

# **Recruiting, Preparing, and Retaining Teachers for Urban Schools**

**EDITED BY**

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## Appendix

### University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Education Guiding Principles

School of Education guiding principles/ Wisconsin standards	School of Education explanation of guiding principle
<p><b>1. URBAN/EQUITY</b> Individuals who complete licensure programs at UWM advocate for and provide equitable education to all students, particularly for those in urban schools and agencies, keeping issues of race, class, culture and language at the forefront of equity considerations.</p>	Individuals licensed through UWM will demonstrate an understanding of the unique characteristics of diverse urban contexts. Licensed individuals will have substantive knowledge about the varieties of urban cultures, the forces that maintain poverty, and the powerful historic and contemporary beliefs and traditions that support racism and discrimination in society. They must understand how poverty, racism, and cultural traditions affect learning.
<p><b>2. DEVELOPMENTAL</b> Individuals who complete licensure programs at UWM operate out of a developmental framework and place learners at the center of the teaching-learning process.</p>	Individuals licensed through UWM will base their professional practice on sound knowledge of the range of typical development. They understand the integrated and specialized nature of learning that includes cognition, language, social-emotional development, and gross and fine motor skills. Within their professional practice, individuals will recognize the unique potential of individual learners. Using knowledge of individual learners to inform their practice, graduates will engage learners in activities that optimize learning and development.
<p><b>3. LIBERAL ARTS</b> Individuals who complete licensure programs at UWM will demonstrate knowledge which is the basis of a liberal arts education and an understanding of the knowledge associated with their profession.</p>	Individuals licensed through UWM will draw upon a strong educational background that includes discipline-based knowledge in the liberal arts. Additionally, graduates will be firmly grounded in the historical perspectives, theoretical foundations, and standards of best practice specific to their area of licensure.
<p><b>4. DISCIPLINE KNOWLEDGE</b> Individuals who complete licensure programs with teaching responsibilities will demonstrate an understanding of the discipline they are prepared to teach.</p>	Individuals licensed through UWM will demonstrate understanding and application of the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the disciplines they teach. They understand the structures within the discipline, the historical roots and evolving nature of that discipline, and the interaction between the discipline and our world. They are able to translate that knowledge into appropriate instructional activities and lessons for their students.
<p><b>5. PEDAGOGY</b> Individuals who complete licensure programs at UWM will engage in professional practice based on sound discipline-based and pedagogical content knowledge that fosters student academic achievement, skills, and overall development.</p>	Individuals licensed through UWM will practice in a manner that is responsive to students and establishes high standards for student learning and achievement. They know what their goals are and can articulate and reach those goals, using a repertoire of approaches that are consistent with their profession. They base their professional decisions on continuous assessment of their students. They are reflective and evaluate the effects of their practice and change their approaches when goals are not met.
<p><b>6. INCLUSIVE</b> Individuals who complete licensure programs at UWM will effectively advocate for and support children and youth with disabilities in inclusive educational environments.</p>	Individuals licensed through UWM view all children and youth as integral and contributing members of the larger educational environment. In their professional practice, graduates will use strategies that readily respond to students whose needs may differ from others. In addition, graduates will appropriately access the expertise of and work collaboratively with other professionals, agency representatives, and families to determine appropriate learning environments and supportive services for their students. Grounded in an understanding of sociocultural and economic factors, graduates will differentiate between cultural and socioeconomic differences and disabilities.
<p><b>7. FAMILIES/COMMUNITIES</b> Individuals who complete licensure programs at UWM will collaborate with and advocate for families within the context of the community and access the resources of the community in order to foster participation in the educational process.</p>	Individuals licensed through UWM will know and value the communities in which their students live. Our graduates understand that their students' family members must be genuinely welcome in their schools and will work actively to accomplish this. They understand that all families want their children to be well educated. Graduates regularly communicate and collaborate with family members as well as access community resources to support the educational process.
<p><b>8. PROFESSIONALISM</b> Individuals who complete licensure programs at UWM will demonstrate professionalism in all their interactions and a commitment to continuous professional growth and development.</p>	Individuals licensed through UWM engage in ongoing reflection and assessment that leads to improving professional practice. They view themselves as lifelong learners committed to maintaining professional practice that is commensurate with developing research in their area of expertise. They are accountable for student learning and development by engaging in professional practice that is grounded in best practices and professional standards.

# Professional Development of Reading Teachers: Biography and Context

*William E. Blanton, Alison Shook, Anne Hocutt,  
Adriana Medina, and Jeanne Schumm*

In 2003, only 24% of fourth graders and 29% of eighth graders met the standard for proficiency in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. These statistics, of course, have important implications for student learning and lifetime success. Most students who do not master reading knowledge and skills needed for reading well fall behind early and rarely catch up with their more successful peers. By the end of first grade, poor readers show lower self-esteem, weaker self-concepts, and less motivation for learning to read. Most referrals for special education are motivated by unsatisfactory progress in reading by the end of third grade (National Research Council, 1998). When differentiated instruction is available, research indicates that students with the greatest need of special reading instruction may receive less, while their higher-achieving peers receive more (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997).

After third grade, the focus of reading instruction turns to learning by reading and emphasizes the application of reading skills to learning from subject-matter texts. Students entering middle school as struggling readers usually begin a pattern of academic failure that persists through high school, generally receive remedial instruction on basic reading skills in pull-out programs (Irvin, 1990), and participate at the periphery of subject-matter instruction. Consequently, they miss instruction that integrates comprehension, understanding, and metacognition with reading to learn from subject-matter texts. Thus students develop incomplete or "fragile" knowledge (Perkins, 1992) rather than the ability to read,

comprehend, analyze, and think deeply about subject matter (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000).

