

Faith-Based Based Educator Support Program

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June 15, 2024

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Assignment 1: Introduction and Problem Statement

- Draft the Introduction and Statement of the Problem sections.
- Introduce the topic, define the scope, and clearly articulate the issue.

Assignment 2: Background and Sociological Theory and Faith-Based Analysis

- **Research and write the Background of the Problem section.**
- **Choose and apply a sociological theory and at least one action research theorist to understanding the problem.**
- **Analyze the problem using NT Wright's "7 universal human longings."**
- **Relate these longings to the problem in a faith-based context.**

Introduction

Objectives and Scope

The objective of this action research is to increase the support for Christian educators in public and secular schools through a faith-based support program to equip, empower, and encourage them to thrive in this distinct profession. The purpose of these programs is to encourage Christian educators to equip, empower, and encourage them for their commission from the Word of God as ambassadors for Christ, through explicit instruction from the Bible. This will also include empowering Christian educators to understand their rights by the US Constitution, more specifically what is and is not allowed, and how they can still utilize and depend on their faith despite policies as believers. The purpose is to retain Christian educators already working in public and secular schools and to encourage others to come into the secular education arena with the understanding that God needs His people to serve in this vast harvest. Church can support public and secular school educators by sponsoring events and programs to support them. Different studies are linking teacher retention and student achievement and have suggestions as to how to retain teachers (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020).

Providing faith-based support for educators, in particular Christian educators, will help with teacher retention. Studies have also shown a link between teachers leaving the profession and decreasing student achievement (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Faith-based support for educators will help the national educator retention problem as more and more educators walk out of the schoolhouse permanently. Churches can support Christian educators in public and secular schools as missionaries in the same light as foreign missions. Pastors and ministers can visit their parishioners and pray with them during their breaks, take them flowers or gifts, or do kind deeds

for their colleagues, like sponsoring a staff lunch. Imagine fellow Christians ministering to their public school missionaries in the same way as for foreign missions, i.e. even providing gift cards. This would also impact others working in the school as they watch Christians coming in and loving Christian colleagues in their school. This would also provide a cover for Christian educators and students so that they don't feel so alone and not backed by anyone.

Statement of the Problem (1-2 pages)

Most Christian educators working in public schools lack the skills necessary to teach in the light of the Kingdom and are unprepared for the challenges they face. Because most Christian educators are not trained on how to use their biblical influence, they are unaware of the impact that implementing biblical principles and reflecting God's character in their work may have on the Kingdom (Marker, 2020). Christians working in the public school system are often overwhelmed with the anti-Christian beliefs that are a part of the curriculum and culture. Most Christians in public schools are uninformed of their constitutionally protected rights to practice their religion. In addition, a lot of Christians feel alone in their schools and are unprepared for the hostile environment in public education, often feeling ostracized and abandoned (Marker, 2020).

Everything Christians believe about biblical truth and Jesus Christ being the only way to salvation puts us in direct conflict with some of the curriculum and policies in the public school system. Educators face a dilemma in teaching about the Bible. The knowledge of the Bible is important for cultural literacy, but the different views and legal considerations have made it controversial. Since the mid-twentieth century, the Supreme Court interpreted The First Amendment to forbid public schools and other government agencies from promoting religious

viewpoints to establish a state religion and from forbidding the free exercise of religion (Chancey, 2020). Religious and moral freedom is jeopardized by the policies and laws that are being created. In the education realm, Christians are being coerced to comply with policies contrary to their beliefs. People are scared of losing their jobs and being forced into silence. Educators of all faiths, in particular Christians, are being forced to comply with teaching and uplifting state ideologies and religions. Some non-Christian religions are deemed acceptable and are celebrated and practiced in schools throughout the United States. This study centers around public school and secular educators, which include teachers, principals, professors, administrators, and other roles in the field of education.

The constant assaults and legislative attacks on the teaching profession have caused many experienced teachers to abandon their classrooms, creating a teacher shortage. Colleges and universities have seen a sharp drop in applications to teacher preparation institutions. Several political leaders contribute to decreased enrollment by blaming public school teachers as they tried to gain support to privatize education. “How can a nation educate its young without well-qualified, experienced teachers?” (Ravitch, D., 2020, p. 4).

Political polarization is posing new problems for the American democratic system. Despite the alleged separation of church and state, religion continues to play a significant role in American politics, particularly in the Republican Party. Even though the proportion of Americans identifying as Christians is declining, Christian value systems still influence many political decisions (Treon, 2021). Outside of politics, few churches or Christian affiliations are involved in negotiating and sitting on school district communities where policies are made as representatives of the Christian community. For this reason, it is imperative that Christian educators are

supported through faith-based support groups and program, such as the one that I am embarking on in my action research project.

