

Faith Based Educator Support Program

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Assignment # 3: Ethical Considerations and Intervention Design

- Develop a detailed plan for the intervention.
- Link the intervention to sociological and faith-based analyses.
- Discuss and address potential ethical issues related to the intervention.

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. This support program will help Christians educators to understand their right in accordance with the US Constitution, more specifically what is and is not allowed, and how they can still utilize and depend on their faith in spite of policies as believers. A central theme will be, as Christian educators live for Christ in public school, the goal is to empower, equip and encourage Christian educators.

Providing faith-based support for educators, particularly Christians, will help retain teachers, which in turn will help students. There is a link between teachers leaving the profession and decreasing student achievement (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Providing faith-based education for educators will help stop them from walking 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, and 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 foreigners 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. These gestures from the church would provide a covering for Christian educators and students so that they don't feel so alone and abandoned by the church.

Statement of the Problem (1-2 pages)

America is at a crossroads. There is a substantial culture war happening in our country, and our public and secular schools are a major battleground. “While there is no standard for how much polarization is “enough” to label the public polarized, at a minimum, we can say that a substantial minority of the population holds polarized attitudes on transgender rights and religious liberty” (Castle, 2019). Christian educators working in public schools typically do not have training in faith-learning integration to work within a secular educational system with policies contrary to their beliefs, and most 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 a hostile environment or policies in direct contradiction to their faith. Christian educators often feel ostracized and abandoned (2020). By supporting Christian teachers, it can have a profound impact in supporting Christian students to make sure their religious freedoms and beliefs are not discriminated against. It is important that educators show respect to all students, regardless of their faith, to avoid any student feeling marginalized, isolated and discriminated against by other staff or peers (Mackie, 2017, p. 80).

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 with 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 being celebrated and practiced in schools throughout the United States (Brown, 2019). This action research study centers around Christian public school and secular educators, which include teachers, principals, professors, administrators and other roles in the field of education.

Many experienced educators, including Christians, have left the profession due to the constant assaults and legislative attacks on the teaching profession, thus creating a teacher shortage. Colleges and universities have seen a sharp drop in the number of applications to teacher preparation institutions (Ravitch, 2020, p. 4). Several political leaders blamed public school teachers as they tried to gain support to privatize education. This has contributed greatly to decreasing the number of students entering into education programs to be a teacher. “How can a nation educate its young without well-qualified, experienced teachers?” (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 that the church is educated on how to come alongside Christian educators in public schools in carrying out the Great Commission.

Background of the Problem

A Brief History of American Public Schools

In order 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 prior to 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. American states 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, most children were receiving some schooling, but 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. Today, there is an increasing trend to classify oneself 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 put an emphasis on 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 humankind through Jesus Christ is not. In another article, Mary Boyz 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 own 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 are effective 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 mind 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

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 to organizational success (2019).

Schools are under attack as cultural wars rage on from religious perspectives, curriculum, even to contributions of people of color. In question is will we tell a true and accurate story of America 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-worldview (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 the number of students entering into education programs to become teachers. “How can a nation educate its young without well-qualified, experienced teachers?” (Ravitch, p. 4).

Today in public and secular education, 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, through wearing 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 districts committees and other policy making structures. As a result, in many school districts across America, Islamic holidays are now on school calendars, and Islamic showcases uplifted in school cases or on school bulletin boards. Muslim 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 parent’s led the protest against the LGBT curriculum (Arnold, T., 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, it is imperative that we 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 the 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 being no such thing as truth. Nietzsche further explains that there is no answer to the question of “why” beyond one’s own 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—that 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).

Faith-Based Analysis

How are Christians to respond to the blatant and distinct anti-Christian policies? I believe that 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, “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.” The Holy Spirit will guide us.

The strength of Christian educators coming together to build a community is where equipping, empowering and encouraging educators is going to be maximized as they work in secular schools and universities. We can learn from the alliances for the advancement in struggles for equality. In recent decades, if we were to analyze the struggles for justice and equality, the importance of alliances in struggles for justice has led to some victories opposed to total annihilation. Scholars refer to this as the ‘justice cascade’, bringing about justice via prosecutions (Sikkink, 201; Trimikliniotis, 2020). Jesus tells us in John 17 that we as believers are to come together as one blood, and that the world will get a glimpse of the Kingdom by the love that we show one another (NASB, 2020).

