

3-2019

Teacher Reading as Professional Development: Insights from a National Survey

Amy D. Broemmel
University of Tennessee, broemmel@utk.edu

Katherine R. Evans
Eastern Mennonite University, kathy.evans@emu.edu

Jessica N. Lester
Indiana University, jnlester@indiana.edu

Amanda Rigell
University of Tennessee, awilbur1@vols.utk.edu

Chad R. Lochmiller
Indiana University, clochmil@indiana.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons



Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Language and Literacy Education Commons, and the Other Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Broemmel, A. D., Evans, K. R., Lester, J. N., Rigell, A., & Lochmiller, C. R. (2019). Teacher Reading as Professional Development: Insights from a National Survey. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 58 (1). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol58/iss1/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



Teacher Reading as Professional Development: Insights from a National Survey

Amy D. Broemmel, *University of Tennessee*

Katherine R. Evans, *Eastern Mennonite University*

Jessica N. Lester, *Indiana University*

Amanda Rigell, *University of Tennessee*

Chad R. Lochmiller, *Indiana University*

Abstract

Over the past four decades, a number of researchers have attempted to describe the reading habits of teachers. Some have investigated the impact of reading habits generally, while most have focused on some kind of loosely defined “professional reading.” In relationship to this body of literature, the purpose of our descriptive survey study, which invited teachers from randomly selected schools in both large and small districts across the United States, was to both add to and update the available literature regarding teachers’ professional reading habits. We found that reading for professional development appears to be a common activity for the classroom teachers who participated in our survey. We also found that the bulk of the teachers’ professional reading time was completed in the evenings and on weekends. We did not find statistically significant differences in reading preferences and behaviors when differences in degree were considered. Further, we did not find statistically significant differences in reading preferences when we compared the teachers’ responses by years of experience. Teachers noted that limited time and lack of relevancy were two primary reasons for why they did not read. We discuss implications for professional development.

Keywords: teacher development; professional development; reading habits

Over the past four decades, a number of researchers have attempted to describe the reading habits of teachers, and with good reason: teacher reading habits may directly impact student learning and achievement. Carroll and Simmons (2009) studied the importance of teachers’ professional reading habits, suggesting that they demonstrate interest in the

career. McKool and Gespass’s (2009) research suggested that teachers of students aged 5–11 who reported reading more than 30 minutes a day (not limited to professional reading) use more effective reading-related instructional practices than those who do not. Morrison, Jacobs, and Swinyard (1999) found that teachers who saw themselves as readers were likely to use recommended literacy instruction practices in their classrooms.

Despite the insights gleaned from the past 40 years of research on teachers’ reading habits, there are several limitations that impact what we know. First, the vast majority of the research is based on self-reported survey data. While this certainly warrants caution in the interpretation of the data, the fact that there is convergence across studies indicates that the results do have credence. In addition, self-report survey data seems the most efficient means of accessing this kind of information. A second, and more concerning, limitation is related to the samples. Most are small (less than 100 participants) and focus on a very narrow segment of the teaching profession (see Table 1). Few researchers have attempted national studies not bound by content area or grade level.

Table 1. Overview of Past Studies of Teacher Reading

Population studied	Study authors
Teachers in general	George & Ray, 1979
Elementary teachers	Burgess, Sargent, Smith, Hill, & Morrison, 2011 Cogan, 1975* Cogan & Anderson, 1977* Koballa, 1987* McKool & Gespass, 2009
Secondary teachers (specific content areas)	Littman & Stodolksy, 1998
Secondary English teachers	Carroll & Simmons, 2009 Hipple & Giblin, 1971*
State- or county-specific studies	Burhans, 1985 Cogan, 1975* Cogan & Anderson, 1977* Eicher & Wood, 1977 Hipple & Giblin, 1971* Kersten & Drost, 1980 Koballa, 1987* Wmoack & Chandler, 1992 Wood, Zalud & Hoag, 1995
Teachers enrolled in graduate classes	Mour, 1977 Nathanson, Pruslow, & Levitt, 2008 VanLeirsburg & Johns, 1994
Reading Teachers	Commeyras & DeGroff, 1998 Commeyras, DeGroff, Stanulis, & Hankins, 1997
Teachers attending a national conference	Hill & Beers, 1993

*These studies are cross-categorical.

Some studies have investigated the impact of reading habits in general, though most have focused on some kind of loosely defined “professional reading.” Pryke (as cited in Rudland & Kemp, 2004) defined professional literature as a “periodical or publication (journal, book, magazine) which presents up-to-date information about contemporary

practices, trends and philosophies in education” (p. 4). Very few of these studies, however, have included any reference to web-based professional reading, and while those published in the late 1990s found increasing use of Internet resources (Fidelman, 1998; Oberg & Gibson, 1999), a more recent study found little consensus on the use of the Internet as related to professional reading (Carroll & Simmons, 2009).