Background of the Problem

A Brief History of American Public Schools

To instill civic values in the culturally diverse migrants coming from Europe during the "Age of Mass Migration" between 1850 and 1914, states used compulsory schooling laws as a nation-building instrument. States that welcomed European immigrants with less exposure to civic norms at home adopted laws requiring attendance at school far earlier. We demonstrate that these immigrants had a considerably lower demand for American schooling before compulsion using cross-county data (Bandiera et al., 2019). To significant financial investments in education and high levels of volunteer attendance, Americans had the highest level of education in the world by the middle of the nineteenth century. From 1830 to 1890, rates for pupils aged 5 to 15 were high in the United States and other developed countries. Starting in 1850, the United States enrollment rates were above fifty percent and began to increase, and diverge from other developed nations. States in the US started enacting legislation requiring students to attend school at the same hour. However, these laws did not apply to all children. Black and other marginalized children were still effectively kept out of schools even after compulsory attendance (2019).

By the early 1930s, a small group of humanists made it their mission to eradicate the Christian influences in America's public schools and replace them with a new religion—humanism. Additionally, humanistic tenets like the Humanist Manifesto I, II, and III are now evident in many areas of public education, including instructional content, policies, and culture.

More humanistic headway was gained when nonprofit organizations made it their mission to cleanse public schools of Christian influences as a means of upholding the First Amendment (e.g., American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], Americans United [AU] for Separation of Church and State, and Freedom From Religion Foundation [FFRF]) (Marker, 2020, p. 2-3).

Apart from humanism, other religions are being introduced and celebrated to annihilate the Christian influence in the nation's schools. Until the late twentieth century, many Christians viewed yoga and meditation as Hindu and Buddhist practices that were ungodly. As these practices entered the United States, Asian and European promoters downplayed the religious background affiliated with Hinduism, Buddhism, and even the New Age movement. Instead, the promoters used science to gain public acceptance by highlighting the mental and physical benefits of reducing stress. The promoters strategically used tactics to move yoga and meditation more systematically into institutions and schools by secularizing them and downplaying them as Hindu and Buddhist practices (Brown, 2019). Brown's work discusses how Christianity, by certain measures, is losing its dominance in America, and more people are sympathizing with other religions. Many people are simply referring to themselves as spiritual. People from all persuasions are bringing these mindsets into our schools. The perceived problems in our schools have opened the door for yoga and mindfulness to come in as acceptable practices. Brown's work explains that while eradicating Christianity remains incomplete, other varieties of religious practices are being established, and public schools are crucibles to this change (Brown, 2019). Yoga, meditation, healing, and alternative medicine are a few examples of practices that emphasize the body to encourage self-knowledge, self-mastery, and self-healing. This study includes a section that tracks the global adoption of body-based therapy methods. The study

demonstrates how these behaviors moved from primarily religious settings into secular ones. (Pegis, 2020).

This plurality of truth is encouraged and respected; whereas, believing in an absolute supreme being and salvation for all of mankind through Jesus Christ is not. In another article, Mary Boys discusses the importance of Christians forming friendships with people from other religions. Boys believe that since the United States is no longer a Christian nation, but rather, a religiously plural nation, it is important for Christians to have relationships with people from other faiths so they can see that their faith is not the only truth. Boys' article gives recommendations for re-educating Christians after asking, "What, then, might we do to educate Christians in such a way that the religious "stranger" becomes "neighbour"?" (Boys, 2022, p. 188). According to Boyz, people should embrace religious pluralism, recognize the limitations of having only one religious theory, and go beyond the particular of their religious tradition. The author thinks that instead of clinging to absolute truths, individuals should embrace religious diversity. The author says that because God loves others and communicates with them through many religions, individuals have a competitive impulse that leads them to believe that this undermines their relationship with God. "Acknowledging the finitude of one's tradition requires a degree of maturity" (2022).

I believe that God has called me and many other Christ-followers into the public and secular schools, colleges, and universities for such a time as this. We may not win the overall war, but we can surely win the battle and make a difference by snatching both fellow educators and students straight from the enemy's grip. To defeat the enemy, you must first understand what it is you are fighting against, and when you go to war, you need to have an army. God has His

warriors already in position. God just needs us to be equipped for the battle and allow His Holy Spirit to do work in the minds and hearts of those He has set before us. The Bible tells us three things in John 1:1-4, first, that Jesus made us all, second, that nothing happens apart from Him, and third, that Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness (NASB, 2020).

