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Faculty Perceptions of Teacher Professionalism in Christian Schools

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Abstract

Able school administrators understand that teachers are their most valuable asset. If Christian schools are to effectively serve the families who entrust their children to their care, teachers must demonstrate both professional competency and godly character. This study was an investigation of faculty perceptions of teacher professionalism at ten Christian schools in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. An online survey of 24 items was completed by 230 teachers (*males=30; females=200*). The survey instrument was a modified version of Tichenor and Tichenor's (2009) four dimensions of teacher professionalism. Data were analyzed using a multivariate analysis-of-variance (MANOVA) with gender as the independent variable. Results demonstrated statistically significant variance in totals on 18 of 24 individual items, three of the four dimensions, and on the total score.

Introduction

Throughout American history, classroom teachers have faced a seemingly endless struggle to have their occupation respected as a profession. This struggle is especially acute for many Christian school educators who have struggled to establish schools under less than ideal circumstances. Because religious schools do not receive direct government funding, many find it difficult or impossible to offer the competitive salaries and benefits needed to attract highly qualified, professional teachers. For instance, one study recently reported that only 33% of participants in their survey of 175 Christian school educators held a state teacher credential or certification (Finn, Swezey, & Warren, 2010, p. 15).

Concern over the relationship between low salaries and teacher quality has been around for many years (Brubaker, 1980; Lowrie, 1976; Watson, 2006/2007). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES),

The average starting salary for teachers with no experience in public charter schools that used a salary schedule was \$26,977, compared with \$25,888 for public school districts.

Private schools offered the lowest base salary, with teachers holding a bachelor's degree and no experience earning \$20,302 annually. (NCES, 2001)

Based on this information most teachers in Christian schools can expect to make only 78% of that of public school teachers and this doesn't include the substantial loss of earnings through retirement pensions and other benefits. Obviously, these salaries can range greatly from school to school as noted in the ACSI (2009) survey with 28% of teachers holding a bachelor's and 14% a master's degree and 0-9 years of experience making less than \$20,000 annually.

Grady, Helbling, and Lubeck (2008) asserted that while teachers are expected to be "martyrs to the cause of children and are required to develop themselves professionally" (p. 603),

their value pales in comparison to other professionals such as lawyers and architects whose value is measured by “the fees they collect and the respect they receive” (p. 603). According to Ravitch (2003), education failed to develop a unified core body of knowledge, research-based standards, and an external system of examination to guide the profession. The road towards developing these requirements has historically been a bumpy one.

Spring (2010) noted that in the nineteenth-century, teachers were typically certified for classroom service by passing an examination that was administered by the employing school system and not according to the number of education courses taken. Eventually, the move to licensing classroom teachers shifted from localities to the states. In 1834, Pennsylvania became the first state to mandate teachers pass an academic test before entering the classroom; however, by the end of the nineteenth century only four states had a centralized certification or licensing system (Elsbree, 1939 as cited in Spring, 2010). According to Spring, in 1839 a teacher training institution called a normal school was established in Lexington, Massachusetts with the support of noted 19th century educator Horace Mann. Spring wrote, “By 1933 42 states had centralized licensing at the state level; the primary requirement for gaining a teacher certificate was the completion of most courses in teacher education and other fields” (p. 202). Formal training for teachers was certainly an effort to professionalize the field. Unfortunately, the twentieth century saw one educational theory after another further weakening the reputation of the profession.

Partially in an effort to address this concern, educators created the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The NBPTS (1987) established five core propositional statements it expects all National Board Certified Teachers to meet or exceed: (1) Teachers are committed to students and their learning; (2) Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students; (3) Teachers are responsible for managing and

monitoring student learning; (4) Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience; and (5) Teachers are members of learning communities (NBPTS, 1987).