From these sobering statistics, we are invited to make the inference that students are not reading well because they are not receiving appropriate reading instruction. Two arguments have been proposed to account for this poor quality of reading instruction. The first is that teachers lack determination; therefore, accountability—driven by high-stakes testing—has been implemented. The emphasis on high-stakes testing appears increasingly to consume schools, take away instructional time, and lead to a focus on teaching test-taking skills with materials that resemble high-stakes tests (Ananda & Rabinowitz, 2000; International Reading Association, 1999; Johnston, 1998; Kohn, 2000; McColskey & McMunn, 2000). Research also reveals that teachers alter their instructional methods in response to high-stakes testing (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Jones & Johnston, 2002; Yarbrough, 1999). However, the research is mixed regarding whether these changes have a positive (Borko & Elliot, 1999; Bridge, Compton-Hall, & Cantrell, 1997; Jones & Johnston, 2002; Porter, Chester, & Schlesinger, 2004) or negative (Calkins, Montgomery, & Santman, 1998; Gordon & Reese, 1997; Kohn, 2000; Passman, 2001; Wideen, O'Shea, Pye, & Ivany, 1997) impact on the quality of instruction.

The second explanation for inadequate reading instruction is that teachers simply lack sufficient knowledge of research-based reading instruction to specify with some precision what the most reasonable instructional alternatives are and on what the most appropriate alternative depends. Teachers may need an updated reading instruction “tool kit” that contains a full set of assessment and instructional tools to evaluate their classroom situation and to determine the most appropriate reading instruction for each student. Teachers may also need the knowledge to recognize the special student and classroom characteristics that require the “shaping” of researched-based instruction to “fit” their classrooms.

It is now possible to construct such a basic tool kit for classroom reading instruction (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Research-based strategies are available for almost every strand of the reading curriculum, including phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, and metacognition (e.g., Allington, 2001; Block & Pressley, 2001; Gambrell, Morrow, Neuman, & Pressley, 1999; Pressley, 1998; Pressley, 2000; and the What Works Clearinghouse at <http://www.whatworks.ed.gov>). More important, when applied by knowledgeable teachers, this tool kit enables students to successfully make the transition from learning to read to applying reading and critical thinking skills in subject-matter instruction.

Addressing the need for such knowledgeable teachers requires professional development to assist teachers in developing, applying, and sustaining the knowl-

edge and skills needed to teach reading and reading-to-learn from subject-matter texts. However, the effective professional development of teachers is not accidental (Richardson & Placier, 2001). It has to be purposefully planned (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Good & Brophy, 1986; Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002; Hiebert & Stigler, 2000; Lewis & Tsuchida, 1997) and provide participating teachers with support over the long haul.

Recently, Klingner (2004) described a barrier-facilitator metaphor to outline the factors that enhance or inhibit the sustainability of professional development. Among the *enhancers* were support networks, administrative support, student benefits, student acceptance, flexibility of practices, availability of materials, and long-term support. *Inhibitors* included high-stakes testing, content coverage, time constraints, and teachers forgetting the professional training they have had. On the one hand, we agree with Klingner's summary. On the other, we believe the barrier-facilitator notion leads to an incomplete understanding of how either perilous or secure professional environments affect teachers as they attempt to improve their practices through professional development. We think there is a need to develop a deeper, richer understanding of professional development designed to improve teachers' ability to engage students in reading instruction.

## The Interplay of Context and Professional Development

The professional biographies of teachers and the contents of their instructional tool kits are the outcomes of their ongoing interactions amid the dynamic interplay between and among the layers of context surrounding their local professional practice. Context affects how teachers respond to professional development, the extent to which the knowledge and skills they learn are transported to their classroom practice, the quality of their instruction, and their professional identities. The purpose of this chapter is to develop an understanding of how context affects the biographical trajectories of teachers and their tool kits.

Over a period of 4 years, we chronicled the biographies of a teacher and a research-based reading instruction strategy that intersect in a reading institute. In the sections below, we propose biography and context as conceptual tools for understanding classroom teachers' responses to professional development and the transformation of the instructional tools they obtain. Then we analyze data obtained from Project SUCCEED (School-University-Community Coalition for Excellence in Education), a professional development school (PDS) project, and a research program (Klingner, Awhée, Pilonieta, & Menendez, 2003) on professional development

to instantiate our understanding of biography and context. We end with comments on the implications of our inquiry for practice.

## Theoretical Orientation

We have been working on a schematic for understanding the complexity of analyzing the effects of professional development as moments in the biographies of teachers. The sections below are the outcome of our exploratory study of who and what are involved in the successful or unsuccessful professional development provided to a teacher who participates in PDS work. Our goal is to explain the complexity of the transfer and sustainability of the effects of professional development on reading to the world of practice of which it is a part.

