

Emotional Motivators that Influence Teacher Activism:
Chicago Public School System Strike and School
Closings

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Research Question

- What are the potential emotional motivators that influence teacher activism among Chicago Public School (CPS) teachers?

Previous Research

- Previous research indicates that emotions help to motivate activism efforts and behaviors within social movements
- For the basis of this research, emotions were defined as an individuals' conscious or unconscious feeling(s) that are subsequent reactions to a situation, relationship, and/or mood (Jasper 2011)
- Theoretical Framework is based on Dr. Michalinos Zembylas' (2006) theory of "Politics of Emotions" and Zembylas' (2010) theory of "Spaces for Coping"

Methods

Qualitative Study using a snowball sampling of four subjects

- All interviews were conducted over the phone and then recorded with a digital recorder
- each interview ranged from 11 minutes - 34 minutes (depending on subject response)
- each subject asked the same 9 questions then additional probing questions were asked

Methods Continued

- Subjects ranged in age between 28 years old - 54 years old
- All subjects teach in the Chicago Public School District (CPS)
- Two have taught for 7 years and the other two have taught for over 20 years and are members of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU)

Chicago Public School Teachers Union

Chicago Teachers Union:

- represent over 30,000 teachers and education personnel that work in CPS
- “CTU is an organization of educators dedicated to advancing and promoting quality education, improving teaching and learning conditions, and protecting members’ rights.” (www.ctunet.com)

Why is the CTU significant?

- CTU helps to ensure safe work conditions and negotiates the CPS teachers contracts with the school board
- School board is elected by the Mayor (Rahm Emmanuel)
- June 30, 2012 the previous teaching contract was up and the CTU and teachers voted to go on a strike once the negotiation process was deemed futile

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ON

STRIKE

FOR A FAIR CONTRACT

Association of Teachers

Teachers Go On Strike!

- Schools were closed down
- Teachers Rallied together, picketed, held town-hall meetings, occupied downtown Chicago with over 18,000 people (teachers and non-teachers)



CTU Logo



Strike Participants

Findings

- Preliminary results support Zembylas' theories on the politics of emotions (2006) and spaces for coping (2010)
- For the basis of this research, emotions were defined as an individuals' conscious or unconscious feeling(s) that are subsequent reactions to a situation, relationship, and/or mood (Jasper 2011)
- The most salient emotion that encouraged or motivated the teachers to become involved in the activist efforts was fear

Themes

(1) Anger & Fear:

- associated with losing their jobs, homes, pensions

(2) Joy & Unity:

- sense of “Euphoria” created during the strike from all the teachers coming together

(3) Hopelessness & Resignation:

- schools were going to be closed regardless

Anger & Fear

- Mr. Sanders is 32 years old, and has been teaching literacy in the Chicago Public School district for 7 years. During Mr. Sanders interview he states that he was led to join the strike because he felt, "...upset with some of the decisions that were being made" by the school board and Mayor Rahm Emanuel
- "Defend my job, my living conditions, then my students within the school, my salary, my benefits, my survival really"

Joy & Unity

- Mr. Slaughter is 54 years old and has been teaching science in the CPS school district for 15 years and has been a teacher for over 20 years.
- “When you saw the support of others rallying around you for the same cause, it gave you more strength and conviction that, ‘yes’, I am doing the right thing”
- Mrs. Applegate is 47 years old and has been teaching mathematics in the CPS school district for over 20 years.
- “Simply being able to bring together teachers who are apart of the union and those who are not was really encouraging. It helped to keep you motivated and gave us all a sense of belonging and joy being around one another and helping to uplift one another”

Hopelessness & Resignation

- Mr. Concord is 28 years old and has been a music teacher in CPS for the past 7 years
- “...gathering together all the teachers, parents, and other union workers but not changing anything. It made a lot of us feel like what was the point if the school board got what they wanted in the end anyway. If our schools are still on the chopping block, what was the point?”
- Mrs. Applegate and Mr. Slaughter both have been teaching for more than 20 years and regarded the school closings as “inevitable”

Importance

This study indicates that emotions are not just random occurrences or things people feel. Rather they are socially and politically charged and have strong implications for deeper understandings into emotions and their influences on activism and activist.

Recommendation for future research

More in-depth study on the various components of emotions and its influence on activism among teachers in CPS.

There should also be studies on the influence social movement organizations such as CTU have had on the mobilization of parent activism and involvement with the school closings.

Any Questions

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