

Public School Teachers' Religiousness and Sense of Efficacy in Dealing with Professional Challenges



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Introduction

Each teacher faces professional difficulties and brings his/her own personality in dealing with those problems. One aspect of many teachers' personalities is religious identity. Religious beliefs inspire some people to choose to become teachers and those teachers rely on their faith in maintaining their vocations. Nevertheless, little systematic research exists regarding potential influences of teachers' personal religiousness on their professional lives. The purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between teachers' religiousness and their sense of efficacy in dealing with professional challenges.

Research Questions

- How do public school teachers perceive their religious beliefs?
- What are the relationships between the public school teachers' efficacy perceptions in managing professional difficulties and their personal religiousness?

Methods

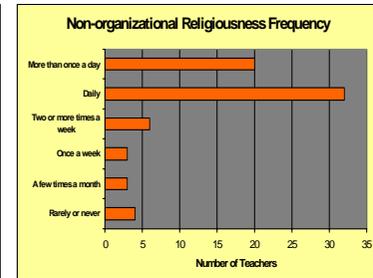
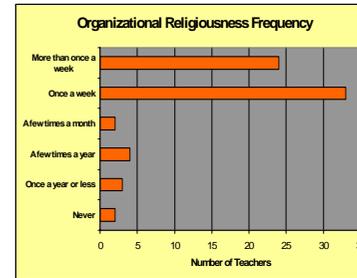
- The data for this presentation were collected as a part of a larger mixed methods research study.
- Participants: 68 Teachers (Pre-K to 3rd grade) in 5 public elementary schools in TN; All female teachers with 1 to 34 years of experience (Mean=14.3, SD=10.3)

Grade	N (%)
Pre-K	3 (4.4%)
K	15 (22.1%)
1st	15 (22.1%)
2nd	16 (23.5%)
3rd	17 (25%)
1 st &2 nd ELL	1 (1.5%)
3 rd &4 th ELL	1 (1.5%)
Total	68 (100%)

Ethnicity	N (%)
Caucasian	51 (75%)
African American	16 (23.5%)
Mixed	1 (1.5%)
Total	68 (100%)

Instruments

Teacher Spiritual/Religious Survey by Hartwick
Importance of religion & Religious affiliation
Duke Religion Index by Duke University
Organizational religiousness, Non-organizational religiousness, & Intrinsic religiousness
Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale by Ohio State University
Classroom management, Instructional strategies, & Student engagement
Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale by Bandura
Parent involvement & General school influence



Intrinsic religiousness. The participant teachers rated the extent to which the three following statements were true: 1) In my life as a teacher, I experience the presence of God; 2) My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life as a teacher; and 3) I try hard to carry my religion over into all other dealings in life as a teacher. Scores range from 1 (i.e., 'definitely not true') to 5 (i.e., 'definitely true of me'), the higher the score, the greater the perceived intrinsic religiousness. The result reveals that a solid majority of the sample believed they were extremely high intrinsic religious members; 61.8% of the sample rated 5 for all three statements. Another 16.2% of the sample reported that they were likely to feel more than just 'tends to be true' for the three intrinsic religiousness statements (average rating = 4.67 or 4.33); 10.3% of the sample were inclined to feel 'tends to be true' (average rating = 4.00). A minority (5.9%) of the teachers' average ratings of intrinsic religiousness is 3.67; 1.5 % of the sample's average rating is 3.00; and 4.4 % of the sample's average rating of intrinsic religiousness items is 1.00.

Comparison of Teacher Efficacy Mean Scores among Various Religious Groups

Description	Number	In Class	Classroom Mgmt	Instructional Strategy	Student Engagement	Out Class	Parent Involvement	General School Influence
General Religiousness								
High (sum score 24-27)	44	7.44* (.72)	7.64* (.83)	7.32 (.81)	7.38* (.95)	6.50 (.90)	6.76 (1.03)	6.37 (1.08)
Low (sum score 6-23)	24	7.00 (.75)	7.01 (.94)	7.01 (.83)	6.80 (.89)	6.27 (1.13)	6.23 (1.20)	6.29 (1.27)
Organizational Religiousness								
High (once or more than once a week)	57	7.37* (.76)	7.54* (.85)	7.29 (.82)	7.28* (1.00)	6.47 (.96)	6.68 (1.12)	6.36 (1.11)
Low (never - a few times a month)	11	6.86 (.57)	6.95 (1.07)	7.00 (.81)	6.61 (.42)	6.15 (1.12)	6.00 (.87)	6.23 (1.38)
Non-Organizational Religiousness								
High (daily - more than once a day)	52	7.33 (.75)	7.49 (.92)	7.28 (.78)	7.22 (.99)	6.38 (.96)	6.68 (.95)	6.24 (1.14)
Low (never - two or more times a week)	16	7.15 (.79)	7.31 (.86)	7.11 (.93)	7.02 (.86)	6.52 (1.07)	6.22 (1.51)	6.67 (1.14)
Intrinsic Religiousness								
High (9)	42	7.47** (.76)	7.63* (.91)	7.35 (.86)	7.45** (.96)	6.67** (1.00)	6.86** (1.06)	6.58* (1.22)
Low (Average Rating <=5)	26	6.98 (.65)	7.14 (.83)	7.08 (.72)	6.73 (.80)	6.00 (.82)	6.12 (1.06)	5.95 (.89)

Discussion

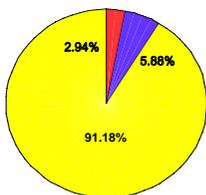
This study is significant in that it documented public school teachers' personal characteristics little known to the educational academia. The findings reveal that bulk of teachers in the sample perceived their personal spiritual beliefs to be important in their lives and viewed themselves as highly religious Christians. This phenomenon may be because all of the survey participants were female, who are more likely to attend church often than male (USA Today, 2008).

Another speculation on an explanation for the high spirituality of the sample relates to the nature of the inquiry. Considering a 62.7% of return rate of the questionnaire, it may be that people who perceived themselves as not religious did not feel like participating in the study. The sample of this study might possibly be biased in a direction of spirituality because of those who chose to respond to the survey.

A different type of explanation for the high spirituality among the sample could be that these are teachers in a medium sized Southern city. Arguing against this interpretation is the consistent findings from Hartwick (2004) who also observed in Wisconsin that a large number of public school teachers (i.e., 88% of 317 teachers randomly sampled) regarded religion and spirituality as important to their professional lives. In addition, he found more than 66% of the teachers who prayed perceived that prayer had positive impacts on their professional lives in various ways. The teachers' reports in this study also suggest teachers' efficacy and spirituality are bound in some ways. However, the data are insufficient to explain why and how the relationship exists. The findings from the current study and the one from Wisconsin taken together, indicate that spirituality may be seriously important to public school teachers across the nation, regardless of region. Further investigation in various research sites is warranted to investigate the phenomenon.

Results

Importance of Religion



Religious Affiliation