Sociological Theory

I will use the Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Symbolic interactionism and systems theory align well with Christian approaches to sociological intervention. The principal origins of Symbolic Interactionism trace its origins to the works of G. H. Mead (especially, 1934). H. Blumer was one of Mead’s best-known students, advanced interactionism through his teaching and writing. Blumer interpreted 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, individuals modified these meanings through an interpretive process used in dealing with the signs they encounter (Meltzer, et al., 2020, p. 1).

Blumer's Three Symbolic Interactionism Premises

As I develop a faith-based support group, understanding Herbert Blumer's three premises can be helpful. First, Christian educators equip themselves as they study the Word of God (John 5:39), which will help them to gain meaning from a Christian and not secular worldview. Secondly, Christian educators empower each other through assembling together to build community to strengthen one another as they follow Christ (Hebrews 10:25). Thirdly, Christian educators encourage each other as they share their individual experiences and interpretations of those experiences. I would like to expand on these three premises with Jeremy Pollack's Six Core Psychological Needs.

N.T. Wright's Universal Longing

Truth

At the center of the entire project, I will focus on N.T. Wright's Universal Longing, truth. With the diversity of religions in our country, truth is relative different beliefs. According to Simon Blackburn truth can be subjective. "Sometimes, more often than we think, truth hides itself, and we have to put up with simplifications, models, idealisations, 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 must 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, 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 several 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. Non-Christians and Christians alike are embracing spiritual plurality. Jesus answered the question of truth. "In answering a question about death, 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).

Pollack Six Psychological Needs

I will center the program for these educators around Pollack's six psychological needs, which are safety, affiliation, positive self-regard, interdependence, engaging activities, and engaging activities (Pollack, 2020, p. 7; Pollack, 2017). Pollack discusses the importance of establishing trust in relationships and in understanding six core psychological needs of all human beings. Understanding these core needs at the foundations of our relationships helps us to maintain and problem solve in both personal and professional relationships. The six core psychological needs are safety, affiliation, positive self-regard, independence, engaging activities and noble pursuits (2020; 2017). Safety involves the belief that one is psychologically and physically safe now and in the future. Affiliation is feeling a part of the family, community or

organization. Positive self-regard is one's identity and how they are feeling. Independence is the extent to which one feels they have autonomy to make their own decisions. Engaging activities that have one feeling stimulated or amused. Lastly, noble pursuits which is the extent that one is learning, growing or making progress towards their endeavors (2020; 2017). The rapid decline in college applications into education programs and the increase in the number of people leaving education is evident that there is a problem (Ravitch, 2020). Faith-based support groups for Christian educators need to address Pollack's basic core psychological needs if we are to reverse the trend.

Intervention Challenges

Thriving In The Conflict Through Symbolic Interactionism:

While students choose to attend colleges and universities, K-12 education is mandatory and public schools belong to everyone in the community. Coming to a consensus will take all stakeholders to understand what is and what is not permissible under the First Amendment (Haynes, 2012). The greatest challenge is that Christian beliefs are in direct conflict with the school systems policies and curriculum. This conflict of core values and belief systems propels the need for support for Christian educators. Even with their support the conflict is still present. These are fundamental core beliefs that are in direct conflict, and Christians sometimes targeted for having different values.

The interactionist view does not suppose that all conflicts are bad. Organizations can benefit from conflict that may improve performance and 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 their members to identify the

problems and see opportunities. Functional conflict can also increase learning, growth and inspire the creation of innovative ideas. Thus, it is pertinent to understand that a functional conflict can support the goals of the organization and 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. “This conflict type is reflected in situations such as (a) when individuals who are competing allows 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). 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, leads to underutilization of resources and reduced productivity. Therefore, it is important for Christian educators to allow the Holy Spirit to lead them to carry out their assignments as peacemakers (Romans 12:18).

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 principle origins of Symbolic Interactionism trace its origins to the works of G. H. Mead (especially, 1934). H. Blumer, one of his best-known

students, advanced interactionism through his teaching and writings. Blumer interpreted interactionism with three basic premises. First, human beings act towards things on the basis of 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).

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 sociological intervention. It is the process of analyzing and creating interventions for constructive social change via the lens of sociology (Reichard, 2024).

Communication To Carry Out Plan

Through whole group, small group and individual virtual and in-person meetings, texts and telephone calls and through communication with leaders that I am developing, I will monitor the six core psychological needs of the participants.

Resources

All participants will need time to attend virtual and in-person meetings, laptops, Bibles, notebooks or pads for notes.