Theoretical Framework

Often at the heart of this debate is the elusive definition of teacher professionalism. The varied definitions of teacher professionalism reflect the lack of standardization in the field. For instance, Wise (1989) wrote,

[Professional teachers] have a firm grasp of the subjects they teach and are true to the intellectual demands of their disciplines. They are able to analyze the needs of the students for whom they are responsible. They know the standards of practice of their profession. They know that they are accountable for meeting the needs of their students. (pp. 304-305)

Whereas, Stronge (2002) categorized the attributes, behaviors, and attitudes of effective teachers into six major areas: “prerequisites of effective teachers, the teacher as a person, classroom management and organization, organizing for instruction, implementing instruction, and monitoring student progress and potential” (cited in Tichenor & Tichenor, 2009, p. 9). Others described teacher professionalism as specific behaviors such as personal appearance, punctuality, proper grammar, and collegiality (Hurst & Reding, 2000).

In his book, *The Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism*, Hugh Sockett (1993) posited a theory of the moral foundations of teacher professionalism. For the purposes of this study the authors relied upon Sockett’s definition of teacher professionalism as the “manner of conduct within an occupation, how members integrate their obligations with their knowledge and skill in a context of collegiality, and their contractual and ethical relations with clients” (p. 9). He identified five major dimensions of professionalism for educators: character, commitment to

change and continuous improvement, subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and obligations and working relationships beyond the classroom and it was these dimensions that Tichenor and Tichenor (2009) would draw upon to develop their instrument.

Literature Review

Christian Schools

There are dozens of different types of private and religious school systems and organizations across the country. Alongside the widely respected Catholic school system, the broadest, most general, grouping is the Christian-day school. They run the gamut of the Christian religious spectrum, from denominational (e.g. Southern Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Assemblies of God, etc.) to non- or multi-denominational. The modern Christian school movement in many ways is still a relatively new phenomenon in the history of American education. According to a recent survey of ACSI member schools, 46% began operations in only the past 20 years, with half of those in the last ten (ACSI, 2009, p. 12). Regarding Christian schools, Carper (1984) wrote:

Not only do these schools currently constitute the most rapidly expanding segment of formal education in the United States, but they also represent the first *widespread* secession from the public school pattern since the establishment of Catholic schools in the nineteenth century. (p. 111)

Despite the proliferation of Christian schools, they have often found it difficult to establish strong reputations due to “the challenge of placing highly qualified teachers in each class” (Watson, 2006/2007, p. 22) because they tend to hire uncertified teachers. Because certification is often viewed *de facto* as a form of professionalism, these schools have often struggled to attain professional respect and legitimacy (Quirke, 2009).

Teacher professionalism among Christian school educators is fostered and promoted by many of the accrediting service organizations that support them. Leading the way in this mission among Christian schools in the United States and around the world is the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). According to Swezey (2008), “Over the past thirty years no other association has had a greater impact on Christian school education than ACSI” (p. 1). ACSI’s mission is “to enable Christian educators and schools worldwide effectively to prepare students for life” (ACSI, n.d.b.). Among the services provided by ACSI that support educator professionalism are accreditation, teacher and administrator certification, educational consulting, and legal and legislative support. ACSI also conducts educator conventions, conferences, and other professional development opportunities. In fact, ACSI hosts more than 30 conventions and international conferences attended by “nearly 50,000 teachers, administrators, pastors, and school board members... around the world” (ACSI, n.d.a.). Recently, ACSI transitioned from their traditional convention format to one providing a live event streamed throughout a region coupled with an ongoing, virtual professional learning community.

Teacher Professionalism

Various constructs have been built in an attempt to define professionalism. Among the two most common are an essentialist approach, which defines professionalism in terms of its central social function, its length of training, a body of knowledge, high levels of skill, a code of ethical conduct, client-centredness, autonomy, independent decision-making and adaptability, self-governance and the requirement that it play a central role in relevant public policy-making. (Locke, Vulliamy, Webb, & Hill, 2005, p. 558).

