



Exploring the influence of professional development on teacher careers: A path model approach



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Literature review gives initial model of path framing survey and teacher interviews.
- Initial model traces path from professional development (PD) to career outcomes.
- Findings indicate PD can influence intention to stay in teaching.
- Some evidence of impact on progression.
- Path models useful for examining influence of PD on career – with limitations.

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a path model of professional development (PD) to explore the relationship between teacher PD and teacher careers and retention. A focussed literature review frames the study, which is based on a survey of 500 + teachers and interviews with 25 teachers. The findings provide evidence of the influence of PD on intermediate outcomes within the model and some evidence of influence on career progression. The paper concludes that a path model can provide a useful frame for examining the influence of PD on career, but the approach is limited given the complex, situated nature of teachers' careers.

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1. Introduction

Whilst the importance of professional development (PD) in relation to pupil outcomes is (relatively) well established, its relationship to career development and - to a lesser extent - retention has been subject to much less attention. This paper draws on a review of PD and PD evaluation literature to develop a framework - which I refer to as a 'path model' (Desimone, 2009) - to examine the relationship between teacher PD and teacher career outcomes and retention via a chain of intermediate steps in a study of science teacher PD. Drawing on an empirical study of science teacher PD in England, I explore the potential benefits and limitations of using a path model approach to study the relationship between PD and

teacher careers, arguing that path models can be useful tools in articulating a theory of change that can frame data collection and analysis and - in particular - draw attention to factors that influence how PD can lead to career and retention outcomes.

2. Teacher professional development and teacher careers

2.1. Clarifying terminology

By professional development (PD) I mean formal and informal support and activities that are designed to help teachers develop as professionals. This includes taught courses and in-school training, as well as activities such as coaching, mentoring, self-study and action research. By career progression I mean changes in job roles that often, but not always, involve greater status, responsibility and sometimes pay (such as promotion or subject leadership in a primary school). The term 'career outcomes' is used to cover both

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career progression and wider career impacts including professional competence and career aspirations. I mean retention to refer to the teaching profession rather than retention in a particular school or other organisation.

2.2. *The relationship between career stage and professional development*

There is a fairly large international literature (e.g. Day & Gu, 2010; Huberman, 1995; Kelchtermans, 1993; Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Lüdtke, & Baumert, 2011; Sikes, Measor, & Woods, 1985) exploring the relationships between career stage and professional development that theorises that career stage influences individuals' take up of, or the effectiveness of different types of, professional development. However, there are fewer studies that relate directly to the causal relationships between professional development itself and career development or retention. An indicator of this is that the 2004 EPPI centre systematic review of literature in relation to the effects of induction (Totterdell, Woodroffe, Bubb, & Hanrahan, 2004) found only two studies worthy of review, indicating the paucity of studies taking strongly experimental or quasi-experimental approaches judged by the EPPI centre to be the gold standard for such reviews (Oakley, Gough, Oliver, & Thomas, 2005) and although experimental studies in education are now becoming more common, such studies in relation to PD tend to focus on teacher knowledge and practice outcomes and of course pupil outcomes (Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008).

2.3. *The relationship between professional development and teacher retention*

Research largely from the UK, USA and Australia on the factors that influence teachers' retention in the profession indicates that lack of job satisfaction, due to teachers' heavy workload and other pressures, appears to be a more important reason for leaving the profession than a lack of PD (De Nobile & McCormick, 2008; DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Hobson et al., 2007; Ladd, 2007). There is evidence from research into schools' support for early career teachers' development as classroom practitioners, particularly in relation to mentoring, that professional development can have a positive influence on teachers' intentions to stay in teaching (Cameron, Lovett, & Berger, 2007; Day & Gu, 2007; Hobson & Ashby, 2012). However, Opfer and Pedder (2010) suggest that, despite the particular needs of teachers early in their careers, access to more varied types of PD is more likely to be offered to more experienced teachers.

Day and Gu (2007) present UK evidence that, in fact, high quality PD is important throughout the teaching career, arguing that teaching is “emotional work” and therefore requires care, support and access to professional learning to maintain commitment, and other longitudinal studies in the US context such as those of Moore Johnson (2004) and Bullough (2008) provide compelling evidence of the particular importance of the school in allowing access to a range of PD, which these authors are able - through the use of detailed case studies - to relate to retention in the profession.

There is a body of international research that links teacher PD with higher teacher efficacy (Ross & Bruce, 2007 in relation to mathematics; Lakshmanan, Heath, Perlmutter, & Elder, 2011 in relation to science teaching), and a further set of studies that provide limited or weak evidence of a relationship between efficacy and intention to stay in the profession such as Brouwers and Tomic (2000) that showed that higher self efficacy was related to lower levels of teacher 'burn out' on a range of measures, and other reviews link efficacy to teacher retention, again with generally weak

relationships found (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). However, this research and related reviews do not make the link from PD via increased self-efficacy to retention, in the way that Desimone (2009) provides such a pathway from PD via teacher level changes to student outcomes.

2.4. *The relationship between professional development and career outcomes*

There is a body of mainly qualitative evidence, largely based on teachers' self report data, which suggests that PD may influence career outcomes. The content or focus of PD activity is important here. In particular, studies focussed on either leadership development programmes or providing opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership opportunities (Simkins, Coldwell, Close, & Morgan, 2009; Taylor, Yates, Meyer, & Kinsella, 2011) suggest positive outcomes in relation to promotion or orientation towards promotion and school leadership capacity, and similarly, some studies with a subject-specific focus suggest that such work is perceived as supporting actual and intended promotion within the subject field (for example, Jones, Harland, Mitchell, Springate, & Straw, 2008 in relation to Chemistry).

Within the wider research literature into the impacts of PD, evidence of career outcomes is largely related to what might be termed mediating outcomes - i.e. those characteristics that are important precursors to career progression, but may not necessarily lead to promotion - particularly teacher expertise, self-efficacy (as discussed above in relation to teacher retention) and confidence, which are rarely explicitly linked to raising horizons towards promotion. So, for example, the major international review studies examining the impact of professional development (such as Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002; Opfer & Pedder, 2011) and key studies in relation to science education (such as Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007) do not explicitly relate teacher changes to career development or progression.

2.5. *Factors influencing the relationship between professional development and career/retention outcomes*

The likely impact of professional development on outcomes (including - potentially - retention and career outcomes) is related not just to the quality and type of PD, but also to the individuals involved, and the organisational contexts within which they work. Day and Gu (2007) provide a useful analysis of the varying ways in which professional development at different stages of the teacher's life interacts with other factors to influence teacher resilience and commitment to the profession concluding that “the provision of responsive and differentiated support to meet teachers' professional and personal learning needs at different times in their work and lives can help counter declining commitment trajectories, enhancing the continuity of positive development of teachers' professional commitment” (Day & Gu, 2007, p. 439). There is also evidence suggesting that the school culture and organisation is important in setting the context for positive PD outcomes: Bubb, Earley, and Hempel-Jorgensen (2008, p. 15) note, for example, that a school's ethos or culture was key to staff development: “it was an overarching factor, from which all else followed” and McIntyre, Hobson, and Mitchell (2009) argue that successful PD tends to take place in schools with a culture focussed on the learning of staff as well as pupils.

3. *Towards a path model*

The review presented in Section 2 indicates that whilst there are

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