Finally, it is clear that much of the literature is outdated. Of the 20 studies we found, only four took place in the past 10 years; the others are all over 20 years old. A review of the literature conducted by Australian researchers Rudland and Kemp (2004) also found that most of the research on the professional reading habits of teachers took place during the 1970s and 1980s.

Thus, our research, which invited teachers of all grade levels and subject areas from randomly selected schools in both large and small districts across the United States, has the potential to both add to and update the available literature regarding teachers’ professional reading habits.

What We Think We Know About Teacher Reading Habits

Past research on teacher reading reported disheartening findings. Cogan and Anderson (1977) asserted that “teachers don’t do much professional reading at all” (p. 258). Latham (1985) suggested that in comparison to those in other professions, teachers relied more heavily on intuition and experience than on professional literature in their field, resulting in tendencies “to proceed intuitively, idiosyncratically, and with conventional wisdom” (p. 19). Where engineers, lawyers, and physicians turned to principles of science and law, educators turned to experience. Worthy of note is that many major publications for educators were founded in the early 20th century and have been available for decades (e.g., *English Journal* in 1912, *Language Arts* in 1924, *The Reading Teacher* in 1947).

More recent research has suggested that teachers, like the general population, spend little time engaged in leisure reading (Burgess, Sargent, Smith, Hill, & Morrison, 2011). In their study of 161 elementary teachers, Burgess et al. (2011) reported that over 20% indicated that they read less than one book per month, while 41% of the 65 fourth- through sixth-grade teachers in McKool and Gespass’s study (2009) reported spending less than 10 minutes reading anything each day, and 63% of those reported no reading for pleasure at all.

When it comes to teachers’ professional reading habits, however, the findings are more nuanced. Studies in the four decades since Cogan and Anderson’s (1977) survey of 100 Minnesota elementary schools, which generally serve students in kindergarten through fifth grades, indicated that while teachers overwhelmingly believe that professional literature influences their beliefs and changes their practice (Commeyras, DeGroff, Stanulis, & Hankins, 1997), relatively few teachers actually engage in professional reading

on a regular basis (George & Ray, 1979; Kersten & Drost, 1980; Koballa, 1987; Smylie, 1989; Carrol & Simmons, 2009).

Hill and Beers's (1993) study of teachers attending a professional reading conference found that 77% of the teachers viewed themselves as avid readers, while the remaining 23% termed themselves "dormant" (p. 3) readers, in that they like to read but do not read. This finding suggests that teachers involved with professional organizations may be more likely to engage in reading, especially if membership in the organization provides access to professional reading materials.

Which Teachers Read

Though few teachers tended to read professional literature, those who do are more often secondary, not elementary, teachers (Kersten & Drost, 1980; Koballa, 1987). Neither degree attainment (George & Ray, 1979) nor, in some cases, teaching experience (Koballa, 1987) influence professional reading. However, the extent of the influence of teaching experience is not quite as clear. Cogan and Anderson (1977) found that more experienced teachers read more and early-career teachers read less, George and Ray (1979) suggested that teachers at both ends of the experience spectrum (less than three years and more than 10 years) do less reading, and Kersten and Drost (1980) found that teachers with 11–15 years of experience read more than others while those with 16–20 read the least. Carroll and Simmons (2009) reached yet another conclusion by using journal subscriptions as a means of assessing professional reading habits. Their results indicated that teachers with over 21 years of teaching experience were most likely to have subscriptions to professional journals, while those with 6–10, not 1–5, years of experience were the least likely.

What Teachers Read

While there are different interpretations regarding the types of teachers who engage in professional reading, the literature is quite clear in regard to what materials professionals are reading. Most research has focused on reading habits associated with professional periodicals (journals and magazines). The vast majority of teachers, especially those at elementary levels, reported reading pedagogically oriented materials—those that are clearly applicable to specific situations and have direct and immediate value in classrooms (Carroll & Simmons, 2009; Koballa, 1987; Wood, Zalud, & Hoag, 1995). Commeyras and DeGroff (1998) reported that twice as many elementary teachers reported reading magazines in comparison to journals. This is not surprising, as adults across professions tend to read to solve immediate problems, not to acquire general knowledge of the profession (Kirsch & Guthrie, 1984).

It is still disappointing, however, that 6% of the teachers surveyed by Kersten and Drost (1980) asked what a professional journal was. Interestingly, Hipple and Giblin's

(1971) study of almost 480 Florida secondary English teachers asked teachers to identify the professional journals and books with which they were familiar. While many indicated familiarity with “imaginary” books placed on the list by the researchers, the more stunning, or “depressing” (Hipple & Gibling, 1971, p. 160) finding, according to the authors, was that these teachers had not read and were not reading even the most widely recognized books in the field. Commeyras and colleagues (1997) stated, “Production of professional literature is based on the assumption that new ideas derived from research and practical experience can be disseminated to practitioners through print and other media” (p. 8), but recent research (Burgess et al., 2011; McKool & Gespass, 2009) indicates that professional literature for educators may be falling short of achieving its intended impact.

