



The Initiative Anthology

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Clearinghouse

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You Have to Pray
Or Else
You Will Lose Your Mind:
Christian Teachers' Perceptions of How Religious Belief Affects Their Teaching

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Abstract

This naturalistic field study analyses the perceptions of five self-identified Christian teachers in a racially integrated suburban high poverty elementary school in southwestern Ohio. Responses to a semi-structured interview were found to reflect two themes: **How religious belief is perceived by Christian teachers to affect what they do in school** and **How Christian teachers feel they are comforted by religious belief and practice**. In the first theme teachers reported feeling a sense of mission. Also noted were specific behaviors derived from Christian values, such as the desire to serve all students. Some informants reported being motivated to expose their students to Christian ministry, even in a secular public school setting. The second theme highlighted these teachers' use of prayer and seeking the company of other Christian teachers as ways of comforting themselves after a difficult day at school. Implications of explicitly Christian faith communities in pluralistic public school settings are discussed.

Preliminary Considerations

Background

I would like to know if Christian teachers feel their faith makes them better teachers, and in what way they feel helped by faith. A related question I have is: are there Christian teachers whose beliefs make them intolerant of those students who hold other beliefs or are in some way different? In other words, I am open to the possibility that I will find that teachers who hold strong religious beliefs may be led to teach in a way that is incompatible with what I feel educators should be doing in a secular, pluralistic, democratic society. Also, I am fascinated by the immense diversity of spiritual beliefs evident in American society. From Lutherans to Neo-pagans, from Muslims to Jehovah's Witnesses, it is plain that teachers can and do choose from a diverse menu of belief systems. I believe that all gods carry baggage (Crossan 1991), that the specifics of religious belief really do matter, so I would like to look at how one specific belief system, Christianity, affects practice.

What motivates educational leaders and upon what basis do they construct an ethical position? According to some recent literature, a growing number of leaders are turning to spirituality for answers (Fairholm 1997). Spirit is a universal energizing force that connects us with all that is permanent and worthwhile. The concept of spirit is intended to encompass all religious practices.

I contend that it is worthwhile to examine specific religions and their associated beliefs. In my study of the perceptions of Christian teachers, I will be looking for two specific values: *Christian love* (Greek word agape) and *the calling of God* (Greek word kalein). Christian love is a love that expresses itself as service to all people, even those we don't like (Barclay 1974 p. 17). The calling of God is a summons to duty, even when one doesn't feel like serving (Barclay 1974 p. 147.)

I will use a qualitative research approach to study teachers' perceptions of how their religious beliefs and pedagogy interact.

Purpose and Focus

In this study, I attempt to describe teachers' perceptions of how their religious beliefs influence their educational philosophy and pedagogy. As my study has progressed, my focus has narrowed to the study of Christian teachers at the school where I teach. I want to know what values they bring to the

education profession that might have a positive impact on students and peers.

Methods

Inquiry Setting

I teach at a school that is ideal for my particular study. It has the two ingredients I consider essential: it is in an urban setting and there are teachers on staff who are openly Christian. It is an elementary school serving grades K-5. The quality that I am looking for, Christian love and caring, may be easier to spot in the more nurturing elementary school environment. I also believe that it will be easier to conduct my study at a site where I am an insider. I know who the Christian teachers are and have already achieved a certain comfort level with them talking about religion.

My school services about 600 students in grades K-5. It is in a large suburban district in close proximity to Cincinnati, Ohio. The district is undergoing a demographic shift, becoming more urban in character. About 30% of students participate in a federal free and reduced price school lunch program. My school is the most ethnically diverse in the district with roughly 30% of the students being African American, a sizable population of students of Appalachian heritage, and a recent influx of non-English speaking students of central Asian heritage.

Teaching at this school can be quite difficult because a high number of the students come from family backgrounds where compliance with the demands of school is not highly valued or encouraged. Teachers at this school must build and sustain mental, emotional, and possibly spiritual resources in order to survive.

