought to be like" rather than blindly accepting what exists," (Whiting, S., 1988). Teachers in stage five use abstract reasoning and can understand multiple points of view. They tend to be reflective in both their teaching and their learning. In stage six, the highest stage, reflects people who make decisions based on "principles of justice, equality of all human rights, and respect for the dignity of human beings as individuals," (Whiting, S., 1988). Teachers in this stage show dialectical thinking, post-formal problem finding, and reflection on action (Oja, S. et.al., 1989). Two people considered stage six individuals are Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ghandi.

Lawrence Kohlberg suggest three ways an individual might advance through these stages of moral development. First, associating with the ideas or the thinking of those who are more advanced is particularly helpful. Another spur to growth follows the adage: "I do and I understand." Experience in teaching helps teachers to know what they need to learn in order to further develop as educators. A third tactic is to look back on experiences and talk about them -- reflecting on one's teaching. This helps individuals to gain a broader perspective by stepping back to assume the critical observer's stance; thereby leading teachers to a new and or greater understanding of their teaching and/or their students, (Watts, 1980).

The work in developmental theories, such as those explained above, has strong implications for teacher development. Through research, Sharon N. Oja found that "teachers at higher, more complex stages of human development appear as more effective in classrooms than their peers at lower stages," (Oja, S. et. al, 1989). Knowing that it

seems to be accepted in research that people go through many stages of development, educational researchers formed models of teacher development based on ideas set forth in developmental theories such as these.

Francis Fuller began research addressing teacher concerns back in the 1960's. After a series of clinical studies, Fuller proposed categories of teacher concerns that appear to vary qualitatively in relationship to the amount of teaching experience. Teachers in the pre-teaching phase show little or no concerns about teaching. Teachers in the early teaching phase share concerns that are predominately related to themselves as able teachers; while teachers in the late-teaching phase express concerns about efficacy, i.e. impact on student growth (Sprinthall, et. al.). Fessler and Christensen (1992) used Fuller's research as a starting point and continued with a longitudinal study following 160 teachers throughout their career. From this they developed a model consisting of eight stages: (1) preservice, (2) induction, (3) competency building, (4) enthusiastic and growing, (5) career frustration, (6) stable and stagnant career, (7) wind-down, and (8) career exit (Springhall, et. al). Table 2 illustrates these stages and common characteristics among them.

This model is not unidirectional, but rather, represents a cycle in which teachers move in and out of positions. This movement may be based on personal experiences, such as family concerns or crisis, as well as school or social influences. Thus, it is possible for a teacher to be frustrated and feeling stuck in his/her career. Then s/he may go to an influential workshop or become a mentor teacher which revitalizes his/her interest and desire to teach. This teacher may then move from a stage of frustration to a stage of enthusiasm. Unlike human development theories, this model takes into

**TABLE 2**

**COMMON CHARACTERISTICS**

**AMONGST FESSLER'S AND CHRISTENSEN'S**

**TEACHER CAREER STAGES**

<u>Stages</u>	<u>Characteristics</u>
Preservice	*High Motivation
Induction	*High Task Accomplishment
Competency Building	*Formation of Teacher Identity
Enthusiasm and Growth	*Period of Giving Back to the Profession

<u>Stages</u>	<u>Characteristics</u>
Career Frustration	*Waning Career Satisfaction
Stable and Stagnant Career	*Frustration
Wind- Down	
Career Exit	



consideration that not all teachers go through every stage. Some may even skip stages or drop out of teaching.

A great deal of research involving preservice education, looks at the development from beginning teacher to master teacher as a way to determine how teachers develop into great teachers. “If we could find out how they [master teachers] differed from novices, it might tell us something about training needs,” (Brandt, R., 1986). One such researcher, David Berliner (1988), developed the Theory of Pedagogical Development. His theory describes pedagogical development in five stages: (1) novice, (2) advanced beginner, (3) competent, (4) proficient, and (5) expert. Table 3 shows these stages with some defining characteristics (Berliner, 1987, 1988, in press, & Henry, M, 1995).

Although the stages may be condensed or given different titles in other studies, stages share similarities across researchers. It is through the acceptance of this stage development theory for the growth of master teachers, that much research has been initiated to focus on studying the master teacher’s thoughts, judgments, and actions. It is through the general understanding of developmental theories, that research is able to continue to investigate how some people become experts. The hope would be to transfer this information to pre-service education and teacher professional development programs.

**TABLE 3****BERLINER'S PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENT STAGES****Novice**

Deliberate

Applies context - free rules

Minimum application of skills

Gaining procedural knowledge and experiences

Feeling of survival (Watts, 1980)

**Advanced Beginner**

Insightful

Beginning to recognize similarities across contexts

Developing strategic knowledge

Still unable to differentiate what is important

Blames actions on external factors

**Competent**

Rational

Makes conscious choices about what to do

Sets priorities based on experiential knowledge

Makes instructional decisions within a specific context

Takes personal responsibility for classroom results

**Proficient**

Intuitive

Recognizes similarities within differing situations

Predicts events more precisely

Analytic and deliberative

**Expert**

Intuitive

Non-analytical and non-deliberative

Fluid and seamless

## **Research in the area of Master Teacher**

The master teacher research has identified a number of common characteristics among elite teachers. Outstanding teachers do share various characteristics such as the desire for continuous renewal (Collinson, 1994). Furthermore, research has indicated that teachers go through stages of development. As the stage of development theory dates back to Piaget and his work with children, other researchers have applied this theory to teacher development. Stages of teacher development seem to focus on the different experiences, reactions, and attitudes teachers have throughout their career.

Identifying the characteristics of master teachers has been the focus of several studies. The drive for such research comes from the idea that if researchers can pinpoint the key elements of an expert teacher, teacher education programs can better prepare future teachers. The findings can also direct current teachers to areas of their own teaching that need to be fine tuned.

Vivienne Collinson (1994) completed research that identified key characteristics shared by exemplary teachers. These characteristics included (1) a disposition to question and reflect on one's teaching (2) knowledge of the children, curriculum, and community (3) a deep belief that what teachers do is important (4) an appreciation of the whole educational community, and an ability to accept and process different points of views represented in their community and (5) an explicit set of ethics that the teacher values and passes along to his/her students.

Similar characteristics have emerged as research in the area of master teachers reaches across disciplines. For instance, Lowell E. Hedges and James Papritan (1987) did a study titled “The Ingredients Necessary for Excellence in Teaching.” This study examined the attitudes of experienced vocational agriculture teachers. From a population of 130 agriculture teachers in Ohio, 14 received three or more nominations for master teacher status. Seven of these fourteen were randomly selected to participate. What Hedges and Papritan found is similar to what other researchers have found concerning teachers in the field of education. Master teachers tend to value being technically up to date (knowing curriculum), being motivated (knowing that what teachers do is important), being interested in students (knowing students), setting directions, evaluating performance (reflecting on one’s teaching), developing a positive attitude, using community resources (knowing the community), and having a high quality supervised experience for each student. While many of these “ingredients” for excellent teaching are extraordinarily similar to the characteristics of expert teachers in the field of elementary education, there are some different characteristics that specifically pertain to the field of agriculture.