Why Teachers (Don’t) Read

Little information exists regarding the reasons why some teachers choose to engage in professional reading, though it does appear that school subscriptions (Cogan, 1975; Kersten & Drost, 1980) and the influence of the principal (George & Ray, 1979) can have a positive impact on professional reading. What is clearer are the factors that restrict teachers’ professional reading. Overwhelmingly, the lack of immediate value for classroom practice and lack of time are cited as reasons for not engaging in the research and associated professional literature (Burgess et al., 2011; Carrol & Simmons, 2009; Kersten & Drost, 1980). Thus, we designed our study to provide updated insights into this primary question: What are classroom teachers’ reading behaviors and preferences? However, we also wanted to look specifically at three additional factors: (a) the impact of years of teaching experience on reading behaviors and preferences, (b) the impact of advanced degrees on reading behaviors and preferences, and, because of the nationwide nature of our survey, (c) whether teachers’ reading behaviors and preferences differ regionally.

Method

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine how teachers view and participate in professional reading. We intended to glean information related to the types of professional materials teachers spend their time reading. As such, a nationwide survey was determined to be the most appropriate means of gathering information for this line of research.

Surveys are the most widely used method of data collection in education (Isaac & Michael, 1997). Kerlinger (1986) noted that in education, where much is reported concerning what people presumably think, survey research can be very valuable, as it is best adapted to obtaining personal and social facts, beliefs, and attitudes. The nature of surveys is such that while they do provide access to a wide range of participants and are effective in gathering this type of data, there are risks. Data may be misleading or slanted, since results are dependent on the interest, cooperation, and interpretation of the

participants. The inclusion of straightforward, structured items and field testing the survey instrument helps counteract such risks (Isaac & Michaels, 1997). We kept these tenets in mind as we designed our study.

The Survey

The 22-question survey (see Appendix A) was designed to provide demographic data on the teachers being surveyed as well as insight into both their professional reading habits and the kinds of professional reading materials they accessed. Nine questions were forced choice, where teachers simply clicked the button representing the most appropriate answer (e.g., “What is your highest degree held?”, “Do you read professional literature?”). Twelve of the remaining 13 questions expected teachers to provide brief but individualized answers (e.g., “How many years have you been teaching?”, “What books on teaching have you found helpful?”). The only truly open-ended question was the last one, which asked teachers to explain why they either did or did not engage in professional reading.

Prior to launching the survey, each of the three researchers solicited a small group of teachers to read and respond to the survey with the intention of providing clarifying feedback. A 23rd question (“Please provide us with feedback on the individual questions. What suggestions do you have for improving the survey?”) was added to the online survey explicitly for this purpose. Six respondents provided minor suggestions intended to clarify questions, highlighting how to restructure a question to make it clearer and noting the amount of time it took for some individuals to respond. Upon receiving the feedback and making the suggested modifications, the final survey was complete. It was made available via a web-based survey tool early in the school year, when emails were sent to the principals, and remained available for approximately three months.

Sample

We disseminated the survey in three intentional ways. We first shared the link through our own professional networks via social media. We also shared the link with our professional contacts (e.g., teachers at schools with whom we worked) and encouraged them to share the link with other colleagues. Finally, we used a semi-stratified random sample of school districts from across the United States to procure a random sample of elementary (kindergarten through fifth grade) and secondary (sixth through 12th grade) teachers. We selected two districts from each state for inclusion in the study: the largest district in each state and one other district at random. Neither private nor charter schools were excluded from either the original list or individual principal contact; thus every school other than the largest in the state had an equal chance of being included in the research.

Each school principal in the two identified districts for each state was then sent an email asking them to forward the email to all the teachers in their building. The text of the email is contained in Appendix B. This process resulted in 333 completed surveys. Of the

completed surveys, only 208 teacher respondents were included, as in our final calculation we did not include those respondents who self-identified as serving in an administrative or other nonteaching position in the school district ($n = 125$). The 208 included in the final calculation represented districts in 32 states.

Table 2 highlights the demographic characteristics of the research participants. While the majority of the participants were from the South, all regions across the United States were represented. Teachers' years of experience were spread relatively evenly across the spectrum, though most reported having advanced degrees, primarily at the master's level. Interestingly, over three quarters also reported belonging to a professional organization, which suggests that they had at least some level of regular personal access to professional reading materials since, at a minimum, newsletters full of profession-related information are typically included as a benefit of professional membership.

Limitations

Limitations must be considered in order to frame this research in proper perspective. Though a national stratified random sample was sought, not every state was represented in the data. In particular, there were noticeable gaps in the responses from both the New England states (no teachers responded from Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, Rhode Island, and New York) and the Midwest (no teachers responded from Nebraska, Minnesota, Kansas, Iowa, Indiana, and Ohio). Thus, despite efforts to ensure equitable opportunity across the United States, responses were not consistent across the sample. More importantly, this research assumes that the teachers were capable of accurately representing their reading habits. Though the online survey was anonymous, it should be noted that there may have been a tendency to overestimate the amount of reading completed.