The Inquirer

I am a Christian public school teacher. I have been teaching for thirteen years. I am also a doctoral student who wishes to function as a public intellectual. A desire for social justice drives all my professional efforts. I would like schools to function as democratic institutions that give children from all backgrounds what they need to share fully in what our society has to offer. I think schools as they are fall far short of this goal.

Such views seem to place me on the left of the political spectrum. Yet, many of my left leaning acquaintances in the academy disagree with my claim that my Christian faith makes me a better teacher. Those who have made the postmodern turn away from Eurocentric metanarratives see Christianity as an

instrument for perpetuating human relationships of oppression, dominance and submission. I would like seek to find what there is in Christianity that is worth salvaging in the postmodern era.

At the same time, I disagree with many of my Christian acquaintances. Their desire to find certainty in the word of God often leaves them closed to alternate, diverse perspectives and lifestyles. Those who find certainty in the Christian God are often quick to dismiss the religious beliefs of others.

I openly entertain the possibility that "god" is merely a feeling that goes along with our unique human version of consciousness. In spite of that doubt, I feel I am at my best when I study and reflect upon the word of God and dedicate myself to doing Christ's will. I think it makes me a better teacher, even if I'm not sure exactly how it works. I would like to know how other Christian teachers view the relationship between faith and teaching.

Informants

I chose informants who have made it known that they are practicing Christians. I have prayed with some of them, and all have made statements indicating a strong Christian faith. In addition, I chose teachers who seem to be practicing Christian love as I understand it. I have had conversations with each of these teachers well before this study where they shared with me their sense of Christian mission that they bring to their teaching. I found five teachers who fit the criteria.

Mrs. Jay is a Euro American woman in her final year of a thirty year career. She is very active in a Protestant church. She thinks it is important to set a Christian example for the children by what she says and how she acts.

Mrs. Bee is an African American woman who has been teaching about five years. She belongs to a new church that has a strong evangelical mission. Evangelists believe they must work aggressively to bring the "good news" of Christ to the unchurched. She thinks it is quite important to try to "save" the souls of children at school.

Mrs. Kay is an African American woman who has taught for 17 years. She is a member of an urban Baptist church. She feels she cannot separate who she is as a Christian from who she is as a teacher.

Mrs. Dee is a Euro American woman who has taught about seven years. She attends a very large

evangelical church. She seems to struggle at times with her faith, looking for evidence that God is really there.

Mrs. Tea is a Euro American woman who has taught about four years. She was raised Catholic but recently switched to a Baptist church. She is the only informant who says she doesn't feel her Christian belief makes any difference in what she does in the classroom. She does feel called by God to teach, so she does feel her faith does make a difference in more behind-the-scenes ways.

I obtained written informed consent prior to interviewing each informant. Each informant was able to decide whether to participate based on information I provided describing what to expect in the interview and listing the potential risks and benefits of participation.

Data Gathering

I gathered data by conducting semi-structured interviews. My questions had two general goals. First, I wanted to find out what teachers' perceptions were of how their religious beliefs affected their teaching. Second, I wanted to find out how teachers described the difficulty of their jobs and to see if they found their Christian faith to be a comfort or a source of strength and renewal. Using a constant comparative approach, my analysis began with my first interview and led me to add questions as new thinking units of analysis emerged.

I tape recorded all my interviews and made a complete transcript of each interview using a computer word processing program. I tried taking notes as I interviewed at first, but found that I had so much to think about simply asking questions that it was impossible to determine the relative importance of narrative segments as I was hearing them. Transcribing all the interviews was quite time consuming and produced about 20 pages of text, but it was well worth the time because it made the coding process easy and effective. The shortest interview was 15 minutes and the longest was 30 minutes. Interviews averaged 20 minutes in length.

I obtained written permission to tape record each interview. Prior to data gathering, I obtained permission from Miami University's Institutional Review Board to do research on human subjects.