### Biography

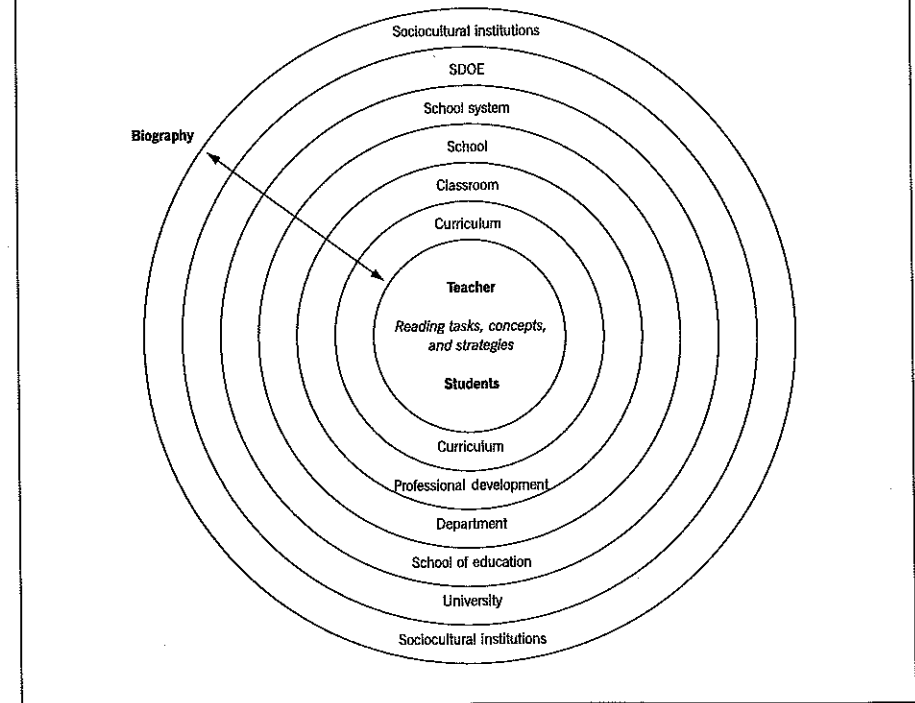
The professional development of teachers is in part a property of others, particularly of those who are their consociates (friends, classmates, and professional colleagues) with whom they relate across time. As an illustration, assume we are observing a teacher's application of a research-based reading instruction strategy obtained through participation in a PDS professional development activity. How can we proceed to understand the transportation of the strategy into the instruction we are observing as an instance within broader sets of activities that stretch across a range of social and material resources, all of which combine to coconstruct the moment of instruction we are observing? To describe such moments requires attention to how everything involved in the moment we are observing is connected to the surrounding contexts, producing the present and affecting the future.

### Context as Authoring Space

We view professional practice as participation in the authoring of biography—of an individual's personal history. *Professional* biographies are authored and edited in a context—literally, that which surrounds and constitutes the action that motivates the creation of the biography (see Figure 6.1). For the participants in the authoring space, the outcome might be described as “history in person” (Holland & Lave, 2001). For example, a teacher does not enter professional teaching with a preformed professional identity. Rather, professional identity begins with engagement with the struggles of contentious practices in local settings. Contentious practices are also related to the broader institutional contexts that affect local practices. Practices endure, struggles are always in process, and professional identity is always a work in progress. The outcome is the historical production, professional

identity—or history in person. Broadly conceived, professional biography and identity are fashioned out of the dynamic interactions between and among immediate and peripheral contexts surrounding practice.

Figure 6.1. Context and Biography



A reading lesson is arrayed according to the normative practices of the school in which the classroom is located and the professional practices of the classroom teacher. Schools and classroom teachers vary in their interpretation of reading, subject matter, instruction, assessment, and evaluation. Policies regulating curriculum and instruction, measurement, and evaluation are developed by the State Department of Education and influenced by federal mandates, such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Such policies are interpreted, implemented, and monitored by the local school system. The selection of and emphasis placed on the particular reading task, concept, or skill that pupils are expected to master are influenced by statewide assessment, public posting of grades that schools receive, and sanctions they may or may not receive as a result of their performance. It is easy to understand how a reading lesson and its qualities are shaped by the influence of a number of interacting contexts. The reading lesson is to some extent

“authorized” by preexisting and continually changing institutional rules and regulations and coauthored by the interactions of contexts.

Context also affects the professional development of the teacher. Professional organizations such as the International Reading Association set standards that reading instruction teachers are expected to meet. Similarly, the State Department of Education sets performance standards that teachers must meet for certification renewal, changes in certification, and advanced graduate work. Teachers who participate in professional development are influenced by the theoretical orientation of the faculty who design the program (including the extent to which content is based on scientific research), incentives for teachers to participate, time allocated for professional development, pacing, supervision, and the sustainability of the professional development program. Similar to the classroom instruction, professional development is authorized by certain institutional rules and regulations that constrain the potential development of a teacher before a teacher arrives to participate.

## The Research Setting

### **Miami-Dade County Public Schools**

The Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is the fourth-largest school district in the nation. In 2004, the ethnic makeup of the 370,000 students was 57% Hispanic, 30% Black (including 7.4% Haitian), 11% White non-Hispanic, and 2% Asian and Native American students. District-wide, 70% of elementary students are in free or reduced-price lunch programs, and a fourth are designated limited English proficient (M-DCPS, 2004).

Florida mandates high-stakes assessments—the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)—in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. A formula is used that assigns a school grades ranging from A to F, according to the “Florida A+ Plan.” Schools graded F are given 2 years of probation under the looming threat of state takeover and provision of student vouchers while the school is reorganized by the state. During the 2002-2003 school year, more than 90% of the 336 M-DCPS schools failed to meet the standards of the No Child Left Behind Act. Starting in 2002-2003, third graders were retained based on FCAT reading scores; retention rates are more than 50% at many of the inner-city schools in M-DCPS, especially those enrolling large numbers of English language learners (ELLs; M-DCPS, 2001). With the state’s English-only policy, ELLs have limited access to instruction in their first languages and are held accountable for school and individual performance on statewide tests 2 years after their school enrollment.