Data Analysis

Our analysis of the survey data was completed in two stages and is consistent with common survey data analysis techniques (Lee & Forthofer, 2006). Stage 1 sought to identify frequencies and patterns in survey responses. We based our calculations on 208 complete survey responses. We standardized responses and removed incomplete responses, then calculated frequencies and percentages for each survey question. Next, we created cross-tabulations to disaggregate responses by key characteristics (e.g., region, teacher experience, highest degree held). These cross-tabulations provided opportunities to compare responses across salient participant characteristics.

In stage 2, we conducted a content analysis (Carney, 1972) of the open-ended survey responses related to why teachers did or did not read. Specifically, we analyzed each of the open responses and applied a descriptive code (Saldaña, 2009). We then calculated the frequency of the codes and identified representative extracts that highlighted each code.

Table 2. Participant Characteristics

	No.	%
Region		
Midwest	21	10.1
Northeast	18	8.7
South	109	52.4
West	59	28.4
Highest degree earned		
Bachelor's	69	33.2
Doctorate (EdD)	7	3.4
Doctorate (PhD)	3	1.4
Master's	129	62.0
Years of experience		
Beginning (0–1)	8	3.8
Novice (2–5)	39	18.8
Early career (6–10)	45	21.6
Mid-career (11–20)	70	33.7
Veteran (21+)	46	22.1
High-poverty school (free/reduced lunch <50%)		
Yes	100	48.1
No	51	24.5
Did not respond	57	27.4
Professional association membership		
Yes	161	77.4
No	47	22.6
Type of professional association		
National professional association	76	36.5
State professional association	12	5.8
Teacher's union	73	35.1
None	47	22.6

Results

Stage 1 Findings: Frequencies and Patterns

Professional reading appears to be a common activity for the classroom teachers who participated in our survey. Nearly all of the teachers (98%) indicated that they read some type of professional literature. Our analysis illustrated the extent to which we found differences in the types of publications that teachers were reading, the frequency of their reading activities, and the locations of their reading activities.

Types of publications read by classroom teachers. First, despite widespread growth in electronic publications, we found that 49.5% of classroom teachers indicated that they primarily read books, 22.1% read professional journals, and 14.9% read magazines and/or professional materials put out by professional organizations. (One respondent named unspecified “articles” as their primary professional reading material, so print/electronic designation was not applied to that response.) The responses suggest that many teachers continue to rely on printed publications as their primary source for obtaining professional information. Blogs and websites, which have grown in popularity in many fields, appeared to be the least read publications. Only 5.8% of the teachers indicated that they read one or both of these types of electronic publications. These results are highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3. Types of Publications Read by Classroom Teachers

	Respondents	
	No.	%
Articles	1	.5
Blogs	12	5.8
Books	103	49.5
Journals	46	22.1
Magazines	31	14.99
Multiple types	12	5.8
None	3	1.4

These print-focused results are consistent with a later question in the survey that asked whether teachers read electronic journals. Sixty-six percent of respondents said they did not, while 33% said they did read e-journals. This result also seems to indicate a preference for print publications among survey respondents.

Location of professional reading. We found that the bulk of the teachers’ professional reading time was completed in the evenings and on weekends. Teachers were rarely engaged in professional reading during the school day or as part of a formal professional development activity. Fifty-three percent of the teachers who participated in the survey indicated that they read during the evenings and weekends. When added with reading that occurred after school, during holidays, and over the summer break, nearly three quarters of classroom teachers read outside the school day. This result also reflects teacher responses regarding where they typically read. As shown in Table 4, 85.6% of the teachers who participated in the survey indicated the majority of their professional reading occurred at home.

Although 98% of respondents said that they participated in some kind of professional reading, they also indicated that their professional reading occurred relatively infrequently:

29.3% had read in the past week, 31.7% had read in the past month, and 26.4% had read professionally within the past year. These responses suggest that teachers were not investing substantial time reading professionally at school and were instead finding time to read when they were not bound by school-based responsibilities.

Table 4. Location of Professional Reading Activities

	Respondents	
	No.	%
At home	178	85.6
At work	22	10.6
Multiple locations	3	1.4
No response	5	2.4

Differences in reading preferences and behaviors by years of teaching experience. We did not find significant differences in reading preferences when we compared the teachers' responses across reading categories by years of experience. Of the 47 classroom teachers who had 5 or fewer years of experience, 36.2% read books and 31.9% read journals, the two dominant categories across experience levels. Among the mid-career and late career teachers, 55.7% of mid-career teachers and 47.8% of late-career teachers indicated reading books. Late-career teachers appeared to read professional magazines with more frequency. More than a quarter (26.1%) of veteran classroom teachers read professional magazines, compared with 13% of mid-career teachers and just 8.5% of novice teachers. We also found differences between novice teachers and veteran teachers with regard to reading journals. Novice teachers were more likely to read professional journals than mid-career teachers, and about twice as likely to read journals as late-career teachers. An overview of these results can be found in Table 5.