Another study focuses on the characteristics of an effective teacher (Richards, Beverly, 1982), examining clinical teachers of nursing students. Again, similar findings occurred. Excellent clinical teaching involves advising and counseling (focus on the relationship between teacher and student), (1) investing time in the profession -- using personal and professional experiences to contribute to teaching techniques, (2) organizing and directing -- the teacher organizes materials and gives clear directions, (3) seeking quality - this characteristic relates to the relevance of the teaching style and the flexibility

of the teacher; (4) seeking substance - this pertains to the “depth and breadth,” (Richards, B. 1982) of the teacher’s subject knowledge; and (5) being committed to the profession - this suggests an increasing knowledge of subject matter in their area as well as personal research and publications as indicators of continuous growth. Table 4 compares the various similarities between the studies of master teachers. It is also noticeable that there are some differences among master teachers in different fields.

Researchers have been able to note similarities and differences among master teachers in different fields. There are implications that there are differences among expert school teachers based on where one teaches. For instance, Martin Haberman did a study in which he was able to identify characteristics of teachers who are most successful with urban students. He refers to these characteristics as functions:

1. Persistence in problem solving
2. Protecting learners and learning
3. Applying generalizations
4. Approaching at risk-students with high expectations
5. Assuming a professional rather than a personal orientation towards students
6. Avoiding discouragement brought on by working in a school bureaucracy
7. Admitting teacher fallibility

(Haberman, 1994)

One can conclude that although these characteristics are different from those found by Collinson, they still have much in common with Berliner’s expert teacher stage. There are also similarities to Collinson’s work. For instance, persistence in problem solving would require the teacher of urban students to seek different alternatives, which is also reflected in Collinson’s description of teachers who question and reflect on their teaching. It is important to note that different arenas of teaching require different skills and abilities from expert teachers.

**TABLE 4**  
**COMPARISON OF EXPERT TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS**  
**IN DIFFERENT REALMS OF TEACHING**

<b><u>Collinson - General Education</u></b>	<b><u>Hedges &amp; Papritan Agriculture Education</u></b>	<b><u>Beverly - Nursing Education</u></b>	<b><u>Haberman - Effective Urban Teachers</u></b>
* Disposition to question and reflect on one's teaching	* Evaluates own performance.	* Uses personal and professional experiences to contribute to one's teaching.	* Persistent in problem solving and admits teacher fallibility.
* Has knowledge of the children, the curriculum, and the community.	* Interested in students and is technically up to date.	* Seeks substance in subject knowledge.	* Capable of applying generalizations appropriately.
* Maintains a deep belief that what teachers do is important.	* Being motivated and having a positive attitude.	* Committed to the profession.	* Avoids discouragement from working within a bureaucracy.
* Appreciates the whole educational community and different points of views.	* Uses community resources.		
* Passes a set of ethics on to his/her students.		* Seeks quality.	* Has high expectations for at-risk students.

Martha Henry( 1995) conducted a study based on Berliner’s Stages of Pedagogical Development. She wanted to find out if expert teachers and experienced teachers differed with respect to factors that influence their instructional decision making. This study does not however explore differences among teachers with regard to their pedagogical development. In her study, expert teachers were nominated based on the following criteria (Henry, M. 1995):

- Knowledge of content
- The ability to work with all students
- Nurturing
- Takes Risks
- Respectful and interested in students’ needs
- Continues professional growth
- Self-confident and reflective
- Adjusts the context to the learners
- Enthusiastic
- Uses teachable moments and a variety of strategies
- Maintains good classroom management
- Acknowledges own lack of knowledge

These factors not only resemble Berliner’s findings regarding the expert teacher, but they also resemble Fessler’s and Christensen’s cycle of teacher development. The experienced teacher’s group had a mean of sixteen years of experience and therefore more than likely included expert teachers. However, her data had some important implications.

Henry found that expert teachers consider informal student outcomes like enhancing student understanding and/or enjoyment, motivating student interests or improving classwork to be most important when making instructional decisions. The experts also ranked the (1) compatibility of instructional strategies with the teacher’s personality and style and (2) teacher enjoyment of the instructional strategy and content as important factors. While the expert teachers ranked these factors significantly higher than the experienced teachers, they also ranked administrative or school board approval and

collegial support significantly lower as relevant factors influencing instructional decisions. According to Henry's (1994) study, "Statistical measures show these Expert teachers to be more concerned with student enjoyment while learning and the compatibility of the instruction to their own philosophy and experience of success in the classrooms in the past."

Finding similarities between master teachers has been an area of research that continues to develop in the educational world. As Horace Mann pointed out so many years ago "As is the teacher, so is the school." The initiatives of school reform are cradled in the strength of teacher development. Continuous research in the area of master teachers is needed to guide beginning teachers through a successful career.

It is clear that there are differences among teachers. There are differences among pre-service teachers, beginning teachers, experienced teachers and expert teachers. There are even differences among master teachers depending on their field of education and the area in which one works. Yet, all of the characteristics can be linked to Berliner's Stages of Pedagogical Development.

### **Research in Professional Development of Teachers**

Watts (1980) recognizes that "Teachers ... develop at different rates, with a foot on two different steps of the (development) ladder." This is true of all learners, students and teachers alike. However, many teachers get to the middle stage(s) and stay there feeling satisfied with their work (Watts, 1980). Again, the question comes to mind, how



do educators move past the stages of competent and proficient and into the stage of mastery?

Watts (1980) claims that the stage of development in which a teacher is currently working should influence the type of development that teacher receives. For instance, in what she terms the middle stage, which would be Berliner's stages of advanced beginner and competency, Watts sees positive feedback from students and colleagues as an aid for professional growth. This allows the teacher to "open up, accept help and begin to step back and view the experience more objectively" (Watts, 1980). Master teachers need to find continuous renewal, perhaps through a course or trying something new in the classroom.

However, it is still widely accepted that most teacher development occurs at one day workshops or conferences (Lieberman, 1995). Watts' (1980) experiences with teacher centers indicate that "the formal and traditional forms of inservice programs decrease in value as teachers increase with mastery." This explains why some teachers will call a workshop a success if they get *one* good idea over the six hour inservice. As a matter of fact, Darling-Hammond (1997) argues that the understanding of learners and learning is the "most neglected aspect of teacher preparation in this country. Licensing and preparation have focused more on subject matter knowledge and methods than on strong theoretical and empirical understanding of students and their learning."