### **Participating School Azul Elementary**

Azul Elementary is an urban PDS engaged in a professional relationship with the University of Miami (UM). Azul was built in the mid-1970s as an open school. The main body of the school is a large “cafetorium,” an open area that can be arranged as a cafeteria or auditorium. Pod areas contain open classrooms that are arranged around the cafetorium. If desired, the architecture enables all of the pod classrooms to be opened up into one large classroom. Azul’s prekindergarten through fifth-grade enrollment is 729 students. Approximately 1 in 10 students (11.5%) has limited English proficiency, and 93% receive free or reduced-price lunch. At Azul, about half of the students (56%) are Black non-Hispanic, a third (32%) are Hispanic, 8% are White, and 4% are Asian/Indian. The school has a high mobility rate (M-DCPS, 2001).

### **Project SUCCEED Reading Institute**

The central mission of Project SUCCEED, a PDS collaboration between UM and M-DCPS, is to prepare competent, enthusiastic teachers who are ready to meet the demands of America’s 21st-century classrooms, which are increasingly diverse in terms of language, culture, and special needs. Each summer, Project SUCCEED offers a set of institutes for practicing teachers on a variety of subjects, such as reading, math, science, African American history, the holocaust, visual thinking strategies, culture and diversity, and a support network for novice teachers. Teachers come away from the institutes with a wealth of knowledge, ideas, and materials for their students, classrooms, and curricula.

### ***Reading Institute Purpose and Objectives***

The purpose of the Reading Institute is to prepare teachers in M-DCPS to implement multilevel, research-based reading instruction that promotes gains in reading, in conjunction with the district’s implementation of its comprehensive reading plan. Curriculum specialists from the district’s Division of Language Arts/Reading help plan and facilitate the Institute’s sessions. Similar to a train-the-trainers model, the intent of the Reading Institute is to develop leaders who will implement research-based reading at school sites and will serve as facilitators at their schools.

The objectives of the Institute include renewing teachers’ personal interest in reading, providing skills to aid teachers in evaluating their reading/language arts program to identify strengths and weaknesses, developing knowledge of research-based reading instruction, helping teachers provide for the linguistic and cultural differences of students and their families, and assisting teachers in organizing materials for implementation of instruction. Teachers are required to participate actively during the 2-week Institute. Sessions run from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

### *Reading Institute Content*

The content of the Reading Institute is composed of scientifically based reading research in the areas of reading instruction designated by the 2000 National Reading Panel Report: phonological awareness, word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Research-based instruction in reading puts a focus on implementing reading instruction that has been demonstrated to be effective through scientific research. Particular emphasis is placed on (a) students in culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse urban schools, (b) integration of direct instruction with meaning and thinking activity, (c) struggling learners and readers, including students with mild and moderate disabilities, and (d) reading instruction in the content areas of mathematics and science.

Two methods were used to determine the content included in the Reading Institute. The first strategy was to access, read, evaluate, and interpret the state-of-the-art publications on reading instruction (Barr, Kamil, Mosenthal, & Pearson, 1991; Kamil, 2003; Pearson, Barr, Kamil, & Mosenthal, 1984; compendia of research-based reading instruction published by the International Reading Association; and meta-analyses of published research on reading instruction). From this knowledge base, we organized what seemed to be an essential set of research-based reading instruction strategies in the areas of phonemic awareness, word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension, and subject-matter text. With a team of faculty, local teachers, and doctoral students, we reduced the set to a manageable list.

The second strategy was the application of evidence-based instruction recommended by the International Reading Association. Amidst increased public interest in best practice in reading instruction, the International Reading Association issued a position statement (2002) about research-based reading instruction. The statement describes five criteria that constitute "evidence" of scientifically based research. These criteria are used to evaluate the particular practice and serve as a framework for selecting content to be included in the Reading Institutes and courses.

- Objective—Data would be identified and interpreted similarly by any evaluator.
- Valid—Data adequately represent the tasks children need to accomplish to be successful readers.
- Reliable—Data will remain essentially unchanged if collected on a different day or by a different person.
- Systematic—Data were collected according to a rigorous design of either experimentation or observation.
- Refereed—Data have been approved for publication by a panel of independent reviewers. (International Reading Association, 2002, on-line)

The Reading Institute on which this report is based targeted four research-based reading strategies. The first strategy, Writing Process (Graves, 1983), was developed to improve composition skills. The second, Collaborative Strategic Reading (Klingner & Vaughn, 1996; Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998), was designed to teach reading comprehension strategies for subject-matter areas. Making Words (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1992) was intended to teach phonemic awareness, spelling patterns, and decoding skills. Finally, Class-Wide Peer Tutoring (Delquadri, Greenwood, Whorton, Carta, & Hall, 1986; Mathes, Fuchs, Fuchs, Henley, & Sanders, 1994) with an emphasis on reading was developed to provide instruction on decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills. In order to satisfactorily complete the Institute, participants are required to read and engage in discussion of professional readings and write a reflective paper on their journey as a reading teacher. Participants also develop an implementation plan that indicates what reading strategy they plan to implement and study during the coming school year. Participants' principals are required to approve and agree to support the implementation of the plan.

### *Reading Institute Activities*

Reading Institute activities include (a) exploration of theory through readings and discussions; (b) demonstrations and modeling in actual classrooms; (c) practice under simulated conditions; and (d) coaching and consulting to solve problems and answer questions that arise during implementation (Joyce & Showers, 1995). Activities during the year include regular visits and support by an "institute partner." To assist teachers in keeping a focus on content, a midyear workshop is conducted to debrief participants, examine issues, and obtain constructive feedback.