Table 5. Types of Professional Literature Read by Teacher Experience Range

	Novice teachers (0–5 years)		Mid-career (6–20 years)		Late career (20+ years)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Articles	1	2.1	0	0	0	0
Blogs/websites	2	4.3	6	5.2	4	8.7
Books	17	36.2	64	55.7	22	47.8
Journals	15	31.9	24	20.9	7	15.2
Magazines	4	8.5	15	13	12	26.1
Multiple	8	17	3	2.6	1	2.2
None	0	0	3	2.6	1	2.2

Differences in reading preferences and behaviors by degree. In addition to looking at experience, we examined frequency of reading in the two dominant categories (books and journals) relative to earned degree: 31.9% of teachers with a bachelor’s degree read professional books within the past week, compared with 32.4% of teachers with a graduate degree, as shown in Table 6. Twenty-six percent of teachers with a bachelor’s degree read a journal within the past week, compared with 30.9% of teachers with a graduate degree. In fact, for all categories and timespans, rate of book and journal reading by degree was relatively similar. We did not find statistically significant differences in reading preferences and behaviors between books and journals when differences in degree were considered.

Table 6 . Types of Professional Literature Read by Teacher Experience Range

	Teachers with a bachelor’s degree (n=69)				Teachers with a graduate degree (n=139)			
	Book		Journal		Book		Journal	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
4+ years	2	2.9	4	5.7	5	3.6	8	5.8
3 years	3	4.3	2	2.8	0	0.0	5	3.6
2 years	5	7.2	0	0	6	4.3	7	5
1 year	19	27.5	24	34.7	44	31.7	31	22.3
Month	18	26.1	21	30.4	39	28.1	45	32.4
Week	22	31.9	18	26.1	45	32.4	43	30.9

Differences in reading preferences and behaviors by geography. We found few differences in teachers’ reading preferences and behaviors across regions of the country. We also found that school districts across the regions provided professional reading materials to classroom teachers at similar rates, with the notable exception of classroom teachers from the Midwest, who appeared more likely to work in schools and districts that provided professional literature. Eighty percent of teachers in the Midwest reported that their school district provided them with professional literature, compared with 61% from the Northeast, 63% from the West, and 63% from the South. It is intriguing that classroom teachers working in southern states, which typically have less aggressive collective bargaining laws and weaker union presence, were no less likely to work in school districts that provided professional literature than teachers in the Northeast or the West.

Stage 2: Content Analysis

Each of the usable surveys included an open-ended response to the question “Why do you choose to engage in professional reading?” The majority of teachers explained their reasons for professional reading, though some responses provided insight into why the respondent did not engage in the activity. The central reasons teachers listed for reading were (1) being required to read by the district or an academic program, (2) staying informed

about new policies, (3) informing classroom instruction, and (4) learning for personal growth. The central reasons listed for not reading were related to (1) lack of time, (2) lack of relevant reading materials, and (3) lack of access to professional reading materials.

Why do they read? Fourteen (6.7%) of the 208 respondents indicated that the requirements of their school districts or academic programs were their primary reason for professional reading. For example, one teacher said: “My graduate courses require me to read and cite professional journals.” Another teacher explained: “I read what I’m required to read for professional development.” One teacher oriented to this requirement with resentment:

I want to own my growth as a professional and resent my district or school to mandate any type of study. Time is a resource in this profession, so when I invest, I want it to be meaningful to me.

Thus, overall, when providing a reason for why they did read, these 14 teachers highlighted the realities of being required to read. While at first glance, one might assume that this finding implies that they would likely not read otherwise, at least a few of the comments suggest that these teachers would prefer the opportunity to choose what to read.

The majority of teachers who offered a reason for why they read highlighted their desire to stay informed and up-to-date on new education-related policies and practice. Nearly 30% (62 of the 208 teachers) wrote about the ways in which reading kept them informed of new developments in the field of teaching. For instance, one teacher noted that they wanted “to stay up to date on developments in the field”; another said that “reading the literature is the only way to stay up to date with best practices.” Some teachers linked reading with “staying up to date with research,” while almost half of the teachers who reported engaging in professional reading wrote about reading for the purpose of informing their instruction. For example, one teacher stated:

I want to learn more about the different aspects of instruction. I enjoy learning about new ideas that I could possibly utilize in my classroom to help the students with their learning. Also, as a special educator, I like to study up on the various disabilities, especially when I am slated to have one the next school year that I may not have encountered previously.

For some teachers, then, the act of reading professional materials was a way to “find new techniques and ideas for teaching. Learn more about how people, teenagers in particular, learn.” Another teacher wrote:

I read professional books, blogs, and online articles to learn new strategies to use in my classroom. We are seeing that we need to make changes in our reading program and we need to meet kids where they are and that involves learning the best practices in education.

Eighteen of these 62 teachers also wrote about reading as being something to do for the sake of learning and personal growth. One stated:

There are many valuable resources on improving instructional practices and managing your classroom. As a teacher, I feel I can learn and grow from reading of the experiences, ideas, or research of those who have shared their thoughts in writing—whether journals, magazines, or books.