Data Analysis

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As this was my first attempt at qualitative study, a constant comparative approach to data analysis could hardly have been avoided. I began this study with two related questions. First, I wanted to know what Christian teachers say when asked about how religion affects their teaching. As I conducted my interviews, it became apparent that responses to this question were generating enough data to support a major theme of analysis. By the end I found this theme, **How religious belief is perceived by Christian teachers to affect what they do in school**, to have four categories: 1) **Sense of mission or being allied with a larger purpose**, 2) **Specific behaviors derived from Christian values**, 3) **Falling short of the mark/Rising above self-doubt**, and 4) **Christian ministry for children in secular public schools**.

My second question arose from my experience that teaching public school can be enormously frustrating and emotionally taxing. I know what it is about my job that I find vexing, but I wanted to know how other teachers describe what frustrates them and to what degree they feel frustrated. If others found teaching to be frustrating to a high degree, I wanted to know if Christian teachers found some sort of comfort from their faith that helped them endure or even overcome these frustrations. The responses to this line of questioning did prove to be substantial enough to support the theme **How Christian teachers feel they are comforted by religious belief and practice**. I divided this theme into two categories, **Individual practices** and **Group practices**.

Using a constant comparative approach, my analysis of the narrative data changed as new data came in. After I transcribed each interview, I used the following open coding technique: I created a matrix using a computer spreadsheet program. Then I searched the transcript for meaningful conceptual narrative segments. I "cut and pasted" each segment from the transcript to a spreadsheet cell in a specific column of the matrix. Each column was given a heading, which represented a thinking unit for me. These thinking units were created spontaneously without trying to ascertain how they might fit into a larger pattern. I did move columns around from time to time to group thinking units that were similar next to one another. As I continued to interview and code, I added thinking unit columns as needed. At the end of the first interview I had 14 thinking unit columns. At the end of the final interview I had 24 thinking unit columns. The column with the most conceptual narrative segments, **What's wrong with kids/families**, had 33 cells containing conceptual narrative segments. Thinking unit **Be strong to do**

what's right collected the fewest segments--two. My finished coding grid contained 24 columns and 54 rows.

My thinking units did divide neatly into the two original themes I had started with. I was able to combine thinking units to create the following categories of analysis.

- 1) **Sense of mission or being allied with a larger purpose:** Informants feel compelled by a higher power. They feel teaching isn't just a job, it's a calling.
- 2) **Specific behaviors derived from Christian values:** Informants feel they need to treat children and colleagues a certain way. They want to be seen as standing for certain values.
- 3) **Falling short of the mark/Rising above self-doubt:** Some informants in my sample feel they fall short of the Christian ethical ideal but keep trying anyway. One informant feels her faith has liberated her to take actions that are unpopular, but right.
- 4) **Christian ministry for children in secular public schools:** Informants feel many children lack core values. Some informants believe they must look for opportunities to "witness" their faith to children, even though as representatives of a secular pluralistic government, they understand they are expected to take a rigorously neutral religious stance.
- 5) **Individual practices that comfort:** Informants draw strength to face the difficulties of teaching by studying the Bible, praying regularly, and seeking moments of quiet reflection.
- 6) **Group practices that comfort:** Informants pray with other believers and seek their advice and support. The question is raised here if certain school sites are more comfortable for spiritually minded teachers than others.

Trustworthiness

I do not feel I reached a feeling of saturation after the fifth interview. In fact, responses became less "typical" as I interviewed each successive informant. I attribute this to the variety of beliefs that one may hold and still call oneself a Christian.

I feel that taping and transcribing each entire interview made my quotations more accurate.

I conducted member checks by allowing several teachers to read the thematic analysis section of this paper. One teacher said she didn't see herself too much in the paper, but when I pointed out several

places where she had been quoted, she seemed satisfied. I asked if she felt I had gotten anything wrong; she said it sounded reasonable and right to her. Another teacher said she felt she had told me more than she would have told a stranger. She said, "I don't share with many people that evangelism is my main motive in teaching."