An alternative construct is the social constructionist approach, which perceives professionalism in light of historical context and recognizes an elastic definition that affords change over time based on such factors as social change and political policies (Locke et al., 2005). More than 35 years ago, Lortie (1975) documented teachers' uniform dissatisfaction with their professional socialization and their limited sense of a shared technical culture.

Hoyle (1995) defined a profession as "occupations requiring a high degree of knowledge and skill to perform social functions that are most central to the well-being of society" (p. 12). Among the many occupations often cited as professions (e.g., medicine, law, engineering, dentistry, architecture, ministry, and accounting), teaching is often absent (Hoyle, 1995; Lortie, 1975; Rowan, 1994). Teaching is often cast as a semi-profession along with social work and nursing (Etzioni, 1969) or as an emerging profession (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1992; Hoyle, 1995) based on various sets of criteria and "because teaching has taken steps to meet professional criteria more fully through a process commonly referred to as professionalization" (Cook & Hudson, 2006, p. 403). But defining teacher professionalism has proven elusive. Cheng (1997) explained,

Among scholars, the definition of teacher professionalism may vary. Generally, teachers' professionalism or professional orientation may be described as the extent to which teachers subscribe to a professional code, that is, a set of ethical standards of conduct for teachers. (p. 163)

A part of the difficulty with defining teacher professionalism is the opaque nature of effective teaching. Wise and Darling-Hammond (1995) wrote, "Effective classroom practice is a complex mixture of artistry and mystery" (p. 42). Labaree (2000) noted that historically the path to

professionalism has been hindered by a deeply entrenched view that “teaching is an enormously difficult job that looks easy” (p. 228). He explained:

We ask teacher education programs to provide ordinary college students with the imponderable so that they can teach the irrepressible in a manner that pleases the irreconcilable, and all without knowing clearly either the purposes or the consequences of their actions. (p. 231)

Rizvi and Elliot (2005) offered a more utilitarian perspective identifying four dimensions of teacher professionalism: teacher efficacy, practice, collaboration, and leadership. In this example, teacher efficacy is “based on the belief that teachers are more likely to adopt and implement new classroom strategies if they have confidence in their own ability to control their classrooms and affect student learning” (Rizvi & Elliot, 2005, p. 39). Attempts to revitalize teacher professionalism in Australia focused on an effort to “recast teachers as learners and researchers” (Sachs, 1997, p. 268).

Teacher Professionalism and Christian School Teachers

Keenan (1998/1999) reported that Christian school pioneer, Dr. Roy W. Lowrie, Jr., was fond of saying, “Teachers are the gold in the bank for the Christian school.” Able school administrators understand that teachers are their most valuable asset. If Christian schools are to effectively serve the families who entrust their children to their care, teachers must demonstrate both professional competency and godly character. While not legally binding upon private Christian schools, Darling-Hammond and Berry (2006) noted one of the “most important aspects of NCLB [No Child Left Behind] is its demand that states ensure a ‘highly qualified’ teacher for every student” (p. 15). The goal of every Christian school should be nothing less.

According to the US Department of Education (USDOE), highly qualified teachers must have “1) a bachelor's degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach” (USDOE, 2004). Middle and high school teachers must also provide evidence that they are knowledgeable in the subject they teach. Such evidence might include majoring in the subject they teach, credits equivalent to a major in the subject, passage of a state-developed test, an advanced certification from the state, or a graduate degree (USDOE, 2004).

David Wilcox (2007/2008), ACSI's International Director for Latin America and Asia, claimed, “Professionalism relates to commitments, motivations, and a person's approach to the practice of education” (p. 10). Wilcox further explained that a professional educator must demonstrate a moral imperative by taking responsibility for improving student learning. He believed that professional development, which takes place within the context of community as a collaborative endeavor, will lead to the type of transformation in thinking that must take place if Christian schools are to have any hope of a breakthrough to sustained excellence. Cook and Hudson (2006) argued that for those within the Catholic school setting, teaching is both a ministry and a profession: a professional ministry. They explained that the ministry aspects reflect the teacher's responsibility to advance the mission of the Church, while the professional aspects “focus on the teaching profession's drive toward professionalization” (p. 400). Protestant Christian school educators would heartily agree with their assessment.

