UNCOVERING BELIEFS ABOUT THE ROLE OF FAITH IN CURRICULUM DECISIONS: A VIGNETTE APPROACH, by Carla Stevens

Abstract

Accessing and assessing the controlling beliefs of teachers about the role of faith in curriculum decisions is an essential first step in efforts to address the gap between the faith integration mission of Christian schools and actual practices (Boerema, 2011). Without intervention, teachers’ beliefs about teaching—shaped by early classroom experiences and a culture in which God is depicted as irrelevant for “secular” academic pursuits—might negatively influence their curriculum choices (Harris, 2004; Pearcey, 2005) and impact their acceptance of faith integration innovations (Kuzborska, 2011). Currently, no instrument exists that is both efficient (with a large participant group) and effective (able to capture beliefs that control practice) to help Christian teachers bring controlling beliefs to the fore so that they can be examined in light of God’s word. This preliminary study, restricted to the preactive (planning) stage of teaching, explored the potential of a context-rich vignette-based instrument to uncover teachers’ beliefs about the role of faith in curriculum decisions. Qualitative data collected online from teachers in Christian elementary schools were holistically scored, using a five-level rubric based on an adapted version of Ribera’s (2012) approaches to faith-learning integration that depicts increasing levels of the influence of faith on the curriculum. This nonexperimental, mixed-methods study yielded in-depth insights into the beliefs of Christian teachers and supported the use of vignettes as a valuable tool to elicit and evaluate teachers’ deeply held beliefs.

Keywords: faith-learning integration beliefs, professed versus controlling beliefs, vignette assessment