Thematic Analysis of Informant Responses

Theme One:

How religious belief is perceived by Christian teachers to affect what they do in school

"I know that my belief in Christ makes all the difference in the world."

All the teachers I interviewed except Mrs. Tea feel that their Christian faith has a great effect on their teaching. It begins with a **sense of mission or being allied with a larger purpose**. "I consider [my classroom to be] my mission field," says Mrs. Jay. Mrs. Bee says "one of the gifts in the Bible is being a teacher and I believe that I have been blessed with that particular gift." Mrs. Dee and Mrs. Tea also believe they are meant to teach.

Four of the five respondents express a belief that things happen according to God's plan. "I do feel that every kid is here for a reason and I'm here for a reason," says Mrs. Dee. "I know that this is where I'm supposed to be."

All the teachers I interviewed except Mrs. Tea feel compelled to exhibit **specific behaviors derived from Christian values**. Two informants say they wish to act "Christlike" in their dealings with with students and colleagues. Mrs. Jay thinks about it in this way: "If [you] were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" In other words, she feels that it is not enough to believe in Christ, belief must manifest itself in concrete observable actions of caring and service to others. Mrs. Kay tries "to do that which is right, that which is just; to treat people as I would want to be treated, as Christ gave himself for me. That's what I am expected to do when it comes to others." She feels a need to do God's will regardless of personal preference: "Sometimes what I do has nothing to do with whether I like it. It has everything to do with . . . doing as I am told by the Lord to do it."

Christian love (a love that is expressed as service to others, even others we might not like) seems important to the informants. Mrs. Jay says she tries to act as "love with skin on." Mrs. Dee thinks "the challenge of being a teacher is to find a thing that you can care about . . . in each child. Especially the ones that you have trouble with." "I believe children need compassion," says Mrs. Kay. "Christ dealt with all people. He didn't pick and choose. From the highest of the high to the lowest of the low. He dealt with all people and that's just the way this job is."

All informants except Mrs. Tea say how important it is to stand as an example. "I don't have a problem in letting my colleagues and students know that I am a believer," says Mrs. Kay. Mrs. Bee thinks "the important thing... about teachers that are Christian [is] that they are not afraid to let their light shine. I've had the opportunity to share a piece of my light into [the students'] lives and maybe that will change them in one way or another to be better people." Letting one's light shine is a phrase Jesus used to stress the need to be a positive influence and example for others to see. These four informants all stress that their example of putting Christian values into action is aimed at colleagues as well as students. Mrs. Jay tries "to be a presence, a witness, a fairness, an example of values... in the classroom setting as well as with my colleagues."

All informants except Mrs. Bee mention feelings of **falling short of the mark**. Mrs. Tea says, "I'm struggling like every other teacher is." Mrs. Jay, after listing the "Christlike" traits she strives for, says, "I fall so short of [Christ's example]. I pray for that each day and I fall so short of that each day." Mrs. Kay also feels her actions fail to perfectly reflect Christ's will, but is the only informant to say her faith gives her the courage to **rise above self-doubt**. "Sometimes in our Christian lives we don't tell people what's on our minds because we are afraid that we will hurt their feelings." She explains how her faith allows her to discipline children and help children work a situation out "the way it should be, and sometimes that's not the way they want it."

All informants except Mrs. Tea feel it is important to engage in **Christian ministry for children in secular public schools**. Mrs. Bee relates what happened when religious songs were sung by the children at a recent Grandparents' Day school program.

It was amazing how the other teachers were very excited about being able to share [Christian faith] without really pushing it on someone. But you don't have to if you

allow God to just come on in and use you. It's important to not shy away from the questions that the children ask. I know that it gets to be compromising at times because lots of people are worried about their jobs, but you have to be worried about your soul, too. That may be an opportunity to save somebody and you don't even know it. By your simple comment or what you do, God can get them in the right direction. You may open up the door just enough for other children to take over the conversation for you and not say anything. Or they might develop a dialog and that child might be saved because of you allowing just a little pinhole of light to come into their life. So you have to take little opportunities that arise at any time. And if you have to say its history, then say its history. If you have to say that its events that are happening now, then use whatever you have to go ahead and allow the message go out. Because that's what we are supposed to be, we're supposed to be ambassadors for Christ.