Gender Research

Research on the effects of teacher gender is a widely studied aspect of education. Research includes such varied topics as organizational commitment (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2011), satisfaction and/or stress (Eichinger, 2000; Klassen, 2010; Pei & Guoli, 2007), evolutionary beliefs (Kim & Nehm, 2011), student achievement (Klein, 2004), student academic

confidence (Todor, 2010), and student evaluations (Sprague & Massoni, 2005; Spooren & Mortelmans, 2006). Each of these studies demonstrates that gender is often a statistically significant factor that should be taken into account.

Much research has also been performed on various aspects of teacher professionalism. But an extensive review of the literature found no research examining effects of gender on teacher perceptions of professionalism. According to Ingersoll and Merrill (2010), the teaching profession is increasingly becoming dominated by females. They cited Schools and Staffing Survey data collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics that reports that the percentage of female teachers increased from 66% in 1980 to 76% during the 2007-2008 school year. They noted that the change has not come from a decrease in the number of men, which has grown by 26%, but rather a doubling of that number growth in the number of women (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010, p. 18). The growth of women in the field is most concentrated in secondary schools where males made up the majority of teachers until the late 1970s. Ingersoll and Merrill projected that females would comprise 80% of the teaching force by 2012 and that this change held important policy implications. With the increased role of females, examining the effect of gender offers the potential for new insights into how teachers perceive various aspects of teacher professionalism.

Research Questions

The primary question driving this study is, “What are Christian school faculty perceptions of teacher professionalism?” This question is explored further through two subsidiary questions:

1. How do Christian school faculty perceptions of teacher professionalism vary by Tichenor and Tichenor’s (2009) four dimensions of teacher professionalism according to gender?

2. How do Christian school faculty perceptions of teacher professionalism vary by total score according to gender?

Methodology

Instrument

This study was conducted using cross-sectional survey research methods (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Participants provided online responses to a Likert-type self-report survey instrument. The instrument surveyed the perceptions of teachers using an abbreviated version of Tichenor and Tichenor's (2009) 51-item instrument, which was based on Sockett's (1993) five dimensions of teacher professionalism: character, commitment to change and continuous improvement, subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and obligations and working relationships beyond the classroom. The five dimensions were modified by Tichenor and Tichenor into four by combining subject and pedagogical knowledge into a single dimension. The modified instrument in this study contained 24 items and four dimensions: Personal Characteristics, Commitment to Change and Continuous Improvement, Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge, and Beyond the Classroom (see Appendix). The modification in the number of individual items was made to reduce the time required to respond to all items based on concerns raised by school administrators during a piloting of the instrument. Due to instrument revision, inter-item reliability was examined using a Pearson correlation between each of the dimensions and the total score (see Table 1). Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). A Chronbach's Alpha score of .96 on all five items demonstrated a high degree of reliability.

Table 1*Inter-Item Correlation Matrix*

| | Personal Characteristics | Commitment to Change/Continuous Growth | Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge | Beyond the Classroom | Total Score |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Personal Characteristics | 1.000 | .686 | .814 | .736 | .859 |
| Commitment to Change/Continuous Growth | .686 | 1.000 | .851 | .798 | .922 |
| Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge | .814 | .851 | 1.000 | .829 | .962 |
| Beyond the Classroom | .736 | .798 | .829 | 1.000 | .914 |
| Total Score | .859 | .922 | .962 | .914 | 1.000 |

Teachers were asked to respond to the following prompt: “Teachers at my school...” followed by a statement such as “display positive attitudes on a daily basis” using a five point Likert scale (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Frequently, Almost Always). Teachers were provided these instructions: “The following statements are about teachers in your school. This is **not** a survey of what should be, but rather what is. Please indicate the extent to which you believe each statements occurs, from Never (1) to Almost Always (5).” The survey was administered online.