Finally, another teacher wrote that reading “is necessary for learning and keeping up with my craft—teaching!” Such responses highlighted how reading was about more than just informing instruction or staying up to date. Rather, professional reading was positioned as a tool for personal growth and learning for the sake of learning.

Why don’t they read more? Despite the finding that 98% of the teachers in our survey indicated some kind of professional reading, many said that they did not read with much frequency. Of the 208 participating teachers, 67 (31%) indicated that they did not read frequently because of time, stating that they could not fit reading into an already “busy schedule.” For instance, one teacher stated: “Basically, finding time is difficult. Our school just added a sixth class to our teaching load with many extra duties. I’m tired.” Another teacher noted: “There is no time to read and/or implement any of the strategies that I would encounter through professional reading. It is all I can do to keep up [with] the things that are required by my district.” Relatedly, a teacher linked reasons for not reading with policy expectations that impact time both inside and outside the classroom:

I don’t have time....I need a break from what I do all day. Oftentimes, I don’t have time to even do lesson planning let alone read a book on how to teach better. Our school has a Professional Learning Community whereby we meet two to three times a week to collaborate on teaching and how to implement what we are doing better. There is no time left to actually read books on the topic....We’re so busy collecting data and creating lesson plans to fit in with the district’s expectations that there is no time to sit down and actually read and take notes on a book. Additionally, there are always new mandates coming down on us from the federal, state, and local district as to what we should be doing NOW. We are in constant learning mode and everything was apparently due yesterday.

Three (less than 5%) of the 67 teachers who indicated that there is no time to read added that in addition to having no time, they found few professional reading materials to be relevant to their daily work. One teacher noted: “To be frank, I find a lot of professional reading to be dry and pedantic.”

Fourteen (6.7%) of the 208 teachers stated that it was not time that kept them away from reading, but the lack of relevance and connection to their daily work. One teacher wrote: “Most of the time the central theme of the magazine will not relate to relevant issues to my ‘everyday’ teaching.”

Four (1.9%) of the 208 respondents stated that they had little access and/or too few funds to be able to acquire professional materials. One teacher shared: “Honestly, the professional literature is so expensive, hard to access, and detached from the classroom that I find it to be a total waste of time.”

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to describe the reading habits of teachers. Our research reflects findings that are, in many ways, consistent with those of the researchers who have come before us, strengthening and updating the literature on teachers’ professional reading patterns. Consistent with previous research, degree attainment and teaching experience still seem to have little impact on whether teachers engage in professional reading, though teachers with either 0–5 years of experience or a bachelor’s degree are more likely to prefer journals to books, while those with a graduate degree or more than five years of experience demonstrate a preference for books. Worth noting is that both limited time and perceptions of immediate applicability weigh heavily in teachers’ decisions to opt out of professional reading. Although some past studies suggest that those in the education profession don’t read much, our survey implies that despite varying reasons for not reading, teachers are indeed engaging in the professional literature. It is encouraging to note that the vast majority of teachers in our survey (98%) reported engaging in some type of professional reading within the past year, with over 50% of those reporting reading either a professional book or periodical within the past month.

Although they are reading, many teachers reported that they do not read frequently and they seldom read as part of their professional development. Previous research studies on teacher professional development have found that it is most effective when it is supportive, job-embedded, focused on instruction, collaborative, and ongoing (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hunzicker, 2011). Future studies might explore how professional reading can be incorporated into effective professional development structures.

The findings of our study suggest that there are ways to support and encourage teachers’ professional reading. First, teachers who engaged in professional reading reported that they were encouraged and/or required to do so; however, other teachers confessed to being frustrated with required readings. Thus, one possible implication of this study would be to require teachers to engage in professional reading while at the same time providing options and choices for the types and topics of the readings. Second, providing additional

supports may encourage teachers to read; reading groups or learning communities that focus on researching a particular topic of interest for the teachers in a particular school provide collegial support and shared meaning-making (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Mitchell, 2013).

The findings of this study also suggest that when teachers do not engage in professional reading, it is often due to time constraints. Thus, another possible implication of this research is to include reading professional literature as part of embedded professional development activities and to provide the time for such reading to occur. We believe that providing that necessary time for teachers to continue to grow as professionals will benefit the school, the students, and the community.

In addition, we believe it is important that schools provide reading materials for teachers to access. Most of the teachers reported that they were reading professional materials, despite the fact that respondents reported that just over 60% of their schools provide professional reading materials, except in the Midwest, where over 80% of schools do so. Most respondents—even beginning teachers—relied primarily on print sources, including books and journals, though a small percentage reported reading blogs, websites, and other online materials. Thus, providing access to these print sources, having a teachers' library containing books and journals, and providing access to online materials may support and encourage teachers' professional reading. Questions about the impact of access to professional reading materials harken back to Hill and Beers's (1993) finding that teachers at a conference for a professional organization overwhelmingly identified themselves as readers. It may be that membership in professional organizations provides the support that many teachers need to actively engage in professional reading.