Many educators are calling for reform in both preservice and inservice teacher education. "Beginning with preservice education and continuing throughout a teacher's career, teacher development must focus on deepening the understanding of the processes of teaching and learning" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Darling-Hammond

(1997) further argues that the core of educational reform should be the preparation, induction, and development of teachers.

What is being proposed is that teacher development begin to focus on the theories of teaching, how they are generated, modified and practiced to further teacher understanding of the instructional practice (Henry, 1994). In other words, we have been focusing on a “ ‘teacher - proof’ approach to curriculum” (Darling-Hammond 1997), “going through the motions, implementing new methods and procedures because they (teachers) were mandated to do so by the powers that be,” (Desjean-Perrotta). Rather than questioning policies, researching theories, and applying how we know children learn, teachers have been allowed (even encouraged) to stay with the status quo and follow the leader. We (teachers) have been groomed to believe that other peoples’ understandings of teaching and learning are more important than our own (Lieberman, 1995).

An often heard statement among colleagues is that “theory is for college professors; realism is for classrooms.” Yet, Smith (1982) argues that everyone constructs a theory of the world and perceives and interprets future decisions and events in light of that theory. Furthermore, Ross (1979) found that teachers of known orientation who are able to implement their beliefs are clear in their beliefs, perceive connections between beliefs and practices, are aware of alternative practices and conscious of the beliefs of the school’s administration. If this is true, wouldn’t it make sense that staff development focus on helping teachers research and form their own theories of teaching and learning? Will developing individual teacher’s ideologies strengthen their teaching practices to enhance student learning and at the same time push them to the next stage of professional development?

Darling-Hammond of Columbia University and McLaughlin of Stanford

University are in pursuit of districts to implement new structures and policies for teacher learning. They believe effective teacher development involves teachers as learners.

Therefore, professional development should rely on these features:

1. Teachers should be engaged in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and reflection.
2. Professional development must be grounded in inquiry.
3. It should be collaborative and focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individuals.
4. Professional development should be derived from and connected to teachers' work with students.
5. It must be sustained, ongoing, and intensive and supported by modeling and coaching.
6. It needs to be connected with other aspects of school change.

(Darling-Hammond, et.al., 1995)

If one looks at these criteria closely, they resemble what recent research has said about student learning. Yet, traditionally, teachers have not been thought about as learners, but rather as "middle men." The teacher is the person who goes to the workshops, finds out what to do and how to do it, and returns to the classroom to mimic the techniques with students.

Research has established that there are different stages of teacher development. It indicates that most teachers move from the novice stage to the competent stage with adequate professional training supported by their university or school district. Research

further indicates that some teachers are able to grow beyond the competent stage, despite lack of formal training in the traditional sense.

Knowing all of this, it is recognized by many educators that there is a need for reform in the training and continued support of preservice and professional teachers. The ideas of testing teachers every so many years has floated around in informal conversation. The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards has developed a means of assessing teachers to identify outstanding teachers for national certification. Yet the current trend in reform seems to lie in the initial and ongoing training of teachers. Still, the question remains: What do expert teachers *do* to push themselves beyond the competent stage(s) of teaching?

It is no secret that whole language has come under fire from critics around the country. Misconceptions and myths about the philosophy and strategies seem to fuel the movement to revert back to rote memorization and direct instruction as isolated teaching strategies for the classroom. According to whole language expert Reggie Routman, “My best guess...is that only about twenty percent of us are truly grounded in whole language philosophy to the point where we can understand and apply it,” (Routman, 1995).

Although this is her *guess*, the research previously discussed certainly supports the idea that teachers have not been trained (nor held accountable) to understand theory and how it relates to instructional practice to further their understanding of the learning processes (DeFord 1985). Thus, in the age of buzz words and quick fix techniques, it is not hard to believe that many teachers grabbed on to the term “whole language” before understanding it and all of its implications for practice (Routman, 1995).

These concerns had been raised by Jerome Bruner (1960) decades ago. It is important that teachers have theory knowledge. It is equally important that they can use this theory in effective classroom practice. Gilbert Ryle (1984) distinguished between “knowledge and knowledge how-to” (Springhall, et. al., 1997). He, like Bruner agreed that there is a need for *both* kinds of knowledge.

There are expert teachers who are grounded in the whole language theory (knowledge) and are able to apply it effectively to their classroom practices (knowledge how-to). Since the research on expert teachers and teacher development has not taken into account subjects’ individual ideologies, one may conclude that an expert teacher of whole language orientation moves through the same stages of pedagogy development as an expert teacher of a more traditional orientation. What specifically (whether consciously or unconsciously) have master whole language teachers done to meet their desire for continuous renewal and professional growth? Knowing the paths these teachers take, may not only support the reformist ideas but it may also give beginning and transitioning whole language teachers some guidance to further their growth.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The sample consisted of three master teachers of whole language orientation. The selection of these teachers was made by the researcher with input from school administrators and colleagues of the subjects selected. In establishing criteria, consideration was given to administrative observations and evaluations of the subject, the researcher's professional experience with the subjects and the professional experiences of other teachers with each subject. The criteria from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) served as a foundation for participant selection. The NBPTS, established in 1987, serves to articulate definitive standards of practice that are accepted by the profession. This body of 63 members, two thirds of which are teachers with regular classroom contact with children, is developing assessments for the certification of highly accomplished teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1995). The subjects selected for this study met the following criteria based on the standards identified by NBPTS:

- 1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.** Teachers are dedicated to making knowledge accessible to all students. They understand how students develop and learn. They adjust their practice, as appropriate, based on observation and knowledge of their students' interests, abilities, skills, knowledge, family circumstances, and peer relationships (Darling-Hammond, 1995)

In the context of whole language, teachers are committed to students and learning. They use the whole language theory – “a paradigm, a framework in action” (Edelsky, C., Altwerger, B., Flores, B., 1991) as the underlying framework for how the teacher relates to students and how the teacher adjusts curriculum appropriately.

- 2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.** Teachers have a rich understanding of the subjects they teach and appreciate how knowledge in their subject(s) is created, organized, linked to other disciplines and applied to real world settings. Their instructional repertoire allows them to create multiple paths to knowledge, and they are adept at teaching students how to pose and solve their own problems (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

For whole language teachers, this means they have an understanding of the whole philosophy and how to implement it in the way they teach their curriculum. “They deliberately make sure the theory embedded in their [teaching] methods matches the theory they espouse,” (Edelsky, et. al., 1991).

- 3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.** Teachers know how to motivate and engage groups of students to ensure a purposeful learning environment, and how to organize instruction to allow the schools’ goals for students to be met. They employ multiple methods for measuring growth and understanding and can clearly explain student

performance to parents ( Darling-Hammond, 1995).