Participants

A total of 230 teachers from ten Christian day schools in urban and suburban settings in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States completed all survey items so there were no missing data. The respondents included 30 males and 200 females. All ten schools are affiliated with an association of biblically-based, evangelical schools committed to promoting Christian education and fostering cooperation among Christian schools and educators in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Data

Individual items, aligned with the four dimensions, were combined by averaging individual items according to each dimension creating four new dependent variables named for each dimension (see Appendix). Finally, a new mean score was established using an average of all individual 24 survey items forming a total mean score creating a fifth dependent variable (Total Score) that was then analyzed.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics (ver. 19.0) software by applying a multivariate analysis-of-variance (MANOVA) with gender as the independent variable. Independent-samples *t* and analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were not used because of the disproportionate number of women ($n=200$) versus men ($n=30$).

Results

Pre-data analysis (Mertler & Vanatta, 2005) included removal of all participants with missing data, examination for outliers, normality, linearity, and homogeneity of covariance. An examination of normality using stem and leaf, histograms, and boxplots revealed no extreme outliers. Issues of normality were examined using Kolmogorov-Smirnov. Although descriptive statistics revealed that all scores were negatively skewed, the only score to fall outside acceptable ranges (+1, -1) was the female mean score (-1.12) for Personal Characteristics. Kolmogorov-Smirnov revealed that male scores for Beyond the Classroom were significant ($p<.046$) and all female scores were significant ($p<.001$), except for Commitment to Change and Continuous Improvement ($p=.009$). Although normality may be questioned, the female sample size is quite large ($n=200$) and considered robust and male sample size ($n=30$) is satisfactory; therefore, normality will be assumed and the MANOVA conducted. Linearity of

the five dependent variables was tested by creating a scatterplot and calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient. Results indicated a linear relationship. The correlation coefficients range from medium ($r=.686$) to high ($r=.962$) and are statistically significant ($p=.01$) (see Table 2).

Table 2*Inter-correlation Matrix*

| Dependent Variable | PC | CC/CI | SPK | BC | TS |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Personal Characteristics (PC) | - | .686** | .814** | .736** | .859** |
| Commitment to Change Continuous Improvement (CC/CI) | - | - | .851** | .798** | .922** |
| Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge (SPK) | - | - | - | .829** | .962** |
| Beyond the Classroom (BC) | - | - | - | - | .914** |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

The assumption of homogeneity of variance was tenable based on the results of the Box's Test, $M=16.04$, $F(15, 10128)=1.001$, $p=.45$; therefore, Wilks' Lambda will be used as the test statistic. The results of Levene's test of equality of error provided evidence that homogeneity of variance across groups was tenable for Personal Characteristics ($F(1, 228)=.38$, $p=.54$), Commitment to Change and Continuous Improvement ($F(1, 228)=.02$, $p=.89$), Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge ($F(1, 228)=.01$, $p=.93$), Beyond the Classroom ($F(1, 228)=<.001$, $p=.998$), and Total Score ($F(1, 228)=.01$, $p=.93$).

A MANOVA was conducted to investigate responses regarding teacher professionalism according to gender. The Wilks' Lambda criteria indicates significant group differences according to gender, Wilks' $\Lambda=.916$, $F(5, 224)=4.1$, $p=.001$, multivariate $\eta^2=.084$. Univariate ANOVA results were interpreted using the more conservative alpha level ($\alpha=.01$). MANOVA results demonstrated statistically significant results for Commitment Change and Continuous Improvement ($F(1, 228)=13.02$, $p=<.001$, partial $\eta^2=.05$), with an observed power of .84 indicating a 84% chance that the results were significant. Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge

