The Application of Early Childhood Professional Teaching Standards in the U.S.: A Comparative Study of a Preschool and an Elementary School Teacher

Haesung Im
Duksung Women’s University
S. Korea

Kyong-Ah Kwon
University of Oklahoma
U.S.A.

Elaine Surbeck
Arizona State University
U.S.A.

Abstract

Although interpreting and applying the professional teaching standards is a complex and active cognitive process influenced by teachers’ knowledge and teaching context, there is a lack of in-depth research into how early childhood teachers’ cognition impacts the way teachers change their beliefs and practices. With a cognitive framework, this study focuses on a preschool teacher and an elementary school teacher’s changing beliefs and practices as they apply Early Childhood Generalist (EC-GEN) Standards during and after the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) process. The findings from a qualitative comparative study suggest that EC-GEN Standards guided teachers to reflect on child-directed learning, personalized, more meaningful and intentional teaching. Additionally, there were several similarities and differences in how teachers make sense of the EC-GEN Standards by grade/age levels due to their different approaches to teaching. Implications for reinforcing teachers’ professional development and utilizing professional teaching standards as a linkage for Pre-K to grade 3 continuities are discussed.

Keywords: early childhood generalist, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, National Board Certification

1) Correspondence should be addressed to Haesung Im, Assistant Professor, Department of Early Childhood Education, Duksung Women’s University, 33, Samyang-ro 144-gil, Dobong-gu, Seoul, 01369, S. Korea. Email: delightlord37@duksung.ac.kr
Introduction

Educational reform movements around the world have endeavored to promote teaching quality and students’ learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Tarrant & Kagan, 2010). Among the many factors that contribute to positive student learning outcomes, teachers’ professional development has been considered one of the most critical determinants of ensuring high-quality education (Avalos, 2011; Borko, 2004; Sato, 2014; Hegde, Sugita, Crane-Mitchell, & Averett, 2014; Lee & Tseng, 2008). As a part of the standards-based educational reform for improvement in teachers and schools in the U.S., the National Board Certification (NBC) was established for experienced teachers (e.g., minimum of three years of teaching experience) in Preschool through 12th grade (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 2017). This certification is a voluntary, standards-based process offering an effective professional development tool designed to develop, retain, and recognize accomplished teachers. More than 112,000 teachers have achieved the certification since 1985.

During this certification process, candidates are provided with opportunities to assess and reflect on their beliefs, knowledge, and practices using the National Board Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2012). More specifically, as the candidates are required to provide a rationale for every instructional practice in their written commentaries of the teaching portfolio, they have a plethora of opportunities to step back, reflect, and analyze their instruction based on NBPTS. In the course of the NBC, the candidates typically spent 200-400 hours in a cycle of planning instruction, video-recording, analyzing, and re-planning over a four to the six-month period (Cavalluzzo, Barrow, Mokher, Geraghty, & Sartain, 2015). To evaluate whether candidates meet the professional teaching standards, the NBC requires them to submit three teaching portfolios online: (a) student work, (b) a video-recording of classroom interactions with a written commentary, and (c) professional work outside of the classroom. The Teachers’ performance reflected in the teaching portfolio is evaluated by reviewers trained in specific content areas.

National Board Professional Teaching Standards are defined by students’ developmental levels (e.g., early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescence, adolescence & young adulthood) and subject areas. Candidates can choose the Generalist certificate if they do not want to specialize in a particular subject area. Most of the teachers who teach children between age 3-8 are certified as an Early Childhood-Generalist (EC-GEN). The EC-GEN Standards were developed collaboratively by university faculty, practitioners, and experts in early childhood and elementary education to incorporate the best educational approach for both age groups (Camp, 2009; Gillentine, 2010).