

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
COMMUNITIES: WORKING TOWARDS
IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL
EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

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This research investigated professional development (PD) experiences of secondary teachers of English learners (ELs) in Maryland and their perceptions concerning characteristics of PD that are most effective in helping them to improve their professional knowledge and attitudes toward PD. It also investigated whether being part of professional learning communities (PLCs) enhanced PD outcomes by extending teachers' access to sustained learning. This inquiry fills a gap in research concerning PD experiences of teachers based on the analysis of school-based PLCs.

This research integrated Garet et al.'s (2001) framework of effective PD and Olivier and Hipp's (2010) model of PLCs. The integration of these two frameworks highlights the reciprocal relationship between PD and PLCs, and the extent to which these experiences and structures generate changes in teachers' improved knowledge and attitudes toward PD. A mixed methods approach is implemented to analyze

survey and interview data in a sequential manner with emphasis on the quantitative component. The study is built on the strength of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, and jointly, these methods provide a more complete picture of the research problem than would either method individually (Creswell, 2009). A total of 100 teachers participated in the survey and 9 teachers participated in the interview.

The analysis supports and extends Garet et al.'s (2001) findings that PD that emphasized improving content knowledge and was coherent with teachers' other learning experiences resulted in teachers' positive attitudes toward PD, as well as perceived improvement in knowledge. The results also revealed key practices of teachers' PLCs. Teachers' PLCs focused on their professional growth and improvement of student learning while fostering leadership and engaging in school improvement were not strong components of their practices. As a result, the associations of PLCs and teachers outcomes were not significant. This study is significant because it contributes to the emerging knowledge base that explores the relationship between the effects of PD on teachers and the role of PLCs reinforcing in best practices. The results of this research inform educators and education policy regarding and provide deeper insight into the comprehensive conditions needed for improving teachers' PD and PLC experiences.