($F(1, 228)=10.26, p=.002, \text{partial } \eta^2=.04$) had an observed power of .73. Beyond the Classroom ($F(1, 228)=15.83, p<.001, \text{partial } \eta^2=.07$) had an observed power of .92. Total Score ($F(1, 228)=12.53, p<.001, \text{partial } \eta^2=.05$) had an observed power of .83. Results reveal that three of the four dimensions of teacher professionalism and the total score significantly differ according to gender with the mean score for males scoring below that of females on every measure. The only dimension not to demonstrate statistically significant results was Personal Characteristics. Based on Cohen's threshold of .01 for small, .06 for medium, and .14 for large, the effect sizes were small to medium ranging from .04 to .07 for all significant dependent variables. Table 3 presents means and standard deviations for gender.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Gender by Dimension and Total Score

| Dependent Variable | Males (<i>n</i> =30) | | Females (<i>n</i> =200) | |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Personal Characteristics | 4.33 | 0.55 | 4.52 | 0.52 |
| Commitment to Change/ Continuous Improvement | 3.32 | 0.68 | 3.80 | 0.68 |
| Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge | 3.84 | 0.63 | 4.23 | 0.62 |
| Beyond the Classroom | 3.55 | 0.73 | 4.08 | 0.68 |
| Total Score | 3.75 | 0.58 | 4.15 | 0.58 |

Discussion and Recommendations

The primary question driving this study was, "What are Christian school faculty perceptions of teacher professionalism?" This question was explored further through two subsidiary questions: (1) How do Christian school faculty perceptions of teacher professionalism vary by Tichenor and Tichenor's (2009) four dimensions of teacher professionalism according to gender? and (2) How do Christian school faculty perceptions of teacher professionalism vary by total score according to gender? The results revealed several useful findings.

Regarding the primary research question, Christian school faculty generally express high regard for the professionalism of their colleagues. Faculty responses were skewed in such a way that mean scores were high and demonstrated a largely positive perception of their fellow teachers. When these findings are examined, it is important to remember that study participants were responding to the prompt “Teachers at my school...” thus assessing their perceptions of others rather than themselves. It may well be that given the opportunity to assess their own professionalism, the scores may have returned inflated. These findings should be a source of encouragement to school boards and administrators. Despite the relatively powerful constraints imposed by financial limitations, faculty members within Christian schools in this study hold their fellow teachers in high esteem. By far, the highest mean score revealed that Personal Characteristics is their strongest attribute. These teachers display positive attitudes on a daily basis, put the welfare of students before personal interests, behave in an ethical manner, exhibit personal responsibility for the quality of own teaching, and maintain composure in all school-related situations. These qualities lay the foundation for a professional work environment. Our first recommendation is that Christian school administrators affirm the character qualities of their teachers in spite of working within the teaching profession under difficult circumstances for below market wages. This is a cause to celebrate, creating a culture that values the personal qualities of faculty members (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

The first subsidiary question also provided notable findings. Among the dimensions of professionalism, males and females were most closely aligned regarding Personal Characteristics and this was the only dimension not to show statistical significance. Seeing that this dimension also revealed the highest mean scores (*males*=4.33; *females*=4.52), it is deemed by the authors of this study as a sign of community health that no statistically significant difference was found.

The dimension with the lowest mean scores was Commitment to Change and Continuous Improvement (*males*=3.32; *females*=3.80). This dimension also demonstrated statistically significant differences by gender. This finding should be of concern to school boards and administrators as it might indicate a perceived lack of long term commitment to professional growth. All too often veteran teachers are stereotyped as teaching the same curricular material with the same pedagogy, year in and year out. Without the presence of personal dedication to lifelong learning and professional development, teachers are in constant danger of stagnation. Our second recommendation is that Christian school administrators need to carefully scrutinize faculty needs when it comes to professional development. Offering fresh and innovative activities might foster long-term commitment to professional growth.