The results of this study are also of particular importance to teacher educators. Applegate and Applegate (2004, 2014) suggest that teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to address teacher candidates' attitudes about reading, because their affective transmission of a love for reading will impact their students' reading achievement. Moreover, their replicated study of teacher candidates' reading identities demonstrates that, persistently, only roughly half of teacher candidates view themselves as enthusiastic readers. Future studies might investigate how teacher preparation programs can lay a foundation for creating in-service teachers who choose to engage in lifelong professional reading.

Becoming an "expert" in any field requires not only acquiring a body of knowledge about the field, but also developing dispositions that drive the search for new answers in light of problematic situations. New information is constantly emerging and requires

professionals to stay on top of new research. Thus, the importance of teachers' engagement in professional reading cannot be underestimated. The fact that our research indicates teachers are more often engaging in professional reading, during a time in which education policy is forcing fast-paced changes in school-based procedures and classroom assessment and instruction, should be viewed as a positive sign.

About the Authors

Amy D. Broemmel is an associate professor of literacy and elementary education at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville. Her research interests include teacher development, with particular attention to capitalizing on tenets of adult learning. Providing a forum for teachers' voices in the research is another key element of her work.

Katherine R. Evans is an associate professor at Eastern Mennonite University, where she teaches courses in special education and educational theory. Her research is focused on school and classroom climates, school discipline procedures, and the ways in which restorative justice is applied to educational contexts.

Jessica N. Lester is an associate professor at Indiana University. Her interests lie in qualitative research methodology and methods, particularly related to discursive psychology, conversation analysis, and critical disability studies and qualitative research practice.

Amanda Rigell is a former middle school teacher and current doctoral student in literacy studies at the University of Tennessee. Her research interests include reading motivation, young adult literature, and the reading–writing connection.

Chad R. Lochmiller is an assistant professor at Indiana University, where his work focuses on issues related to K–12 educational leadership. His research explores how leaders develop the capacity to effect positive changes in teaching and learning through the development of human resources and investment of fiscal resources.

References

- Applegate, A. J., & Applegate, M. D. (2004). The Peter Effect: Reading habits and attitudes of preservice teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(6), 554–563. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20205399>
- Applegate, A. J., Applegate, M. D., Mercantini, M. A., McGeehan, C. M., Cobb, J. B., DeBoy, J. R., Modla, V.B., & Lewinski, K. E. (2014). The Peter Effect revisited: Reading habits and attitudes of college students. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 53(3), 188–204. doi:10.1080/19388071.2014.898719
- Burgess, S. R., Sargent, S., Smith, M., Hill, N., & Morrison, S. (2011). Teachers' leisure reading habits and knowledge of children's books: Do they relate to the teaching practices of elementary school teachers? *Reading Improvement*, 48, 88–102.

- Burhans, C. S., Jr. (1985). English teachers and professional reading. *English Education, 17*, 91–95.
- Carney, T. F. (1972). *Content analysis*. Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press.
- Carroll, P. S., & Simmons, J. S. (2009). A study of English teachers' professional journal reading habits. *English Leadership Quarterly, 32*(2), 3–12.
- Cogan, J. J. (1975). Elementary teachers as nonreaders. *Phi Delta Kappan, 56*, 495–496.
- Cogan, J. J., & Anderson, D. H. (1977). Teachers' professional reading habits. *Language Arts, 54*, 254–258, 271.
- Commeyras, M., & DeGroff, L. (1998). Literacy professionals' perspectives on professional development and pedagogy: A United States survey. *Reading Research Quarterly, 33*, 434–472.
- Commeyras, M., DeGroff, L., Stanulis, R., & Hankins, K. (1997). *Literacy professionals' ways of knowing: A national survey* (Report No. 86). Athens, GA: National Reading Research Center.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Richardson, N. (2009). Teacher learning: What matters? *Educational Leadership, 66*(5), 46–53.
- Eicher, C. E., & Wood, R. W. (1977). Reading habits of elementary school teachers and principals. *Education, 97*, 385–391.
- Fidelman, C. G. (1998). Growth of internet use by language professionals. *CALICO Journal, 15*(4), 39–57.
- George, T. W., & Ray, S. (1979). Professional reading—neglected resource—why? *Elementary School Journal, 80*, 29–33.
- Hill, M. H., & Beers, K. G. (1993, December). *Teachers as readers: Survey of teacher personal reading habits and literacy activities in the classroom*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Charleston, SC.
- Hipple, T. W., & Giblin, T. R. (1971). The professional reading of English teachers in Florida. *Research in the Teaching of English, 5*, 153–164.
- Hunzicker, J. (2011). Effective professional development for teachers: a checklist. *Professional Development in Education, 37*(2), 177–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2010.523955>
- Isaac, S., & Michael, W. B. (1997). *Handbook in research and evaluation for education and the behavioral sciences* (3rd ed.). San Diego, CA: Educational and Industrial Testing Services.