Given our belief in the importance of follow-up and social support, participants are paired with a partner who is either an accomplished teacher or doctoral student who has had experience mentoring teachers. The partners visit their teachers weekly in their classrooms to provide assistance. The peer partners are trained extensively in specific research-based reading strategies. Each training session consists of watching a videotape of a teacher implementing a strategy with students and modeling the strategy for institute participants. The partners also read and discuss literature on mentoring and the importance of providing teachers with assistance and ongoing support (e.g., coaching, mentoring, providing feedback, solving problems, demonstrating strategies, and developing materials). Support provided includes (a) demonstrating a strategy; (b) conducting joint problem-solving; (c) assisting in the implementation of a strategy; (d) identifying expertise among colleague teachers and structuring ways for them to share their expertise with others; and (e) facilitating the acquisition or preparation of resources and materials.



In addition, teachers meet in follow-up sessions throughout the year to relate progress in their classrooms and to provide recommendations for future Institutes. The follow-up sessions are more informal discussions without structured questions. “Booster” sessions are also conducted on each practice, serving as a refresher course. Teachers receive reviews of the steps involved in the practices as well as opportunities to model the practices.

### *Participating Teacher Adriana*

Adriana, a teacher newly graduated from an accredited teacher education program with certification in elementary education, accepted a position to teach second grade at Azul. She applied for and was accepted by Project SUCCEED’s Summer Reading Institute and agreed to participate in this study.

During the first year of the study, one researcher/support person visited Adriana weekly to provide assistance and to collect data and ensure fidelity of implementation of the Institute strategy. During Year 2, a second doctoral student joined her support person to observe Adriana’s reading instruction as part of the continued evaluation of Project SUCCEED.

### **Individual Interviews**

During the Institute, an interview was administered to all participants to gain a better understanding of their professional goals and to determine the strategy teachers selected to study, as well as anticipated problems and support. Teachers were asked, for example:

1. The reasons for choosing their instructional strategy
2. Anticipated modification to their action plans as well as to the strategy
3. How they would assess their students’ progress
4. Whether or not they shared the strategies with other teachers
5. The problems and support they anticipated

Later, teachers were interviewed to determine other issues:

1. Modifications made to their strategy
2. Whether or not they shared the practices with other teachers
3. Whether or not they would implement the strategy
4. The extent to which they received support from their administration
5. The benefits they saw for their students

### **Observation of Classroom Instruction**

During the first year, teachers were observed using a strategy validity checklist (Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Klingner, 1998) to determine the degree to which specific components of the instructional strategy were implemented. The checklist consisted of lists of statements that capture the essential elements of the strategy, such as *teachers allocate at least three 35-minute sessions per week; children take turns as reader and tutor, with the advanced reader always acting as tutor first; materials and supplies are easily accessible to students; and teacher monitors individual progress*, among others. For each component, notations were made of the extent to which the strategy was implemented or modified, not implemented, or if there was no opportunity to observe the implementation.

During the second year, the reading instruction of the teachers participating in the study was observed with the Directed Reading Activity Observation (DRAO) and the Reading Skill Instruction Observation (RSIO), two established, reliable, and valid instruments (Blanton & Moorman, 1990). The purpose of the DRAO was to account for how the teacher implemented research-based reading instruction designed to engage students in reading text across the prereading, during reading, and postreading phases of instruction. The RSIO renders an accounting of how the teacher explains and models reading skills, engages students in practice and provides feedback, and engages students in reflective activity.

## Study Results: Year 1 for Adriana

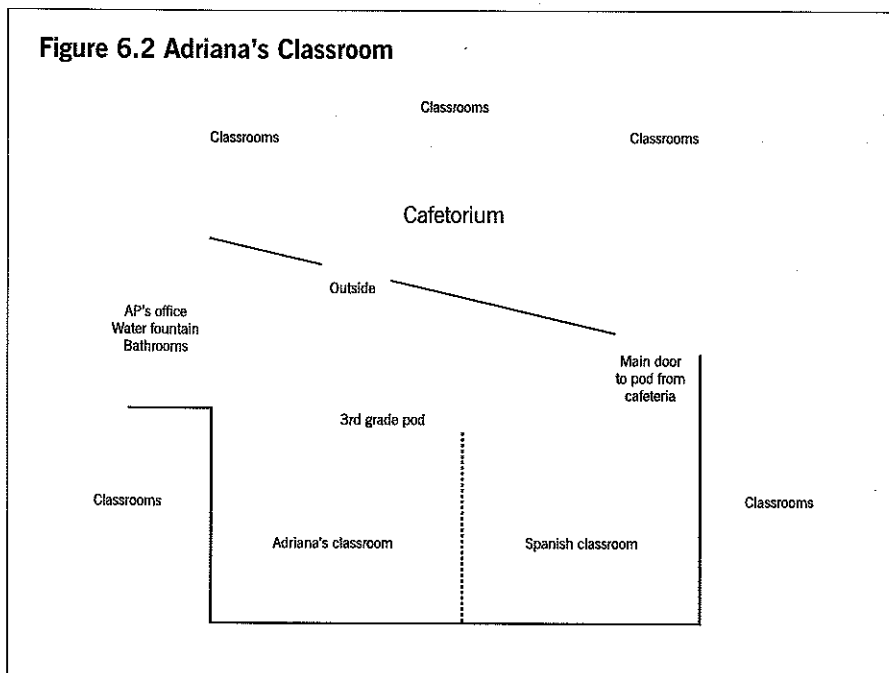
In her interview at the beginning of the Institute, Adriana indicated that her assistant principal encouraged her to enroll in the Summer Reading Institute and that she “wanted to make a good impression, please her supervisors, obtain school supplies offered as an incentive, and obtain credit that could be used for certification or an advanced degree.” She did not indicate that she enrolled in the Institute to gain knowledge of research-based instruction or that she wanted to improve her ability to teach reading. Her reasons for participating in the Institute, however, were similar to those of other beginning teachers.