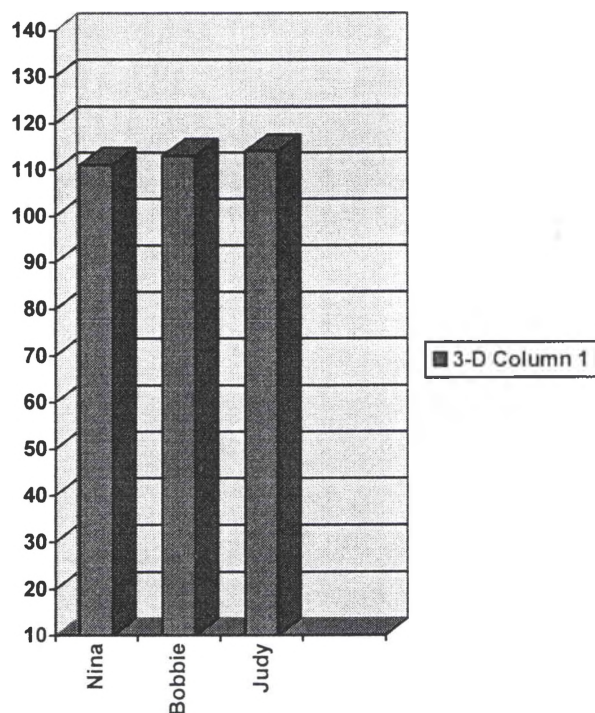
In a whole language classroom, this may look different than in a skills based room. Whole language teachers manage and monitor student learning through a variety of methods. Some methods include observations, portfolio assessment and student work. Teachers also provide a curriculum based on student inquiry and organize opportunities for students to read, write, and learn.

- 4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.** Teachers critically examine their practice, seek the advice of others, and draw on educational research and scholarship to expand their repertoire, deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgment and adapt their teaching to new findings, ideas and theories (Darling-Hammond, 1995).
  
- 5. Teachers are members of learning communities.** Teachers contribute to the effectiveness of the school by working collaboratively with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development, and staff development (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

The criteria established reflects the characteristics of a master teacher, with additional comments connecting the criteria to holistic teachers. In addition to these qualifications, the subjects met additional criteria to establish them as master, whole language teachers. These criteria reflect the teachers' understanding and implementation of whole language theory:



- 6. Learning takes place in meaningful contexts.** Teachers realize, “ language learning is easy when it’s whole, real, and relevant; when it makes sense and is functional; when it’s encountered in the context of its use; when the learner chooses to use it” (Goodman, 1986).
- 7. Completion of the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) results in a score indicating whole language orientation.** The teachers will take the TORP, validated by DeFord in 1985. It is a 28 item self-report that uses a 5 point Likert scale to assess teacher orientation towards the teaching of reading. Possible TORP scores reveal three possible orientations: scores of 28 - 65 indicate a phonics orientation, scores of 66 - 110 indicate a skills orientation and 111 -140 indicate a whole language orientation. Limitations of the TORP include the lack of questions relating to the effect of writing instruction on reading instruction and reading achievement. Also it was validated in 1985, thus it is unable to address new research and developments in whole language. Yet, this is a widely accepted measure of teacher reading orientation that has been used in several studies. Furthermore, the focus of this study is the professional development of these teachers; thus these limitations should have only a small effect, if any , on the outcomes of this research. Table 5 shows the subjects’ scores on the TORP.

**TABLE 5****THEORETICAL ORIENTATION TO READING PROFILE****SCORES**

Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile Scoring:

28 - 65      Phonics Orientation

66 - 110     Skill Orientation

111 - 140    Whole Language Orientation

After selecting the teachers for the study, each participated in an in depth interview conducted by the researcher. The questions for the interview were developed for the specific purpose of this study. They tend to be open-ended questions, so that the teachers could answer in their own words. Furthermore, the interviewer was able to follow up on a teacher's response by asking for clarification or elaboration. The questions were validated by a committee of three experts in the field of teacher development and whole language. The validating committee consists of: Dr. Patricia Hart, the University of Dayton, Ms. Connie Mathis, the University of Dayton, and Mrs. Frankey Jones, Gwinnett County Schools and the National Council of Teachers of English. Their collective expertise consists in extensive work in qualitative research, professional development of teachers, and whole language education.

The interview questions covered several themes, so as to acquire a broad look at these expert teachers' development. The themes focused on the teachers' past experiences in teaching and learning. It was important to understand how their beliefs evolved over the years. It was of further interest to know how these teachers went about gathering, formulating, and implementing these theories.

The interview directed the teachers to identify stages or changes in their development. This helped the teachers to identify what they did to help themselves through each of Berliner's stages to reach the expert level, what events, people or experiences had an effect on their teaching strategies, and how they supported these changes in order to move through the stages of development.

Finally, the interview requested that the teachers reflect on their ideas concerning the teacher's role. This will not only include the role within the classroom, but also

outside of the classroom in their building, district, and community. It was of interest to the study to see how their perception of the role of the teacher changed as they changed professionally and to know what influenced their change in perception.

The interview was recorded via tape recorder or computer. This allowed the interviewer and teacher to focus on the conversation at hand, while giving the interviewer the opportunity to review the interview and analyze the information.

In order to consolidate the data and allow patterns to emerge from the interviews, the responses to the questions were coded using coding categories. Each category is used to cover a topic or recurring theme. The codes used for this study include:

1. Process Code - sequences of events or changes over time.
2. Activity Code - regularly occurring kinds of behavior.
3. Event Code - Particular happenings that occur infrequently or only once.
4. Strategy Code - techniques people consciously use to accomplish various things.
5. Attitude Code - comments showing attitudes towards teaching and factors that affect teaching.

(Crowl, T., 1996)

The data was then recorded in various codes so as to organize the findings of the study. Some data did not fit neatly with one code, and in these instances, the data was marked as belonging to more than one category.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

What is it about teachers like, Nina, Bobbie, and Judy that they progress through Berliner's Stages of Pedagogical Development to the Expert Level? One may predict that stage development is natural and different for each teacher. Yet there are far fewer teachers that ever reach an expert level than those who simply become satisfied with being competent. It is important to take a look at how these teachers were able to evolve through the stages of teacher development within their career span.

It is interesting to note that the years of experience differs among the subjects in this study, yet, all are consider expert teachers. Judy has been teaching fourteen and a half years – half of a typical adult career. This indicates that the development of a teacher reaching an expert level of development does not necessarily take an entire career. Rather, teachers can make conscious decisions that push themselves through this process or decisions that will hold them back. The data that has been collected indicates that there is a way to focus teachers on a professional development track that may expedite their development.