Analysis through Sociological Theory

Diagnosis: Understanding the Conflict Between Christian and Secular Principles and Worldview

In analyzing the complexity of working in a system that is disrespecting and infringing on its employees' and stakeholders' core beliefs, the sociological theory that may bring the best diagnosis is the Conflict Theory. According to CEO Jeff Bezos, "Harmony is overrated" (Contu, 2019). Rather, Amazonians are trained to be adamantly disagreeable and dedicated, to sharply criticize the opinions of their peers before uniting around a conclusion. Managers learn "to diplomatically throw people under the bus as part of normal managerial prerogative" during the yearly "rank and yank" exercise (2019). Contu further connotes that the interactionist perspective suggests that there can be too little or too much conflict, and there needs to be the right amount. Some types of conflict are necessary for organizational success (2019).

Schools are under attack as cultural wars rage on from religious perspectives being included in the curriculum to contributions of people of color. In question is will we tell a true and accurate story of American history, or will we simply paint the picture of the powerful? James Davidson Hunter believed the cultural wars were not most sharply divided on race, class, or political party, but rather by competing systems of moral understanding (Zimmerman, 2022). The culture wars in schools are direct. The constant assaults and legislative attacks on the

teaching profession have caused many experienced teachers to abandon their classrooms, thus, creating a teacher shortage. Colleges and universities have seen a sharp drop in the number of applications to teacher preparation institutions. Several political leaders blamed public school teachers as they tried to gain support to privatize education. This has contributed greatly to decreasing students entering into education programs to be a teacher. “How can a nation educate its young without well-qualified, experienced teachers?” (Ravitch, p. 4).

Today in public and secular education, the distinction between those who are followers of Jesus and those who are upholding practices contrary to those beliefs is unclear due to coercion to comply and fear of retributions. This pressure leads to early retirements and resignations. More respect is given to non-Christians. For example, when women who are Muslim, wear hijabs, niqab, or burqa, they are making a clear distinction of their beliefs through this practice which is in direct conflict with Western culture. Yet, we see the Muslim community making strides in Western culture through effective strategies. It is not that these Muslims have embraced Western Christian orthodoxy, but rather have learned how to negotiate and gain influence by sitting on school boards, school district committees, and other policy-making structures. As a result, in school districts across America, Islamic holidays are now on school calendars, and Islamic showcases are uplifted in school cases or on school bulletin boards. Muslims are also effectively working within the American system and American laws to openly protest becoming moral leaders in a country once dominated by Christian beliefs. In Montgomery County, Maryland, Muslim parents led the protest against the LGBT curriculum (Arnold, 2023). While the Christian influence is still prevalent worldwide, local school districts answer to the State and not the federal government. For this reason, it is easier to get around federal laws. For example,

promoting and blatantly uplifting non-Christian religions is in direct violation of The Establishment Clause (amend. 1)

As believers and practitioners in education and all other sectors, we must come together on one accord (John 17). The Bible warns believers in 2 Timothy 2:3-5, “(3) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (4) No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier” (NASB, 2020). In other words, to please the Lord, it is important to understand the conflict. To strategically work to have more influence with colleagues and students and to effectively minister in the midst of it.

Christians need to clearly understand Christian morality vs. secular morality and the Christian worldview and stance according to the Bible. Not having biblical knowledge as a believer lends itself to confusion and hopelessness. In the nineteenth century, Nietzsche wrote that “Nihilism stood at the door” (Scimecca, 2023). Nietzsche defined nihilism as there is no such thing as truth. Nietzsche further explains that there is no answer to the question of “why” beyond one’s self-interest. Nietzsche connotes that the door has an opening, and nihilism has its foot in the doorway. Should nihilism enter the house and become accepted, it brings with it nihilism’s main tenet, meaningless, because meaninglessness is all nihilism has to offer (2023). Christian or otherwise, the gravest threat to a society lies in an attack on its moral center which makes the society legitimate to its citizens. Without a moral core, we are at the mercy of those in power. “This is the insight of the great classical sociologists, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber, who were most responsible for the institutionalization of sociology in academia” (2023).

Intervention: Thriving In The Conflict Through Symbolic Interactionism:

The interactionist view does not suppose that all conflicts are bad. Organizations can benefit from some conflict that may improve performance and also support the goals of organizations. This type of functional conflict can enhance the performance of a group by encouraging healthy competition within groups resulting in better performance of work and higher productivity. One of the main advantages of this type of conflict is that it enables its members to identify the problems and see opportunities. Functional conflict can also increase learning, and growth and inspire the creation of new ideas. Thus, it is pertinent to understand that a functional conflict can support the goals of the organization improve performance, and bring about innovation (Mills & Mene, 2020).