Inevitably, it makes sense to link teacher professionalism with professional development. As Guskey (2000) noted, “high-quality professional development is at the center of every modern proposal to enhance education” (p. 16). Renewing teachers’ skills is critical to the overall improvement of educational quality. This is supported by Darling-Hammond’s and McLaughlin’s (1995) assertion that teacher development efforts must focus on deepening the understanding of the processes of teaching and learning. Our third recommendation is that administrators invest in effective and ongoing professional development (PD), which would be wise and likely yield results for years to come. Most ACSI schools (81%) report designating funds for PD as an employee benefit (ACSI, 2009, p. 105), yet many (61%) operate on annual budgets of under \$1 million (p. 34), so it is imperative to invest in those PD opportunities that will bear the most fruit in the classroom and in the spiritual development of the students.

Teachers also reported statistically significant differences by gender for two additional dimensions: Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge and Beyond the Classroom. The Subject and

Pedagogical Knowledge dimension contained eight items, including such as aspects as understanding how academic subjects are linked to other disciplines, understanding the developmental needs of children, engaging in self-reflection and analyze their own teaching, and possessing a high degree of content knowledge in own areas of teaching. Finn, Swezey, and Warren (2010) reported that study participants who expressed a desire for additional preparation cited academic and student-centered topics such as classroom management (46%), working with special needs learners (35%), and developing content area curriculum (27%) among their greatest needs. While these percentages are not extremely high, they help to support the notion that quality PD should be offered and maintained in order to reinforce good practice in these critical areas for Christian educators.

It is incumbent upon school leadership to ensure a quality education for its students. In their efforts to employ highly qualified teachers in the classroom and compete with local public schools, Christian schools would be wise to promote PD activities to attract and retain skilled teachers. ACSI offers regional educator conferences with multiple tracks for teachers and administrators. The basic format for these conferences has remained relatively unchanged for nearly thirty years and is primarily composed of three general sessions and multiple one-hour seminar sessions. While this format is popular among those surveyed by ACSI (2009) with 96% of respondents reporting ACSI professional development services as very useful (57%) or somewhat useful (39%) (p. 117), Finn, Swezey, and Warren (2010) found that teachers reported little practical application in the classroom; this is reinforced by similar concerns raised by Hill, (2009), Richardson, (2003), and Edlin, (2007). Headley (2004) reported that 90% of educators in ACSI member schools attended an ACSI regional convention.

The Beyond the Classroom dimension contained five items, including such as aspects as actively participates on school-wide committees and/or in school decision-making, shares teaching ideas and strategies with colleagues, and mentors or is willing to mentor beginning or inexperienced teachers. This dimension plays a critical role in the development of a professional learning community.

The perceived differences by gender provide a fascinating insight into how differently men and women view their fellow teachers. The authors recognize that most teachers already feel overburdened by typical classroom duties associated with the profession and the additional responsibilities that contribute to the greater good of the entire school are often reluctantly embraced, if at all. A fourth, and final, recommendation is that administrators recognize this reality is often a reflection of a lack of leadership that encourages shared leadership (Northouse, 2012) and greater buy-in among faculty.

The second subsidiary question required all individual scores be combined to create a new Total Score and when analyzed according to gender, the means were found to report statistically significant results. As an aside, when reviewing the responses based upon gender, it is interesting to note that mean scores on *every* individual survey item was higher for female participants compared to males. This finding could be due in part to the much lower sample for men (13%) versus women (87%) and definitely warrants further investigation. The significance of the Total Score by gender underscores the trends found in this study, mainly, that men and women view their colleagues very differently when it comes to professionalism.

Conclusions

The information gleaned from this study warrants efforts to expand the study to include greater participation, especially among male teachers. This study adds to the literature on

teacher professionalism by examining it from the perspective of teachers at private religious schools. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2010) reported that 503,469 teachers at 33,740 private schools educated more than five million students during the 2007-2008 school year and it is imperative that administrators and other policy makers establish and implement professional development plans so that students benefit from teachers representing the highest levels of professionalism.

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