Although the development of teachers, who stay in their careers, seems to be a natural occurrence, it is less common for teachers to move beyond the competent and proficient stages of development. The expert, being the highest level, is the most difficult to obtain. In the past this part of development, from competent to proficient and from proficient to expert, seems to have been left up to individual teachers to pursue. Yet, the data to be presented indicate there may be some specific things districts, universities, and

administrators can do to motivate teachers to develop their professional skills beyond mediocrity.

The data is presented in a format similar to the categorizing codes used to assess the data. Most of the responses fell within one of these categories. Each section below emphasizes what the subjects did throughout their career in order to progress in their development. Some of the patterns that emerged were expected; the teachers were very aware of having done certain things to help themselves. However, some of the similarities found, indicate that these teachers were often unaware of things they did to get to where they are today. It is interesting to note that none of the subjects feels like an expert ... yet.

### **Attitudes**

One of the most noticeable differences found among these master teachers was their attitudes throughout their career. As these teachers offered many possible reasons for their success throughout the interview, they tended to neglect the role their personal attitudes could have contributed to their development. Whether they just take this for granted or intentionally maintain these beliefs, could not be seen through the data. What is evident throughout their responses is the pattern that emerged when they spoke about teaching, learning and their students.

This first section reveals information pertaining to the teachers' attitudes throughout their teaching career. It is important to recognize these attitudes and the role they played during the different developmental stages and how they benefited the professional growth of these experts. It seems that there is always advice among veteran

teachers as to the attitudes one should have toward administration, parents, at-risk students and special education. Yet the attitudes these teachers chose to nurture became the foundation for the professional development they were willing to undertake from the beginning of their careers and throughout their tenure as educators.

### **Beginning Attitudes**

Two interview questions seemed to draw out the subjects' attitudes towards different areas of education. The first concerned their first year of teaching. The subjects were asked to think back to the first few years of their career (novice through advanced beginner stages), and think about how they were able to push themselves through these stages of development. The subjects responded in a variety of ways, all of which exposed their beginning attitudes toward teaching.

The master teachers involved in this study all approached the first couple of years with a similar demeanor. They went into difficult situations, not realizing the obstacles they would overcome would not necessarily have been overcome by a veteran teacher. Bobbie and Nina both walked into classrooms that they would share with another (veteran) teacher. Bobbie became grade level chairman the first day, despite the fact that she was the only new teacher on grade level. Judy accepted a job in the inner city of Columbus, Ohio. Many of her fifth graders were nonreader and nonwriters. "One of the kids could not recite the alphabet, but somehow I thought I could make their lives better," Judy recalls.

Despite the difficulties, each of these teachers maintained the attitude that their situation was entirely manageable. Furthermore, they each believed their position was

integral to making life better for kids. “I always thought I could change the world,” Bobbie remarked during her interview. This same comment was repeated by the other subjects as well. Each of these master teachers had a notion that they would sincerely contribute to the future through the children. Needless to say, Nina was the only fortunate one to have an administrator nurture and support this feeling that teaching is important.

This attitude toward teaching, that it is more than a job but rather a contribution to the future, fueled these teachers’ desires to succeed in the classroom. Although none of the teachers remember venturing out on their own to seek professional growth, their will power and belief in their students helped them through the beginning stages of teaching.

### **Passionate about learning**

The second question that exposed strong attitudes towards teaching was one which required the subjects to discuss the qualities about themselves as a teacher that have helped them advance to the expert level of development. All of the teachers were clear in their responses, “I am a learner first, a teacher second. I have a passion about learning,” as Nina eloquently puts it.

Each of the subjects admitted to being slightly uncomfortable with the label of “Master Teacher” or “Expert Teacher.” The main reason seemed to be that each of them feels they have so much to learn. “There’s always someone doing things differently and better. I need to keep up with that,” Bobbie remarked over and over again. “You’re never really *there*,” Judy says. One may characterize these attitudes as perfectionistic or obsessive. Yet, each of these teachers is clear that she sees 28 (or so) learners and



teachers in their classrooms. Their attitudes about learning are clear - it's a lifelong adventure.

These are common attitudes among master teachers as indicated by research. Yet, how do they contribute to their professional development? Einstein once said that ingenuity was ten percent inspiration and ninety percent perspiration. The attitudes discussed above could certainly be considered the master teacher's inspiration as his/her career begins. It is these feelings of passion for learning and children as well as their desire to keep up with current research that keeps these teachers going through out their careers. Today these attitudes keep them asking questions, reflecting and researching better ways of helping their students. These fundamental beliefs keep these teachers teaching and willing to grow in their profession.

### **Process**

Throughout a teaching career, there are times where one's attitudes can make or break a successful teacher. Those that have the attitudes found among master teachers are able to continue past the novice and advanced beginner stages. Yet sure endurance with a smile on one's face will not necessarily make a great teacher. Throughout the careers of the expert teachers studied, they went through many processes to help themselves grow, change and evolve into the teachers they are today.

### **Peer Support**

One process that occurred at different times in each of the teacher's careers, yet was instrumental in fueling their teaching growth, was finding two or three other

educators with whom they could talk about school. This was a process in that it took a period of time to develop and maintain these relationships. Yet once the relationships were found to be safe places to risk, share, question and celebrate, they were integral to the development of each of these teachers.

“I was lucky to have an administrator right away who nurtured my attitude towards honoring children,” Nina recalls. Although Nina was lucky enough to establish this kind of rapport her first years in teaching with her administrator, each of the expert teachers remembers having an administrator who encouraged, supported, and nurtured her emerging holistic philosophy. This was important for each of their developments. In Nina’s case, she was just beginning as a teacher. Her administrator served as a mentor and leader in her philosophical development. Yet in both Bobbie’s and Judy’s careers, they were the first teachers to try a more holistic approach to reading and writing in their buildings. This is the case for many teachers who are moving towards process oriented reading and writing. Thus, the relationship between these teachers and their administrators was pertinent in their philosophical development as well as in their professional development.

Aside from administrators, these teachers found it of crucial importance to find other teachers grounded in similar philosophies with whom to talk. This was a process that none of the teachers purposefully pursued. Rather, they all say they were lucky to meet the person that helped them grow. Yet, each went through this process that other teachers may never pursue. Pursuing a relationship with one or two other teachers to read, plan, question, and reflect together seemed to be a need they had to fulfill. Each of

the master teachers can mention by name these key people, whom she has kept in touch with for as long as 18 years.

All of the expert teachers studied are now no longer teaching with their “key” people. Yet, they all maintain regular communication with their like-minded peers. Furthermore, they have each gone or are going through the process of finding other teachers with whom to grow. Teaching is a social behavior; yet the school structure separates teachers from one another. Looking at this process which engages the master teacher on his/her own time, is key to planning effective professional development for teachers.