The reading strategy Adriana selected to study during the academic year was Making Words. She planned to obtain and organize instructional materials during September and implement her strategy by the beginning of October.

In September, Adriana was placed in a second-grade class; however, when actual student enrollment differed significantly from the school’s projected enrollment—with more students in the upper grades and fewer students in the lower grades—Adriana was reassigned to a fifth-grade class 2 weeks after school began. Her new class consisted of a group of fifth graders who were mainly low-

achieving students. The class was composed of 32 students, 8 of whom were identified as requiring Exceptional Student Education and 10 ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). Almost half (44%) of the class was reading at a kindergarten or first-grade level. Understandably, Adriana felt stress.

Adriana's new class was situated between a Spanish teacher, an ESOL third-grade classroom, and the assistant principal's office. Traffic in her space was high, as Spanish classes changed every 45 minutes, all movement of the third-grade ESOL class went through Adriana's area, and the bathroom and water fountain for the entire pod were next to Adriana's classroom (see Figure 6.2). The noise level was also high, as all child study and administrative meetings, angry parents, unhappy teachers, and misbehaving children walked through Adrian's area to meet with the assistant principal. In an early meeting with us, Adriana expressed her frustration, commenting, "Being a first-year teacher is hard enough, but add to that all of this!"



### Adriana and Making Words: Transforming Biographies

Given her new grade level, Adriana and the University of Miami researcher jointly decided that the Making Words strategy would not be the best one for her to study. They agreed that Reading Class-Wide Peer Tutoring (RCWPT) might be a more useful strategy.

The purpose of RCWPT is to help students improve their decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills. The genealogy of RCWPT begins with its development at Juniper Gardens Children's Project in the late 1970s as a general peer-assisted learning strategy (PALS; Delquadri et al., 1986). The general strategy must be modified to accommodate instruction in a subject area such as spelling, reading, or math. With the addition of strategic reading activities, it became known as the Peabody PALS strategy. The effectiveness of the strategy is well documented in the research literature, and it has produced significant effects for special needs students (Hall, Delquadri, Greenwood, & Thurston, 1982), special education students (Cooke, Heron, Heward, & Test, 1982), and regular education students (Muirhead & McLaughlin, 1990) across most curriculum areas and grade levels.

In RCWPT, students are paired for partner reading that begins with the stronger reader reading aloud for 5 minutes while the weaker reader follows along in the text. Next, the weaker reader reads aloud the same text for 5 minutes as the partner follows along. The weaker reader then sequences the major events of what has been read for 2 minutes. Then the partners engage in "paragraph shrinking" for 5 minutes. During paragraph shrinking, the stronger reader continues reading new text, stopping after each paragraph to summarize the paragraph. For 5 minutes, the weaker reader continues reading new text, stopping after each paragraph to summarize it. The purpose of paragraph shrinking is for the students to learn to capture the main idea of the passage they read. (Sometimes more than a paragraph is read in the allotted time.) Then the better reader reads aloud for the allotted time, followed by the weaker reader asking the better reader the following questions about the passage read:

1. Who or what is the passage about?
2. Tell me the most important thing about [the subject].
3. Tell me the main idea in 10 words or fewer.

The roles then switch, and the weaker reader begins reading where the better reader has stopped. The better reader then asks the same questions. This process is followed until the material is finished.

### Implementing RCWPT

Implementing RCWPT in Adriana's classroom was not a simple process. In order to begin RCWPT, the teacher must know the reading levels of all of the students in the class; in Adriana's case, only the reading specialist could give tests and communicate results to her. To determine reading partners based on reading levels and ability to work together, Adriana needed to observe the children herself. Reading material must be chosen; in Adriana's classroom, reading levels varied from above-



grade to kindergarten and first-grade levels. Then a time and place for regular implementation needed to be found—which also had to fit with the schedules of other teachers in the pod, since “reading aloud” was seen as disruptive.

By October, Adriana still had not implemented RCWPT. She had a disjointed schedule because her ESOL students had their Spanish lessons at a different time from the English-first students, and the schedules of the special education students involved different pullout days and times. Given this schedule, alternative pairings were made for students whose reading partners were absent or out of the classroom. Special math instruction and test-taking skills were also scheduled, making it difficult to have consistently scheduled reading instruction with student groups. Nonetheless, Adriana accepted the challenge and continued her pursuit of studying RCWPT. The doctoral student assigned to provide her with support admired her “stick-to-it-iveness.”

By the first of November, Adriana was successfully implementing RCWPT. In an interview, Adriana commented, “The kids liked the strategy a lot. It helped them pay attention to stuff they may have missed when their partners read the material. They felt they learned more. I will retype the procedure outline for them so that they can have a copy without the ‘weaker’ and ‘stronger’ designation.”

In another interview, she explained why she wanted to stay with the strategy. “I began RCWPT! It went very well . . . the kids liked the strategy a lot. . . . They felt they learned more. . . . I did it all by myself and felt confident in doing it. Students have been asking to work together more and are doing better.”

