PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND TEACHER EFFICACY:
A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

A Dissertation
by
DAVID ANTHONY STEGALL

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ABSTRACT

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND TEACHER EFFICACY: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

(May 2011)

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Literature suggests that increased teacher efficacy can have a positive impact on student academic achievement. Literature also suggests that teacher efficacy, as well as teacher effectiveness, can be improved. This research investigated the correlational relationship between professional learning communities (PLCs) as a structure for job-embedded professional development and participating teachers’ self-efficacy. The specific research questions for this study were: 1) How closely does job-embedded professional development align to the National Staff Development Council’s (NSDC) standards for professional development?; 2) To what extent are professional learning communities implemented with fidelity?; and 3) What is the relationship of professional learning communities and participating teachers’ reported self-efficacy?

This quantitative study involved certified staff from 12 Title I elementary schools from a demographically diverse public local education agency (LEA) in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. The LEA has 36 schools in grades K-12 and serves more than 20,000 students, which ranks among the top 20 largest LEAs in the state, out of 115. The LEA selected for this research study had a self-reported structure of professional learning communities as a framework for conducting real-time professional development.
I compared the alignment of the LEA’s professional development structure to the NSDC’s standards for professional development through the Standards and Assessment Inventory (SAI) survey instrument. The guiding theoretical framework for this study focused on Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory which presupposes that people act cognitively on their social experiences as well how these cognitions influence their behavior and development. Using social cognitive theory as a framework for improvement, teachers can regulate their self-beliefs (personal factors), improve their pedagogy and instructional practices (behaviors), and alter the structure of isolation that exists within many schools (environmental factors). Social cognitive theory exerts that humans’ thought can regulate action. This theory also considers human behavior as individuals who adjust their actions based upon their self-beliefs or efficacy.

I also analyzed survey data on fidelity of implementation of PLCs through the lens of the Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R) instrument. The characteristics of PLCs identified through this instrument are: shared and supportive leadership; shared vision and values; collective learning and application of learning; shared personal practice; and supportive conditions including relationships and structures. The levels of teacher efficacy were examined through the lens of the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) survey which categorized efficacy into three subscales: efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional strategies and efficacy in classroom management.

The findings from this study revealed a significant relationship between the components of professional learning communities and teacher self-efficacy. In particular the PLC component “shared and supportive leadership” revealed the largest degree of correlation.
to the three components of self-efficacy. These findings are analyzed, implications for practice are presented, and suggestions for further research are offered.