### **Reading Professional Literature**

Another notable process these teachers engage in and continue to go through focuses on professional reading. All of the master teachers read professional books, articles and other literature almost constantly. “I own over 75 professional books and buy at least ten every year,” Judy pointed out. These teachers each have a large professional library of books and articles that have been read and reread. They find it necessary to find out what other teachers are doing, as well as what is the latest research.

It is not just reading the books that inspires these teachers. They reread them. They talk about them with their peers. They try things differently in their classroom and reread the books again. The expert teachers study the text, meet the authors of these books and discuss ideas with them as mentors. This whole process, Judy brings to the graduate level university courses that she teaches. It is not until the teachers in her class

experience reading professional literature in this way that they truly understand the power of professional reading.

Of all the things that were mentioned through the interview, the combination of reading professional literature and sharing it with other teachers, seemed to have the most influence in these teachers' careers. This is the process they continue to use to grow and stretch their teaching possibilities and to continue to reflect upon their philosophy concerning holistic teaching and learning.

### **Role of teacher**

A final thread connecting these three teachers in the area of processes is their evolving ideas about the role of the teacher in a whole language classroom. At first, each of these teachers had classrooms that were more teacher centered than child centered. Although from the beginning, Nina was encouraged to be more child centered; Judy and Bobbie did not receive this kind of encouragement until later in their career.

The role of teacher changed from being in charge and in control to empowering their students to take charge of their learning. These teachers now see themselves more as a facilitator and listener. They find themselves watching and studying the students to learn about their needs. Giving structure to authentic and purposeful opportunities to write, read and solve problems has become more of their role than deciding which worksheets to do next.

Furthermore, over time, they have found themselves learning how to talk to their students more as readers and writers. They genuinely engage students in research and encourage them to ask questions about their surroundings. The role of teacher went

through a metamorphous during each of their careers in direct correlation with the development of their philosophy about teaching and learning.

### **Activities**

As expert teachers construct, confirm and reaffirm their beliefs about teaching and learning continually throughout their career, they also construct theories about their own learning. Knowing how one learns is an asset to any teacher. The expert teachers studied created theories about themselves as learners and then used that information to help themselves. Each teacher's learning style seems as different as each person. However, as shown in Table 6, they all participated in similar activities throughout their career that they believe are invaluable resources for growth and renewal.

### **Personal reading and writing**

By being a lifelong reader and writer, these teachers are able to model the behaviors of readers and writers naturally to their students. "By becoming a writer, having to write and publish, I know what the kids go through," Judy mentions. Each of the teachers mentioned that knowing through experience what they are asking their students to do helps them not only to model for the students but to respond to them the way young writers need.

In the writing classroom, teachers see growth in their students not only as readers and writers but as people too. The consistent activity of reading and writing provides these teachers with personal growth as well as professional growth.

**TABLE 6**  
**COMPARISON OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**  
**AMONG MASTER TEACHERS STUDIED**

<b><u>Professional Development Activities:</u></b>	<b><u>Nina</u></b>	<b><u>Bobbie</u></b>	<b><u>Judy</u></b>
Professional Reading	yes	yes	yes
Professional Writing	no	yes	yes
Personal Reading and Writing	yes	yes	yes
One Day Workshops	yes *	yes*	yes*
Regional/National Conferences	yes	yes	yes
Professional Organization Memberships	no	yes	yes
Professional Networking	yes	yes	yes
Has Mentors	yes	yes	yes
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• graduate studies</li> <li>• small group of teachers in which to share</li> <li>• leadership roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing Project</li> <li>• Reflecting and planning with other teachers</li> <li>• Facilitating workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate studies</li> <li>• Writing classes</li> <li>• Planning with other teachers</li> <li>• Facilitating workshops</li> </ul>

\* These activities indicate the subjects found them more beneficial towards the beginning of their careers than now.

## **Leadership Activities**

Activities for professional development are situations that occur on a regular basis. Throughout their careers, Nina, Bobbie, and Judy have all taken advantage of opportunities to be leaders. They all contribute much credit to these leadership roles for accelerating their professional development as well.

Nina, Bobbie, and Judy are all leaders in their school and their communities. Nina has participated as a clinical supervisor for a local university. Bobbie leads workshops both locally and nationally. Judy teaches at the local university and leads workshops both locally and nationally as well. All of them are risk - takers.

The preparation for a workshop or class is where professional development takes place. “When you give a workshop, you have to know what you are talking about. You have to research and be sure that you know what you’re doing,” says Judy. The intensity in which these teachers plan their classes includes extensive reading of current research, reflecting on their students, classroom and philosophy, and practicing presenting the information in a clear, interesting manner.

“I grow a lot from the workshops, not just from my preparation, but also from the discussions among the participants. It really gets me thinking,” Bobbie adds. Being able to go to other classrooms and listen to other teachers’ ideas helps me to constantly think about and rethink about my learning community. These expert teachers feel like they get an edge working with other teachers. Someone may say something or ask a question that will get them thinking. Then the expert continues to generate ideas, questions and reflections well after the presentation is over. These expert teachers are able to learn from the opportunities that greet them.

## Reflection

The one activity that seemed to have the most importance to the expert teachers was reflecting. Even from the beginning of their careers, Nina, Bobbie and Judy remember thinking about their day, students and teaching well after the children had gone home. They naturally evaluated themselves and questioned what they were doing and why they were doing it. Reflecting has become second nature to these teachers if for no other reason than they practice it.

Throughout the interview, each teacher consistently mentioned reflecting. They all read professional literature, and they all reflect on the books as well. One person's process may be similar to: reading a book, thinking and/or writing about it, trying some ideas out in the classroom, evaluating, rereading the book, rethinking, etc.... The activity becomes a process that does not end until the teacher is satisfied. That then lasts until they read another book.

All of the teachers sincerely agreed that reflecting with one or two other people is a key component to their professional growth. Being able to bounce ideas off someone, sharing your failures and successes is treasured among these master teachers. Each of them remarked how lucky they were to know one or two people through out their career to have this type of relationship. Yet, in a way, they each sought that relationship. Their willingness to share with others and to listen to others made them reflective people.

Becoming reflective practitioners changed how these teachers attended workshops and conferences. The one day workshop had quickly lost its effectiveness with these teachers. Yet, as they each became more reflective and developed close relationships with some peers, a new awareness emerged. These expert teachers rarely go to any



workshop or conference alone. They always go with someone. “I have to experience it with someone else. That way we can go and talk about it,” Bobbie explains.

Although Nina, Bobbie and Judy rarely attend one day workshops, they all participate in local and national conferences. The combination of attending a conference with a peer with whom you can talk about the experience and networking with other teachers from around the state or country seems to be a powerful activity for these expert teachers. They thirst knowledge, research and ideas that will further their reflective thinking. In this way, the master teacher takes control of his/her professional development to feed their own hunger for knowledge.