Theme Two:

How Christian teachers feel they are comforted by religious belief and practice

"If I did not have my faith I don't think I could do this job."

All five informants feel that teaching is difficult. "There are times when this job can be very frustrating. And there are times when you just want to quit. You just want to give up all this," says Mrs. Kay. The reasons they cite for these difficulties center on lack of respect, support, and cooperation from students and families. All five teachers report using **individual practices that comfort them**. Topping the list is prayer. "I think that in this job you'd better pray!" "Prayer is all the time. I have a constant talk with God." "The strength to do this job comes from a lot of prayer, from constant prayer." "What do I do to comfort myself? Pray, pray, and pray." "I do pray for my students, myself, faculty, before I start the school day." "You have to pray or else you will lose your mind."

Teachers also mention finding a time and place at school for quiet reflection. Two teachers mention the importance of regular Bible study. Bible study is important to these teachers because that is

part of the process of discerning God's will.

All five informants also rely on **group practices that comfort**. Several get together each morning and pray together. All mention the importance of regularly talking with other teachers who are Christian. Two teachers also mention the importance of working in an overall building climate that feels supportive. "There are times when I will talk with other teachers who I know are believers, who understand where I'm coming from," says Mrs. Kay.

It's funny. I'm here at school and we don't run around the building saying 'I'm a believer! I'm a believer!' but we come together. And it's interesting how we end up coming together. It can be just a little something that sparks that conversation. It could be a mishap. 'The chocolate bar that got stuck in the peanut butter jar and now you have a Reece Cup' type thing. Just those little things and next thing you're talking to people and you say 'OK, we're on the same wavelength.'

Mrs. Bee says

It's very difficult when you work in a building where there's a lot of animosity and no one really gets along and you notice that the majority of the staff doesn't go to church or even act like they acknowledge God. To be honest with you, here I don't feel like that. I feel like [at this school] a lot of people do respect God .

Theoretical Context

Where might my findings fit into education discourses? I turn first to the discourse of philosophy of education. There are many ways of constructing an ethical position in education. Many educators believe Kant's categorical imperative is pretty much the last word in ethics. Followers of Noddings (1984) urge teachers to construct an ethic based on caring. Welch (2000) says that liberal Christian theology cannot be the basis of a sound ethical position because the example of an all powerful patriarchal God paves the way for destructive human relationships based on dominance and submission. In his classic study of a fundamentalist Christian school, Peshkin (1986) raises serious questions about the effects of a rigidly monotheistic faith on a pluralistic society.

I turn to Meeks (1993) to find a positive way of viewing Christian ethics. First, he helps cut

through the sheer volume of Christian discourse. It is a very serious question to ask 'is there anything all Christians agree upon?' Kung (1996) filled over 900 pages with his quest for the "essence" of Christianity. Meeks (who prefers the phrase 'morality' over 'ethics') reassures us that

it is clearly not meaningless to speak of "Christian morality," however many qualifications may be necessary as one attempts to delineate it. Within all the diversity that must be acknowledged in Christian moral practice and moral discourse, there is to be discovered a family resemblance of moral traits. (p. 3)

Using an historical-ethnographic approach, Meeks gives us a glimpse at the history and culture of Christians in the first two centuries who struggled to produce a moral community. I feel the urge to create community is one common element in the themes I have identified in the responses of my informants. These informants want the children they teach to be familiar with Christian morality so they all can join together in doing God's will. They also want to feel like they are working alongside other teachers who share their Christian moral vision.

I think Christian ethics is based on the idea and practice of service to others. Barclay (1964) discusses the Greek word *agape*, or Christian love. This is not a warm love or a sexual love. It is "unconquerable benevolence, invincible good will. It is the power to love the unlovable" (p.22). I believe the impulse toward Christian love is an ethical common thread that goes through my analytic categories of responses.