- Kerlinger, F. N. (1986). *Foundations of behavioral research* (3rd ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College.
- Kersten, T. A., & Drost, D. (1980). Professional publications: Who are the readers? *NAASP Bulletin*, 64, 94–96.
- Kirsch, I. S., & Guthrie, J. T. (1984). Adult reading practices for work and leisure. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 34, 213–232.
- Koballa, T. R. (1987). The science-oriented journal reading habits of elementary teachers in central Texas. *School Science and Mathematics*, 87, 672–682.
- Latham, G. I. (1985). *Time on task and other variables affecting the quality of education*. Logan, UT: Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center.
- Lee, E. A., & Forthofer, R. N. (2006). *Analyzing complex survey data* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Littman, C. B., & Stodolsky, S. S. (1998). The professional reading of high school academic teachers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 92, 75–84.
- McKool, S. S., & Gespass, S. (2009). Does Johnny’s reading teacher love to read? How teachers’ personal reading habits affect instructional practices. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 48, 264–276.
- Mitchell, R. (2013). What is professional development, how does it occur in individuals, and how it may be used by educational leaders and managers for the purpose of school improvement? *Professional Development in Education*, 39, 387–400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/194115257.2012.762721>
- Morrison, T. G., Jacobs, J. S., & Swinyard, W. R. (1999). Do teachers who read personally use recommended literacy practices in their classrooms? *Reading Research & Instruction*, 38(2), 81–100.
- Mour, S. I. (1977). Do teachers read? *The Reading Teacher*, 30, 397–401.
- Nathanson, S., Pruslow, J., & Levitt, R. (2008). The reading habits and literacy attitudes of in-service and prospective teachers: Results of a questionnaire survey. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59, 313–321.
- National Council of Teachers of English. (2004). *On reading, learning to read, and effective reading instruction: An overview of what we know and how we know it*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/onreading>
- Oberg, D., & Gibson, S. (1999). What’s happening with internet use in Alberta schools? *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 45, 239–252.

- Rudland, N., & Kemp, C. (2004). The professional reading habits of teachers: Implications for student learning. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 28(1), 4–17.
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Smylie, M. A. (1989). Teachers' views of the effectiveness of sources of learning to teach. *Elementary School Journal*, 89, 543–558.
- VanLeirsburg, P., & Johns, J. L. (1994). *Teachers as readers* (Literacy Research Report No. 18). Dekalb: Northern Illinois University.
- Womack, S. T., & Chandler, B. J. (1992). Encouraging reading for professional development. *Journal of Reading*, 35, 390–394.
- Wood, R. W., Zalud, G. G., & Hoag, C. L. (1995). Reading habits of elementary school teachers and principals. *Reading Improvement*, 32, 220–226.

Appendix A

Survey

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What grade(s) do you currently teach?
3. If you teach in a departmental setting, please identify the content area of your primary assignment.
4. In which state do you teach?
5. What is your highest degree held?
6. Do you teach in a public or private school?
7. Describe your school (e.g., demographics).
8. Do you read professional literature?
9. Identify the types of professional literature you've read.
10. What educational magazines or journals do you read?
11. What books on teaching have you found helpful?
12. When do you typically do your professional reading?
13. Where do you typically do your professional reading?
14. Do you read any electronic journals? If so, which ones?
15. Does your school provide professional literature for your use?
16. If you answered yes to 15, please describe the kinds of professional/educational literature your school provides. Be as specific as possible (e.g., journals, magazines, books).
17. To which professional organizations do you belong?
18. Have you read a professional journal within the past week, month, year, 5 years, 6+ years?
19. Have you read a book about teaching within the past week, month, year, 5 years, 6+ years?
20. In the past 6 months, how many times on average have you read educational literature (e.g., blog, book, journal article)?
 - a. 0 times per month
 - b. 1 time per month
 - c. 2 times
 - d. 3 times
 - e. 4 times
 - f. 5 times
 - g. more than 5 times
21. If you answered 0 times, how long ago did you last read a book about teaching?
22. Why do you choose to engage in professional reading?

Appendix B

Email to Principals

Dear principal,

My colleagues and I are conducting a study about the reading habits of K–12 teachers in the United States.

Not since 1932, when Craig conducted one of the first and only studies examining the types of materials that K–12 teachers read on a regular basis, has another non-discipline-specific study been carried out. We recognize that with recent teacher accountability movements and increasing pressures associated with the No Child Left Behind Act and now Race to the Top funding, many K–12 educators are being required to produce evidence that points to the ways in which their daily practices are supported by professional knowledge. We hope to glean valuable information about the types of materials that teachers spend their time reading, as well as what they identify as “professional development reading materials.”

We’ve developed a short (5- to 10-minute) survey, and we’re hoping that you will take it and forward the link/email to your teachers. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/teachersread>

If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact us. This research has been reviewed by the institutional review boards of our respective universities. Thank you for your consideration in helping us gather this data!