### **Events**

This last section of data describes events that occur once. These happenings are usually extraordinary opportunities of which an expert teacher will take advantage. Nina, Bobbie and Judy described instances in their career that affected their whole outlook, understanding, and way of teaching. These occurrences were rare, yet memorable.

### **Personal Events**

Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development describes the way an adult learner grows as they mature. There are direct relationships that can be made linking these stages to areas of growth in expert teachers’ experience. Each of the master teachers interviewed were able to identify one or two significant events that profoundly affected them as a person and as a teacher. They each remember these events as a struggle with their identity and even their spirituality. Yet they were able to emerge stronger people and better teachers.

Nina describes the influence her divorce had on herself and her teaching. Not only was she finishing her Master's Degree and caring for her nine month old baby at the time, soon after the divorce, both her mother and grandmother died. Her great personal loss at this time forced her to evaluate herself as a person. Where was she going? How did she choose to honor what was important to her? Where would she get her strength? Nina found her answers, and found a renewed commitment to teaching. Her outlook on life had changed, her values of what was important had changed, and her teaching had changed ... for the better.

Bobbie moved to Germany early in her career. She worked on U.S. base, yet was intimidated by living in a country with a language she did not speak. She had to learn to survive in a culture she did not know with a language she did not understand. Bobbie spoke of how this changed her and made her feel more resilient, independent, and capable of change.

Judy experienced an intense teacher strike within her district. She remembers it was easy for her to decide to go back to her students and break the strike line. She recalls it being easy to stand up for what she believed in with the opposition outside. But, once the strike was over Judy had to deal with her peers' anger and feelings of betrayal. She describes this time as a personal inventory. She had to evaluate what was important to her and why . She learned that standing up for what you believe in sometimes has consequences. "As a whole language teacher, you have to be prepared to stand up for what you believe is right," Judy comments. She looks back at this time as a period of great personal and professional growth.

Whether these vignettes accurately portray the direct effect each event had on the teacher's career will need further research. However, it is clear to these expert teachers that they recognize these as significant events that affected them professionally in a positive way.

### **Professional Events**

Life has a way of surprising us. An interesting pattern emerged that did not seem to have significance during individual interviews. However, when cross checking and categorizing the responses, common experiences seem to have had a significant impact on each expert teacher.

Nina, Bobbie, and Judy have all participated in several professional development activities. When asked which one had the most significant impact on their development as whole language teachers and their grounding in whole language theory, they each responded very quickly. Nina discussed her stint as a clinical supervisor. Bobbie described her *Math Their Way* training (which uses the same holistic, child-centered theory as whole language). Judy contended that participating in an International Reading Association Convention focusing on whole language had the most impact on her. Interestingly enough, each teacher found that it was a coincidence that these things happened in the midst of other important developmental events.

For instance, Nina was a clinical supervisor. She was evaluating young teachers, visiting other teachers' classrooms, and reflecting on her own teaching. At the same time, she was finishing her graduate studies at the local university, which had direct relevance

to what she was doing as a supervisor. Furthermore, this was around the same time she was dealing with her divorce and newborn daughter.

Within two years, Bobbie remembers a surge of growth in her teaching. It began in Germany where she participated in the Bay Area Writing Project. This was the first time she was introduced to the idea that kids can write as early as kindergarten. Soon after, she returned to the United States and participated in the Gwinnett County Writing Project. Within the next year, Bobbie was trained in *Math Their Way*. “That’s when it hit me. It just all started to fit together - how children learn, how to be a facilitator, and how to give children the opportunity for authentic learning,” she recalls.

Similarly, Judy also experienced a surge of growth within a two year time frame. She participated on a reading committee for her district. They were reading research on the teaching of reading and investigating textbooks that reflected the newest research. Then that summer, she took a class. She took a graduate elective called “Whole Language.” In this class, Judy met a mentor and was introduced to leaders in the writing education field - Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins. The following fall, she attended the International Reading Association (IRA) convention with an administrator and a co-worker. It was there that she remembers having it all come together. The research she had been doing started to make sense. She finally began to understand holistic learning and teaching.

Since these periods of growth in their whole language philosophies and in their understanding of the teaching of reading and writing, each of the expert teachers admits to gearing most of her professional development toward further understanding whole

language. Every conference, workshop, professional book and class guides them a little bit further in constructing, confirming and reaffirming their teaching beliefs.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

So what does this mean for teachers who are interested in understanding the processes of reading and writing? How does this information affect teachers who are still struggling to move their classrooms into child centered learning communities? Where does this leave teachers who are still coming to understand the holistic philosophy and implications for curriculum?

The following ideas reflect the data and personal recommendations gathered from these expert whole language teachers. There are certain patterns in the professional development of each teacher that can guide and inform other teachers. It is probably the combination of these experiences (the “gestalt”) that influence these teachers’ professional development, not any one or two events.

All of the expert teachers recommended that beginning and current whole language teachers need to **read ... a lot**. Teachers need to keep up to date on the current research that is published in education journals. Teachers also need to read professional books that have been published in all areas of whole language. There are many books available to teachers about teaching. Holistic books span the field of education from writing and reading to math and science.

Developing teachers need to learn how to reflect honestly on what they read and do in the classroom. **Reflecting** came up continuously with the expert teachers. It is an activity that has become an integral part of their professional growth. Learning how to be a reflective practitioner is essential to become an expert in the field.

**Go to workshops and conferences in small groups.** It is evident from this study that these teachers have not evolved by themselves. Each of them sought out and maintained a small group of people with whom to grow. They may not have known they were doing it at the. However, it is evident that these expert whole language teachers depend on the support of a few close friends and colleagues.

**Try out ideas from books and conferences in your classroom** and make them work for you. This seemed to come naturally to the expert teachers in this study. They took a lot of risks. After they read or attended a workshop, each teacher reflected and used the fodder of these reflections to make changes in her classroom. Trying ideas you may not fully understand gives teachers hands on experiences with which to reflect. Furthermore, just as children need time to explore and research new ideas, so do teachers.

**Get into other teacher's classrooms.** Nina, Bobbie and Judy all find it helpful to see what other people are doing. As teachers, we tend to be independent and isolated. However, these experts seem to find a way to break free and get into other rooms. This does not necessarily mean walking around someone's room after everyone has gone home. It means going in when other teachers are teaching, observing how they facilitate their classes, and allowing direct observation of the children's responses.