### Challenges to RCWPT

Even as Adriana was gaining momentum on her reading strategy, the fifth grade was scheduled to take the FCAT math test in March. The school set a goal of performing well on the high-stakes test because school grades are determined by performance on this statewide test. The allocated time for math instruction was changed to 2 hours daily. Additional instructional time was used for Title I teachers to work with students on math and test-taking strategies. According to Adriana, she was told to “just do math, math, math. Your reading instruction can be math word problems. Everything should be math!” As a result of the new focus, Adriana decided to modify RCWPT to Math-CWPT (MCWPT) to accommodate math instruction. The accommodation required a new classroom organization for instruction, math materials that involved text and decoding, reassigning students into new pairs based on their math achievement levels, and rescheduling the days and times for instruction. With the assistance of UM’s doctoral student, Adriana plunged into making the changes, accomplishing them creatively and well.

Unfortunately, her students were resistant to change, and the test preparation atmosphere at the school was overwhelming—for Adriana and her students. In a debriefing, she described the month of February as “chaotic. . . . We continued to implement with math . . . the main problem was the lack of effort from the students.”

In her words, “March stunk . . . total chaos . . . then a state of total collapse.” The MCWPT strategy implementation was challenged by scheduling conflicts, especially when the school district also scheduled itinerant teachers to visit the schools to provide classes on sex education. The times for the new class and MCWPT instruction coincided, resulting in disorder and off-task behavior immediately following the sex-education class.

In summary, during her first year of teaching, Adriana was overwhelmed with learning to teach, engaging in professional development activity, and preparing students for the statewide test. That year, it was her context that caused her to be assigned to a new grade level, as well as her decision to drop the implementation and study of her original research-based strategy. An environment of high-stakes testing and a school-based decision forced her to modify her new research-based reading strategy and apply it to a different subject matter. Her new classroom was overcrowded, and her students were not prepared for their grade level. Moreover, both Adriana and her students experienced stress due to the statewide test and the potential consequences resulting from low test scores.

### Study Results: Year 2 for Adriana

For her second year of teaching, Adriana was assigned to a third-grade classroom. We observed her to determine whether she had been able to sustain the application of either RCWPT or MCWPT and to determine how she implemented directed reading activity and reading skills. We observed her reading instruction four times during a 2-week period. Similar to other classrooms in the school district, most of the instruction provided during reading and language arts classes involved practicing for the FCAT. A common practice in the local schools is to provide students with 6 to 8 weeks of intense practice prior to administration of the test. Most secondary activity is held to a minimum.

As an illustration, the first lesson we observed began with whole-group instruction aimed at teaching students to answer cause-and-effect questions. She reminded the class that they would have to answer this kind of question on the FCAT. Instruction consisted of Adriana reading passages from a story to the students and then having them engage in answering questions on a worksheet. Adriana began the lesson by reading aloud from “Buried Alive,” a narrative about

two children who are almost buried alive as grain comes pouring down on them. The students followed along, reading silently. She stopped periodically to ask them cause-and-effect questions that they completed on their practice sheets.

The lesson was an attempt to provide students with direct instruction on a reading skill that they would eventually be expected to transfer to the statewide test. Student activity was limited to drill and practice for the whole lesson. Students did not receive an explanation, responsive elaboration, or a model of the teacher thinking aloud on how to answer questions.

Prior to our next observation, the school had a fire drill. The students had just returned to their classroom. Again, the lesson observed targeted practice for the statewide high-stakes test. Written on the blackboard was "The FCAT is next week. How do you feel about it? How do you think you will do? What is your greatest strength? What is your greatest weakness?" All the students had a copy of an FCAT activity obtained from the Florida Division of Education entitled "Worry Less About Tests." Adriana began the lesson by reading a passage aloud to the students and asking them, "How many of you are afraid of failing the test next week?"

The ensuing discussion focused on how anxiety interferes with showing what you really know on a test. The students were told that, "A little worry is fine because it helps students to be careful and work hard to do their best." Examples, such as football players who worry so much about winning that they actually don't play well and end up losing the game, were discussed. The teacher then replaced the FCAT acronym on the blackboard with **Florida Children Are Terrific**.

Next, a set of vignettes about how children handle test anxiety was discussed. Some students reported that they became very sick when taking the Florida Writes Exam. As the students read and discussed the vignettes, Adriana asked them to pick out the vignette that they identified with, tell the class why they felt like that person, and write about it in their journals. Examples of comments from different students included "I worry so much about taking tests that I throw up." "When I get a B or C I feel bad." "I play with my brother but I should be studying." "I told myself I couldn't do it and failed the test." In summary, Adriana's experience during her second year was much the same as the previous year. Schedules determined when she could implement instruction and how. In the case of our observations, the schedule consistently called for practice on test items similar to those on the statewide test. We did not observe Adriana implementing RCWPT or MCWPT, nor did we see her implement any other research-based reading instruction strategy. All the instruction we observed was dominated by a focus on practice activity for the statewide test. This was much the same in all classrooms.

## Coda: Adriana 4 Years Later

Two years ago, we visited Adriana again. Her professional development continued. She had completed the professional development activity required by the Florida Department of Education to be certified as a Supervising Teacher. This certification enables Adriana to receive and supervise undergraduate teaching interns and student teachers in her classroom. She had just completed the supervision of her first student teacher and had received tenure.