I also feel my study has importance to those who study educational administration and leadership. Spirituality in leadership seems to be a hot topic these days. Fairholm (1997) believes spirituality has been kept separate from leadership at great cost to organizations. He defines spirituality as:

the essential human values from around the world and across time that teach us how humanity belongs within the greater scheme of circumstance . . . a source guide for personal values and meaningmaking, a way of understanding the world, an inner awareness. Secular and spiritual are not opposed because we need not limit the spiritual to only a religious context. (p. 25)

Fairholm and others realize people work harder when they feel that what they do is important.

Intellectuals such as Dantley (2000) feel that reform efforts in education won't succeed until they are linked in educators' minds to a spiritual purpose. Spirituality provides us with a deeper meaning for our actions.

Few things touch our hearts and motivate us like religion. The idea of spirituality as opposed to religion is that spirituality allows us all to speak a common language and work toward a common higher purpose without privileging one religious culture over another. Wilson (1998) urges us to give up our specific religious myths and adopt a spiritual belief common to all humanity. Yet my informants are located squarely in a Christian tradition with a unique history and culture. If a sampling of diverse peoples were to read my informants' stories, some would nod their heads in agreement and others would be utterly offended by some of the ideas expressed. Likewise, my informants would likely be offended by a definition of spirit as being an "inner awareness." They see God as a separate being, different from them. God is to be obeyed. I don't see educators outgrowing specific historic religious beliefs anytime soon. Such beliefs are a key part of how one understands oneself and are not given up easily. I tend to reject any proposal for a universal spiritual understanding because our specific spiritual stories are a source of our diversity and as such are necessary ingredients of a democratic society.

My personal ethical theoretical position can be seen in how I think about the typical situation where a fundamentalist preacher and a lawyer working for the American Civil Liberties Union are having a disagreement over a public prayer to be given. Both have it wrong in a way. The lawyer is wrong trying to choke off a beautiful statement of community and purpose and faith; the fundamentalist is wrong to think society really would be better if everyone shared the fundamentalist's beliefs. It seems like an intractable dilemma to me. Crossan (1991) says the biggest challenge we face in the new millennium is learning how to hold fast to our religious beliefs while at the same time respecting and learning from those who hold other beliefs. I think it's important that in schools there are teachers who share a common faith, who speak a common moral vocabulary and share a common set of moral archetypal stories. Yet at the same time, it is important to work with and learn from people who are products of diverse cultural heritages and belief systems.

I believe it is important to interact with new ideas and see new ways of understanding the world. This might allow one to negotiate the treacherous area between one's faith community and a pluralistic

society.

Conclusion

I found that a group of Christian teachers did seem to find strength to do a very difficult job by being members of a faith community. By feeling that they were part of something larger than themselves, they were able to experience a sense of purpose that allowed them to feel more satisfied with their jobs. Their positive feelings came from the perception that they were doing the will of God. Positive feelings also grew from being able to talk about their teaching experiences in a language, the language of Christian morality, that they had in common with other Christian teachers at that school.

Some people who hold different belief systems feel smothered or even oppressed by the Christian evangelistic impulse. I contend that the Christian values I found are largely positive. Perhaps future studies can continue the process of sorting positive Christian values from ones that are problematic in an educational setting.

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Appendix A Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Study

I, _____ agree to participate in David R. Mackey's study of teachers' religious beliefs.

I understand that I will be interviewed for approximately 30 minutes on the subject of how I think my religious beliefs affect my teaching. I understand that my identity will be confidential and that information I provide may be used in a professional report with the use of pseudonyms. I understand that I am under no obligation to answer any of the questions that are asked of me and may stop or leave this conversation at any point, with no consequences. If I choose to leave, none of my responses will be kept or used.

I have read the following statement of potential risks and benefits from participating in this study: Since I am free to terminate participation in the study at any time, Mr. Mackey can see no real risk being posed by taking part in the study. Since I will receive a summary of Mr. Mackey's research findings, I may benefit by gaining a greater understanding of my teaching.