From the data collected, it can be concluded that professional development programs focusing on whole language need to offer these elements as shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7

**KEY ELEMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS OF  
WHOLE LANGUAGE TEACHERS**

<b>RESEARCH</b>	Teachers need to know the current research in the teaching of reading and writing. They need to be aware of and exposed to professional books, journals and research studies that strengthen the foundation of the whole language philosophy. Teachers also need to be aware and appreciate other points of view in order to solidify their own philosophy.
<b>CONVERSATIONS</b>	Teachers need to learn together. Teaching and learning are social processes. Teachers need time to discuss connections between their work with students and the research they're reading. Furthermore, professional development programs need to be ongoing and supported by reflection, discussion and inquiry.
<b>MODELING</b>	Strong professional development programs involve teachers modeling, coaching and observing in holistic classrooms. This allows for teachers to have concrete experiences working with children in a holistic manner. Furthermore, it gives teachers the opportunity to observe and discuss student responses.
<b>TIME</b>	Teachers and administrators need to accept that development takes a lot of time. Teachers will need time to research, talk, observe, and reflect. Just as importantly, they will need time to try things in their classroom and develop their teaching throughout the year.



### **Need For Research**

Despite the limitations of the study, the data collected suggests clear advantages for further study. There emerged definite patterns in the way these master whole language teachers developed throughout their careers. If it can be determine how they and others progressed from one stage to another and which development activities were most influential at each stage, administrators, districts, and preservice programs can plan more effective professional development programs.

The need for excellent teachers in all schools is a very real concern among educators and the public alike. Many teachers start off their careers with a lot of promise, but do not reach their greatest potential. Research in the area of master teachers, whole language teachers and professional development will benefit those who are looking for a way to become or support the development of outstanding teachers.

# **APPENDICES**

**The DeFord  
Theoretical Orientation to Reading  
Profile (TORP)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Read the following statements, and circle one of the responses that will indicate the relationship of the statement to your feelings about reading and reading instruction.

SA 2 3 4 SD

(Select *one* best answer that reflects the strength of agreement or disagreement.)

1. A child needs to be able to verbalize the rules of phonics in order to assure proficiency in processing new words. SA 2 3 4 SD
2. An increase in reading errors is usually related to a decrease in comprehension. SA 2 3 4 SD
3. Dividing words into syllables according to rules is a helpful instructional practice for reading new words. SA 2 3 4 SD
4. Fluency and expression are necessary components of reading that indicate good comprehension. SA 2 3 4 SD
5. Materials for early reading should be written in natural language without concern for short, simple words and sentences. SA 2 3 4 SD
6. When children do not know a word, they should be instructed to sound out its parts. SA 2 3 4 SD
7. It is a good practice to allow children to edit what is written into their own dialect when learning to read. SA 2 3 4 SD
8. The use of a glossary or dictionary is necessary in determining the meaning and pronunciation of new words. SA 2 3 4 SD
9. Reversals (e.g., saying "saw" for "was") are significant problems in the teaching of reading. SA 2 3 4 SD
10. It is good practice to correct a child as soon as an oral reading mistake is made. SA 2 3 4 SD
11. It is important for a word to be repeated a number of times after it has been introduced to insure that it will become a part of sight vocabulary. SA 2 3 4 SD
12. Paying close attention to punctuation marks is necessary to understanding story content. SA 2 3 4 SD

13. It is a sign of an ineffective reader when words and phrases are repeated. SA 2 3 4 SD
14. Being able to label words according to grammatical function (nouns, etc.) is useful in proficient reading. SA 2 3 4 SD
15. When coming to a word that's unknown, the reader should be encouraged to guess upon meaning and go on. SA 2 3 4 SD
16. Young readers need to be introduced to the root form of words (run, long) before they are asked to read inflected forms (running, longest). SA 2 3 4 SD
17. It is not necessary for a child to know the letters of the alphabet in order to learn to read. SA 2 3 4 SD
18. Flashcard drills with sightwords is an unnecessary form of practice in reading instruction. SA 2 3 4 SD
19. Ability to use accent patterns in multisyllable words (pho'to graph, pho to'graphy, and pho to gra'phic) should be developed as part of reading instruction. SA 2 3 4 SD
20. Controlling text through consistent spelling patterns (The fat cat ran back. The fat cat sat on a hat) is a means by which children can best learn to read. SA 2 3 4 SD
21. Formal instruction in reading is necessary to insure the adequate development of all the skills used in reading. SA 2 3 4 SD
22. Phonic analysis is the most important form of analysis used when meeting new words. SA 2 3 4 SD
23. Children's initial encounters with print should focus on meaning, not upon exact graphic representation. SA 2 3 4 SD
24. Word shapes (word configuration) should be taught in reading to aid in word recognition. SA 2 3 4 SD
25. It is important to teach skills in relation to other skills. SA 2 3 4 SD
26. If a child says "house" for the written word "home," the response should be left uncorrected. SA 2 3 4 SD
27. It is not necessary to introduce new words before they appear in the reading text. SA 2 3 4 SD
28. Some problems in reading are caused by readers dropping the inflectional endings from words (e.g., jumps, jumped) SA 2 3 4 SD

## Questions for Teacher Interview

1. It has been documented that teachers go through several stages of development throughout their career. The first level is that of survival. Thinking back to the beginning of your career, how did you move beyond the survival stage?
  
2. The next two stages of development are the advanced beginner and competent stages, according to David Berliner. These stages' characteristics consist of knowing and handling discipline, curriculum and the other widespread tasks of teachers. This is also the stages when staff development seems to be the most effective. Thinking back, what forms of professional development were you exposed to during these stages of your teaching? Which were required by your district or state? Which did you participate in due to your own inquiry? Which do you remember being most effective for you? Why?
  
3. You were asked to participate in this study, because you are a recognized master teacher with a whole language orientation. Master teacher is the highest developmental stage. What qualities about you as a teacher do you believe rank you at this level of development? How did you, as a teacher, evolve from the previous stages discussed to a teacher of your current stature?
  
4. What role have the following had in your professional growth as a teacher?
  - \*Professional Reading:
  
  - \*One day workshops:
  
  - \*Professional writing:
  
  - \*Personal reading/writing:
  
  - \*Professional networking:
  
  - \*Mentors:
  
  - \*Professional organizations and conferences:
  
  - \*Other:
  
5. How would you define the role of a whole language teacher? (Consider your ideas when you first started using whole language compared to what you believe today.)

6. What one thing (activity, event, book) had the most impact on your development as a whole language teacher?
  
7. In your opinion, how much of your professional development has been focused on learning and understanding the whole language philosophy and connecting it to what you know about how children learn?
  
8. Reggie Routman estimates that only 20% of whole language teachers are actually grounded in theory. How did you become grounded in the theory? Do you see any correlation between your developing understanding of this philosophy and your development as a teacher?
  
9. If a teacher, whether first year teacher or a seasoned teacher who has been more traditional in his/her methods of reading and writing, said they were interested in having a whole language classroom this year was wondering how to start one. How would you advise this person?
  
10. From your experience, how would you advise the competent whole language teacher who seems to be stuck in that stage of development?

## **Notes**

## **Summary**

## **Suggestions**



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