The following academic year, we dropped by Adriana's school to leave a set of surveys designed to probe teachers about whom they turned to for help with reading instruction, what help they received, and how useful the help was. At that time, we had another informal conversation during which Adriana indicated that she still used RCWPT for some of her reading instruction. She also said that she was required to allocate part of her reading instruction time to preparation for the statewide test. However, rather than trying to use instructional strategies, she was using commercial materials specially designed for training students to take the test. She also commented that the attitude of her principal was about the same: "Focus on the test, focus on the test." Our inference was that teacher morale was pretty low, and this suspicion was confirmed when only one survey was returned from the school.

## Conclusions and Lessons Learned

### Importance of Content

The findings of this inquiry make visible how important it is to plan the content of professional development and involve representatives from the group who will participate. Participants must perceive that the content of the activity is important to their practice. Similarly, they must believe that professional development will provide them with access to content and skills they do not have but are capable of gaining. Such development should be presented with explicit instruction and modeling, be augmented with social support, include constructive feedback, and provide an opportunity to debrief and solve the real-time problems the teachers are experiencing as they try to implement and sustain new practices.

### Context Affects Practice

The factors outlined by Klingner (2004) do, indeed, affect teachers and their practice. Take administrative support as an example. Rather than supporting Adriana's effort to implement research-based reading instruction—as he had agreed to do—her administrator forced her to abandon reading instruction altogether in favor of improving math scores on the statewide achievement test. The justification given

by the administrator was that reading could be taught in the context of math word problems. Whether intentional or not, this was an act of academic sabotage on a beginning teacher's practice and a complete disregard of the possibility that student learning was being jeopardized.

Nonetheless, with the support provided by the Reading Institute, Adriana persevered. She successfully modified and implemented her chosen reading strategy during her first year of teaching. Modification required restructuring student pairs on the basis of instructional levels for math and organizing new materials—all very time-consuming activities. The flexibility of the strategy for modification, the response of her students, and the improvement in student learning—all factors enhancing sustainability of professional development—were the main reasons given by Adriana for enduring.

Ultimately, however, Adriana appeared to be unable to remember what she had learned in professional development. As noted by Klingner (2004), teachers often cite forgetting as a reason for their failure to apply the content of professional development. It was difficult to determine whether or not mere forgetfulness was responsible for the change in Adriana's performance. It could be that she had been socialized into the local practice of aligning her curriculum with the content on the statewide test and reducing the time allocated to some areas of her curriculum in order to give time to practice for the test.

### **A Richer Understanding of Practice**

We need to develop a richer understanding of practice, an idea that has become ubiquitous in professional discourse these days. Although we have developed a tool kit that is filled with knowledge on research-based instruction, our knowledge of how to arrange for it to be learned is limited. Based on our reading (Scribner & Cole, 1981), we understand teaching practices to be a set of goal-directed actions, infused with normative expectations of recurrence, that share common conceptual knowledge, procedures, tasks, and problems. What we traditionally think of as a teaching "skill" is the coordination of the conceptual knowledge, procedures, and tasks to solve particular problems. We do not seem to be clear on how much time it takes for teachers to do the learning that precedes the developmental skill. Nor do we seem to know how to go about preparing teachers to deal with contradictions they must resolve as they attempt to transport advanced forms of professional practice into the context of local practice. And we do not know how to go about prompting the emergence of a social context that might support sustaining new practice long enough to predispose teachers to continue to exhibit the practice.

Remember that Adriana exhibited great resolve. Her motivation to apply the knowledge she had acquired and to perform well professionally was apparent.

Perhaps the social support she had been receiving was withdrawn too soon, or it was simply not enough. We would expect some variability in the amount of time it takes to index research-based instruction to the problems it may solve and to develop skills in coordinating the relevant knowledge, technology, and tasks. Similarly, we expect that conditions presented by particular contexts, such as Adriana's, may require a longer timeframe of support if a teacher is to make a gradual transition to independence in applying what is learned in professional development. This need makes the planning of midyear workshops and conferences during the implementation phase of professional development essential. If teaching is as dynamic and complex as we purport it to be, it is obvious that the mastery of the knowledge systems and procedures required for teachers to implement new practices and the development of skills does take time and requires a supportive environment.

### **Timing Is Critical**

The timing of professional development may be more important than we realize. The "survival stage" (Fuller & Brown, 1975) of learning to teach may be longer that we anticipate or currently support. Beginning teachers may need a great deal more social support, such as developing collegial and productive relationships with colleagues, coaching or nonthreatening feedback on teaching, and less seat-time in professional development; while experienced teachers may need more in-depth professional development that enables them to transform their practices.

### **Concerns About High-Stakes Testing**

Too often we dismiss the concerns of teachers, administrators, students, parents, and researchers about high-stakes testing. Our findings suggest that serious concern is warranted. The disruptive effects of high-stakes testing on instruction and its effect on both Adriana and her students were salient. High-stakes testing may well focus attention on school performance; however, the outcomes obtained may not justify the means. We have a strong hint of the need to delve into classroom activity to gain a better understanding of what teachers mean when they express their concerns about high-stakes testing. If we want to improve classroom instruction, we need to make explicit changes in the evaluation of teachers and remove the threat that high-stakes testing poses.

### **The Reality of Continually Changing Contexts**

Finally, the barrier-facilitator metaphor often used to understand the effects of professional development conveys the notion that context is static and furnished with objects and events that can be removed or gone under, over, or around.

However, the biographies of teachers are affected and changed by the moment-to-moment interactions of an ongoing struggle among a myriad of factors that influence local practice and by the dynamic interplay between and among surrounding layers of context. We may be able to increase our understanding of a science of professional development by conducting research on how to go about "arranging" contexts that yield desirable and sustainable results.

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