Review of Literature

Most reading teachers are not trained in essential theory and skills needed to effectively teach reading to students. Instead, teachers usually receive faulty information based on unfounded ideas. Textbooks used by teachers do not compensate for teachers’ lack of knowledge and preparation, because most textbooks do not contain necessary content required to explicitly and systematically teach students reading (Moats, 1999). As a result, most reading instruction does not implement sound, research-based teaching methods and content. This is of particular concern as research indicates the rate of reading failure dramatically decreases when teachers provide explicit instruction in specific reading components (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001).

Because teachers are considered competent readers, minimal research on teachers’ reading content knowledge is conducted. Many teachers report feeling unprepared to meet the classroom challenges, and most were never trained to teach reading nor do they implement research-driven teaching methods in their classrooms (Lewis, Parsad, Carey, Bartfai, Farris, & Smerdon, 1998; Moates, 1999).

The low self-efficacy of these teachers is of particular concern because teacher self-efficacy has been identified as a major indicator of teachers' level of teaching commitment (Coladarci, 1992). As self-efficacy increases, commitment to teaching increases and vise versa (Hasbrouck, 2006). Self-efficacy has been defined as a persons' self-perception of how good they are in a particular subject or area (Bandura, 1989), and it affects a persons' persistence and resilience in a given task or subject (Parajes, 1996).

Self-efficacy is a concern because nationwide, about 15% of new teachers leave teaching within the first year, 30% within three years, and 40% to 50% within five years ((Ingersoll, 2002; Smith and Ingersoll, 2003) as cited in Johnson and The Project on the Next generation of
Evidence pertaining specifically to mathematics teachers indicates that more needs to be known about how teachers can be helped to transform and increase their understandings of subject matter. Professional development should work with what the teachers know and help them move toward the kinds of subject matter understanding needed to teach well (Ball, 1988).

Because teaching effectiveness is strongly related to teaching preparation, teachers need targeted, applicable professional development opportunities to achieve higher self-efficacy in reading instruction. Teachers with background or experience in specific subject matter are more confident about teaching those topics to students, and student achievement is affected by teachers’ content knowledge, certification status, standards-based evaluations, and educational level (Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Humphrey, Stewart, & Linhardt, 1994; McCutchen, Harry, Cunningham, Cox, Sidman, & Covill, 2002; Milanowski, Kimball, & White, 2004).

Research at the elementary level indicates that teachers with high content knowledge of specific reading skills teach those skills more often, increasing students’ classroom scores (McCutchin et al., 2002). However, minimal research has been found linking reading content knowledge and teaching frequency in the secondary grades. McCutchins et al., (2002) found teachers have high knowledge of literature but low knowledge of language structure and phonology (reading-related knowledge), and teacher’s reading related knowledge affects their instructional practices. Phelps and Schilling (2004) recommend research is needed in how teachers’ ability to effectively teach a subject is affected by their content knowledge.
Teachers need to increase their understanding of the linguistic features of language and text in order to effectively teach reading. Specialized content knowledge is essential for teaching reading just as it is in the math and sciences (Phelps & Schilling, 2004).

Teacher participation in standards-based professional development has been linked to increased student scores on standardized achievement tests not only for economically disadvantaged students but all students (Gibson Consulting Group, 2004). Consistent, high-quality professional development in subject matter is essential to effect lasting changes in teachers’ knowledge (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Suk Yoon, & Birman, 2002; van Driel, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2001). Most teachers do not experience high-quality professional development, and the current professional development system is unclear about exactly what knowledge and competencies teachers should improve (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Suk Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Ingvarson, 1998).

Many districts are unable to offer their teachers consistent, high-quality professional development opportunities. Nationally, teachers’ access to sustained, intensive professional development about specific subject matter, teaching methods, and new technologies is relatively limited. Most professional development workshops are limited to one-day events that offer brief exposure to teaching methods instead of in-depth information on specific subject matter. Trends in professional development are important to note because new student standards are being implemented in the disciplines and it is important for teachers to develop a broad repertoire of methods for teaching all students to succeed with more challenging material (Desimone et al., 2002; NCTAF, 1997). The identification of standards and objectives, which should be determined by professional practitioners, will help focus professional development efforts (Ingvarson, 1998).
What professional knowledge does it take to teach reading? To ensure students’ success and competitiveness in industry and academia, many states have developed and implemented educational standards for student mastery. Following a mandated five-year review of Texas’ learning standards, the 74th legislature passed Senate Bill 1, which called for the State Board of Education to adopt the “Essential Knowledge and Skills” (TEKS) as the required grade-level curriculum for Texas students. TEKS outlined students’ skills and knowledge mastery by subject and grade, and provided guidelines for the content (professional knowledge) that Texas reading teachers should possess (STT, 2005). Moates’ (1999) requirements of effective reading instruction provide a summary of required elements for effective reading instruction as

- Direct teaching decoding, comprehension, and literature appreciation;
- Phonemic awareness instruction;
- Systematic and explicit instruction in the code system of written English;
- Daily exposure to a variety of texts, as well as incentives for children to read independently and with others;
- Vocabulary instruction including a variety of complementary methods designed to explore the relationships among works and the relationships among word structure, origin, and meaning;
- Comprehension strategies including prediction of outcomes, summarizing, clarification, questioning, and visualization;
- and Frequent writing of prose to enable deeper understanding of what is read. (p. 8)

But which of these skills do teachers think are most important to student reading achievement, and how frequently do they teach these skills? Hoffman and Pearson (2000) indicated a need to develop indicators of the knowledge (both content and pedagogical), skills, and attitudes needed by teachers to promote learning. Ingvarson (1998) recommends that
teachers rather than governmental or industry interest identify and standardize their own professional development needs to best help student learning.

This study will sample middle school English teachers in the Texas Panhandle to determine from a select set of state-mandated reading standards those standards professional practitioners believe are most important to student learning and the frequency with which they teach those objectives.