Informant:

Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher:

Signature _____ Date _____

David R. Mackey

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Consent to Audio Recording

I, _____ (circle one do do not) give my permission to have my conversation with David R. Mackey audio taped. I understand that I can ask Mr. Mackey to stop the tape at any time and he will comply. I understand that the tape itself will only be used by Mr. Mackey to recall the details of our conversation. (Some portions of the tape transcription with pseudonyms may be shared with another researcher.)

Informant:
Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher:
Signature _____ Date _____
David R. Mackey

-----clip and save-----
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Concerns or questions regarding your rights as a human subject may be directed to the Miami University Office for the Advancement of Scholarship and Teaching (513)529-3734.

Appendix B Letter to Gatekeeper

Dear Ms. Jeeves:

This is a request to conduct a research study at Dallas Elementary School. I am David Mackey, a Miami University doctoral student and a fifth grade teacher at Houston for the past 12 years. I would like to interview some teachers in order to better understand how religious belief affects teaching.

I have planned this study carefully so there will be minimal disruption. I will ask some teachers (probably about five) for thirty minutes of their time to conduct an interview. This will not interfere with teaching time. I will not announce widely that I am conducting a study, so most teachers should be unaware that anything is going on.

I will ask permission to tape record the interviews. Once I have transcribed what I need from the tapes, they will be destroyed. I will change the names of teachers whose words appear in my notes and report, so I can guarantee confidentiality to all participants.

This study will be read by my professor. I am thinking about using this study as part of my doctoral dissertation, so the results may be published in a scholarly journal some time in the future. I will give a copy of my final report, which will be completed in December, to the principal and any participating teacher who requests one. I will keep a copy of my transcriptions of the interviews (with pseudonyms used instead of real names), but I do not intend to make these notes available to any other person.

I selected Dallas as the place to conduct my study because I have many friends here who might be willing to talk to me. The purpose of this study is not to impose my religious views on others. I am trying to understand how teachers use their religious beliefs in the course of a school day. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will be asking. In addition, it will be clearly explained to each teacher that they have the right to quit at any time without penalty. I see the risks to participants being minimal since interviewees have the right to leave at any time if they are feeling uncomfortable.

I am excited about this research because I feel there are many teachers who use their spirituality as a source of strength as they go about doing what can be a very difficult job. I would be willing to share my findings with the Dallas staff at a faculty meeting. This would be a general discussion of what motivates us to care about children, not a celebration of any one religion over others.

Please find attached a copy of the consent form I will be using prior to conducting interviews.

Sincerely,

David R. Mackey

Appendix C Scripting of Initial and Final Interviews

1. *Tell me about your church activity these days. What kinds of programming does your church have going? How long have you attended?*

These are questions designed to ascertain the informant's interest in church and duration of involvement.

2. *Tell me what you think about the relationship between your religious belief and what you do in the classroom.*

The relationship between religious belief and teaching should emerge here.

3. *How might one ascertain your religion from watching you teach?*

I'm wondering if informants will tell how they treat children in a caring, compassionate way.

4. *Tell me how you feel after a bad day at work? Probe for how they comfort themselves.*

I would like to know if informants use religion as a source of strength while performing the difficult work of teaching.

5. *What else do you think it would be important for me to know about religion and teaching?*

This question may bring out information that I missed.

I added two questions:

3a. *Do you think teaching is difficult work? If so, how would you describe to someone who had never taught what it is that makes this job difficult?* I wanted to know what it was about teaching that made teachers feel a need for comfort of some sort.

2a. *How would you characterize the specifics of your faith?* I wanted to see if there was a connection between what the teacher's belief was and how they said it affected their teaching.

David Mackey teaches fifth grade in the Northwest Local School District near Cincinnati, Ohio. He is working on a Ph. D. in curriculum at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. His research interests focus on the intersection of power, culture and schooling, and the relationship between faith and knowledge in education. His email address is mackda@nwlsd.org