Early Childhood Teachers’ Professional Development during the National Board Certification: An Individual Model and a Collegial Model

Haesung Im

Yonsei University, Korea

Abstract

As few studies have investigated how contrasting models of professional development might impact teachers’ learning experiences, this study examined how individual and collegial models of professional development impact early childhood teachers’ cognitive and emotional experiences during the National Board Certification. The findings from a longitudinal, comparative case study suggest that the individual model facilitated a high level of self-reflection at the expense of feelings of isolation and frustration, while the collegial model without critical feedback led an early childhood teacher to uphold a status quo at the first year of candidacy. This study discusses the implications of facilitating optimal professional development that balances early childhood teachers’ independent work and collegiality.

Key words: Early childhood teacher, professional development, individuality, collegiality, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, comparative case study.

1) Correspondence should be addressed to Haesung Im, Instructor at the Department of Child and Family Studies at the Yonsei University in South Korea. Address: Banpo Raemian Firstage 104-602, 275 Banpo-daero, Seocho-gu, Seoul, Korea, 06547; Email: comet815@gmail.com
Introduction

Educators, researchers, and policy makers are increasingly interested in identifying ways to provide an optimal environment and support for early childhood teachers’ professional development. There has been a long-running debate framing professional development within two different models (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Kuhn, 2015; Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002). Whereas the first model portrays individual teachers as “independent artisans” who work individually with students within their highly contextualized classroom, the second model capitalizes on teachers’ collegiality within a professional learning community (Hadar & Brody, 2010; Wenger & Snyder, 2000; Wood, 2007).

First, the independent artisan model highlights the importance of individual teachers’ self-reflection and examination of their practice (Ross, Cornett, & McCutcheon, 1992). What counts in this model is self-autonomy and self-directed learning in the process of becoming reflective practitioners (Huberman, 1993). Individual work driven by intrinsic motivation is related to teachers’ creativity, personal study, reflection, and professional development (Hargreaves, 1990). Next, the collegial model has gained precedence over the individual model and has been regarded as enlightened educational practice in recent years (Kuhn, 2015). Within the discourse of the “professional learning community,” many studies presuppose that collegial interaction or mentoring contribute to teachers’ professional development (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006). Collaboration with other teachers has the potential to foster professional improvement by allowing the exchange of emotional support (Bergen, Engelen, & Derksen, 2006; Kurtts & Levin, 2000) and intellectually stimulating conversations (Kuhn, 2015).

In line with the debate over the best form of professional development, National Board Certification (NBC) offers a promising opportunity for teachers to work individually and collectively (Gaddis, 2002). Originally created for a standards-based educational reform in the United States, NBC seeks to facilitate teachers’ professional development and to distinguish accomplished teachers by a form of voluntary performance assessment. NBC is a rigorous process in which teachers complete four portfolio entries and computerized assessments with six constructed-response exercises that assess content knowledge. After submitting the teaching portfolio, these portfolios are evaluated by reviewers trained in specific content areas to certify highly accomplished teachers based on the Professional Teaching Standards. When score results are reported, candidates are notified as to whether they were able to obtain the Certification. Additionally, candidate teachers are provided with feedback on their performance based on scoring criteria (Davis, Wolf, & Borko, 1999). Thus, many candidates who do not attain certification in the first year may retake any of the portfolio entries or assessment center...