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Teacher Learning Profiles

David Pedder, Darleen Opfer

University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom

Background

The survey strand of the Schools and Teachers' CPD in England State of the Nation research was designed to capture a nationwide sample of teachers, headteachers and schools in England, to identify patterns of variation in the continuing professional development (CPD) practices, values and beliefs of teachers at primary and secondary schools. We focused on three specific areas:

- the benefits, status and effectiveness of CPD
- planning and organisation of CPD, and
- access to different CPD opportunities.

The survey consisted of a variety of items focusing on the content, amount and quality of continuing professional development activities teachers had taken part in, as well as the benefits of these activities for achieving personal, school-level and student learning goals. Respondents were also asked about school leadership, professional community and organisational conditions (including matters related to developing human and social capital). These have been shown, in our previous work, to influence either decisions about CPD, the benefits received from CPD activity, or effects of CPD activity on teachers' classroom practice (Henry and Opfer, 2003; Pedder et al, 2005; Pedder, 2006; Opfer et al, 2008; Pedder and MacBeath, 2008).

By surveying teachers and headteachers in schools, we were able to pursue issues related to the impact of school conditions and school context on the continuing professional development of teachers. We were also able to identify both personal and organisational variables that mediate or moderate the effects of CPD activity on the individual and the school. This multi-layered focus enabled us to assess how different CPD activities and strategies affected both individual professional development and organisational development, with the assumption that individual orientations and organisational conditions are both likely to influence the quality of teachers' CPD.

Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to report characteristics of different groupings of teachers according to profiles of their professional learning practices and values based on analysis of the State of the Nation CPD survey data.

Methods

Underlying facets of teacher learning were identified through factor analysis as a basis for characterising teacher learning profiles as follows: 'experimental and adaptive learning', 'research orientation', and 'collaborative classroom-based learning and research'. Different groupings of teachers in terms of these facets of teachers learning were distinguished through Hierarchical Cluster Analysis using Ward's method among primary and secondary teachers (N=1,126) from a nationally representative sample from 329 primary and 59 secondary schools. . Groupings of teachers were classified using cluster analysis on the basis of recorded practice and values scores for each of the factors identified above.

Frame

The paper focuses, through Analyses of Variance and Chi-square tests, on the extent to which the groupings of teachers identified through cluster analysis differed according to school characteristics such as region, sector (primary or secondary), location (rural or non-rural), and achievement band (whether schools performed above or below schools with similar demographics on a 5 point scale). The paper also focuses on the extent to which teacher types differ in terms of the following teachers' characteristics: gender, level of responsibility, career stage, and years of experience.

Research findings

Initial analysis suggests the identification of five distinct types of teacher in terms of the identified facets of professional learning practices and values; those that recorded: i) well above average levels of engagement sustained for all three facets of teacher learning, (ii) well below average levels of engagement for all three facets of teacher learning, (iii) about average levels of engagement for all three facets of teacher learning, (iv) about average levels of engagement for two facets but well below average for "research orientation", and (v) about average levels of engagement for "experimental and adaptive learning" but below average levels of engagement for the remaining two facets of teachers' learning.

Although the analysis is not complete, initial results point to a diversity of teacher types in terms of professional learning profiles among different groups of staff according to both their school and teacher characteristics. Challenges for school leaders and policy-makers are considered in light of such diversity.