Dysfunctional or destructive conflicts can do just the opposite and are capable of destroying the goals of an organization. Using the Conflict Theory to provide interventions may put employees at odds with organizational goals and objectives; thus, making the performance of a group, individuals, or parties destructive or dysfunctional. For Christians trying to thrive in the workplace, causing conflict may interfere with ideas exchanged and even ruin relationships. Dysfunctional conflict does not allow organizational goals to be achieved and leads to underutilization of resources and reduced productivity. “This conflict type is reflected in situations such as (a) when individuals who are competing allow their interests to override the goals of the business, (b) when managers withhold information from one another (c) employees sabotaging others’ work, either intentionally or subtly” (Mills & Mene, 2020).

How are Christians to respond to the blatant and distinct anti-Christian policies? I believe that the answer is in the scriptures. “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge

the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17). Jesus modeled for us how to interact with the world and live a purpose-driven life. The Word teaches us that, “(26) When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, He will testify about Me, (27) and you are testifying as well because you have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27). The Holy Spirit will guide us.

The purpose of my action research is to equip, empower, and encourage Christian educators. I will use the Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Symbolic interactionism and systems theory align well with Christian approaches to sociological intervention. William Swatos' "Clinical Pastoral Sociology" is a seminal collection of essays that pioneered the convergence of clinical sociology and pastoral care. It emphasizes the web of social interaction and religion as a system of interaction (Reichard, 2024, p. 374). The main origins of Symbolic Interactionism trace its origins to the works of G. H. Mead (especially, 1934). Mead's ideas have been expounded by several sociologists throughout the years. H. Blumer, one of his best-known students, advanced interactionism through his teaching and writings. Blumer interpreted symbolic interactionism with three basic premises. First, human beings act towards things based on the meanings that the things have for them. Secondly, these meanings are a product of social interaction in human society. Thirdly, these meanings are modified and handled through an interpretive process that is used by each individual in dealing with the signs he/she encounters (Meltzer, et al., 2020, p. 1). The historical underpinnings of these three premises are found not only in the works of Mead, but also in C. H. Cooley's theory of society, J. Dewey's formulation of the concept of habit, and W. I. Thomas' notion of 'the definition of the situation' (2020). In this

action research project, I will use Blumer's three basic premises for the symbolic interactionism theory.

Through a combination of analysis and intervention, clinical sociologists engage with systems to evaluate circumstances and prevent, lessen, or eliminate problems. In addition to being mediators, organizational consultants, community consultants, teachers, trainers, and group facilitators, clinical sociologists can also be sociotherapists. Clinical sociology, to put it simply, is a sociological intervention. It is the process of analyzing and creating interventions for constructive social change via the lens of sociology (Reichard, 2024).

N.T. Wright's Universal Longing - Truth

For my action research project, I will establish a faith-based support group to equip, empower, and encourage Christian educators, who are God's missionaries in our public and secular schools. I will center the program for these educators around Pollack's six psychological needs, which are safety, affiliation or care, positive self-regard or identity, interdependence or autonomy, engaging activities or stimulation, and engaging activities or stimulation. At the center of the entire project, I will focus on N.T. Wright's Universal Longing, truth.

According to Simon Blackburn, truth can be subjective. "Sometimes, perhaps more often than we think, truth hides, and we have to put up with simplifications, models, idealizations, analogies, metaphors, and even myths and fictions. These may be useful, but we think of them as only at best paving the way to the altar of truth. Sometimes we have to settle for mere opinion or guesswork, but the god of truth is better served by attendant deities, such as reason, justification, and objectivity. Once we have it, truth radiates benefits such as knowledge and, perhaps most notably, success in coping with the world" (Blackburn, 2018, p. 15). In addition to truth having a

broad and interpretive meaning is the belief in no type of deity at all. Richard Dawkins' represents many who have as their primary purpose in life to convert people from being a theist to an atheist believing that religion has caused violence and different types of oppression (Kristiatmo, 2022).

Syncretism is one of the most effective tools being used in modern culture to sway Christians away from the Bible as the absolute authority. Scholars are even endorsing it as a mature and positive way to promote harmony and understanding (Boys, 2022; Frankfurter, 2021). Culture wars that are playing out daily in our public and secular schools, and other religions are gaining the same acceptance as Christianity (Ravitch, 2020; Zimmerman, 2022). Non-Christians and Christians alike are embracing spiritual plurality. At the center of the training for Christian educators will be the unadulterated truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ based on the Bible as the absolute truth (NASB, 2020).

Of truth, the Bible teaches that there are absolute truths. In teaching about life beyond our life here on earth, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies (John 11:25). Again, in answering a question about life after death, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The Bible does not waiver on the truth about the origins of the earth or mankind, "(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God. (3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being. (4) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind" (John 1:1-4; Genesis 1-3). The Bible is also clear on monotheism (Exodus 20:3; Revelation 1:8).

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