

Constellations of Support: Teacher Professional Development in Head Start and Child Outcomes

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Research Questions.

- What professional development (PD) supports do Head Start teachers receive?
- What are the characteristics of teachers that receive specific PD supports?
- How do teachers' PD supports contribute to teachers' practice?
- How do teachers' PD supports contribute to child outcomes?

Key Findings.

- Teachers reported a wide array of PD supports that did not follow any distinct patterns. Teachers within the same center or program often had very different PD experiences.
- Hispanic/Latina teachers reported fewer PD supports than other racial/ethnic groups.
- The number of PD supports a teacher experienced did not appear to directly contribute to teacher practices or child outcomes; however more variety in PD supports predicted greater job satisfaction.

Background and Purpose.

- Head Start has made important investments to provide high-quality PD to their teachers.
- The purpose of this study is to improve our understanding of PD in Head Start by, for the first time, investigating PD supports experienced by a national sample of Head Start teachers.
- We also aim to see if teachers' report of their experience of PD in typical HS settings is related to teachers' practice and children's academic and socio-emotional outcomes.

Method.

- This study combines data from the 2006 and 2009 cohorts of the nationally-representative Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES).

- FACES includes information on Head Start children and families and the programs they attend, including teacher report of PD experiences over the year, the quality of teachers' practice, and children's academic and social-emotional outcomes.
- Across both cohorts data was collected on 120 programs, 264 centers, 896 classrooms, 945 teachers, and 6,664 children.
- Multilevel modeling was used for all analyses. A latent class analysis modelling approach was also attempted to understand distinct profiles of PD supports, but results were not meaningful and are thus not reported in this brief.

Results.

- On average, teachers received just under 6 PD supports over the year (out of 9 possible choices). In addition, 97% of teachers reported receiving at least one type of PD support.
- There was a high degree of variability in the total number and which PD supports teachers received; most of this variability existed within teachers (not among centers or programs).
- In terms of teacher characteristics, Hispanic/Latina teachers reported receiving significantly fewer PD supports than non-Latina teachers, as did teachers with more years of education (at trend level). Identifying as Black and years of teaching experience did not predict differences in PD support.
- Variety in PD support did not predict classroom practices or child outcomes. However, more variety in PD predicted greater teacher satisfaction.

Implications for Policy and/or Practice.

- The goal of this study was to provide early childhood education programs and centers, as well as researchers and program developers, more nuanced information about the specific PD supports

Head Start teachers are receiving across a school year.

- The items included in FACES provided detailed information about Head Start teachers' experience of PD support. Results of this study, however, call for a more nuanced understanding of the depth, content, and quality of typical PD experiences. Indeed, the current study relies on teacher report of receipt of different types of PD in a yes/no format. More nuanced PD reporting could greatly enhance PD policy and practice across the ECE field.
- In spite of the lack of significant findings regarding the association between teachers' PD experience and teacher and child outcomes, the extant findings can be used to inform how Head Start centers allocate their funds allotted for PD. For example, the finding that Hispanic/Latina teachers report fewer PD supports has implications for the design and implementation of PD that reaches all teachers.

For more information:

Jimenez, M., Pratt, M. E., & Taylor, M. *Characteristics of Head Start centers and teachers' practice.*

Taylor, M., Jimenez, M., & Pratt, M. E. *Teacher professional development experiences in Head Start: A descriptive study using national Family and Child Experiences Surveys (FACES).*

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