Overall Intervention

Through a Christian Educator faith-based support group ministry, I will begin the 2024-2025 school year with an in-person Fall Kickoff Breakfast with a specific purpose of equipping, empowering and encouraging educators. The Fall Kickoff will be followed up with weekly meetings for six weeks. This faith-based support will involve prayer, scripture reading, fellowship, prayer partners, and a group chat to encourage and uplift one another.

Overall Sociological & Psychological Framework

Through the faith-based support group, I plan to empower, equip and encourage educators. The sociological framework I have chosen is Herbert Blumer's three main premises of symbolic interactionism sociological theory, and Jeremy Pollack's Six Core Psychological Needs to meet the spiritual and socio-emotional needs of the educators in the support group building a sense of belonging and community and to determine the program's effectiveness.

Integrated Frameworks

Premise 1: Equipped Through Gaining Meaning From God's Word

Blumer's first premise asserts that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. With Blumer's first premise, Christian educators can be equipped by studying and gaining meaning from the Word of God. This will transform their thinking from a secular worldview to a Christian worldview. Educators not versed in scripture are prey to post-modern values. One author, David Frankfurter, asserts that syncretism seems to propose two (or more) discrete religious systems, like Christianity and Heathenism, or Judaism and Hellenism, or Persia and Greece. Frankfurter asserts, "This is problematic because none of these systems or traditions was ever discrete and pure. Syncretism thus relies on a romantic fantasy of the pure culture: apostolic Christianity, biblical or rabbinic Judaism, Pharaonic Egypt"

(Frankfurter, D., 2021). Boys asserted that it is even immature to think that one's faith is the only truth (Boys, 2022). The Bible warns Christians about syncretism in Deuteronomy 4:2 and Revelation 22:18-19 (NASB, 2020). The Bible upholds the scriptures as the ultimate truth.

Through studying God's Word and understanding that being a Christ-follower starts with repentance and accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. In order for this transformation to occur in a person's life they must first have a clear understanding of the Gospel message through God's word. Once this occurs, they are a part of the body of Christ, and the scripture teaches believers to fellowship and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Once Christian educators collectively study of God's Word to gain wisdom and allow the Holy Spirit to use that Word in their lives within their careers, it will meet all six of Pollack's basic needs; affiliation (belonging), safety, engaging activities or stimulation, and noble pursuits or growth as an individual matures both intellectually and spiritually. Studying the Word of God will also help meet the need for a positive self-regard of one's identity. The Bible teaches that we are a part of the body of Christ and should study to become autonomous and mature believers (2 Timothy 2:15; Romans 12). The Bible teaches in Genesis that we are all made in the image of God (NASB, 2020). Studying the Bible in community with other Christian educators builds interdependence through God's Word and prayer and will strengthen believers to exercise autonomy in their schools. Studying God's Word will also help maintain a biblical outlook for what educators are experiencing, and it will also deepen their faith in trusting God's purpose and protection over their lives.

Premise 2: Empowered Through Belonging To A Faith-Based Community

Secondly, Christian educators can be empowered by coming together to build community to strengthen one another as they follow Christ. In explaining symbolic interactionism, Blumer

states that humans interpret meanings to what is happening around them through social interactions (Meltzer, et al., 2020, p. 1). This makes it critical to be mindful of our surroundings. Our surroundings and environment may be predetermined for us depending on our birthplace or circumstance. Within the Christian community, the Bible tells us how to manage our surroundings regardless of our birthplace or circumstances by seeking out and fellowshiping with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). Building community through the fellowship of like-minded believers will meet all six of Pollack's basic needs. In his book, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Block connotes, "The need to create a structure of belonging grows out of the isolated nature of our lives, our institutions, and our communities. The absence of belonging is so widespread that we might say we are living in an age of isolation, imitating the lament from early in the last century, when life was referred to as the age of anxiety" (2018, p. 1). All humans long to belong and the feeling of isolation deteriorates when you find a group that accepts you for being you. Having a faith-based Christian educators support group centered around shared biblical support and principles brings meaning to their shared experiences. It also provides a safe space to share, engage in activities together, grow as a believer and grow as a Christian; thus, building community and belonging.

Chiareli asserts that Christian sociologist is in a unique position to discern God's truth from every mainstream perspective and to create a fresh meta-narrative and analytical framework for interpreting social phenomena, solving social issues, and comprehending, communicating, and realizing God's truth about social reality (Chiareli, 2019). This same idea can be true for Christian educators. This type of thinking will help them to feel more empowered within the Christian community as they work and minister in an environment contrary to their core values. Chiareli further states that Christian sociology can advance toward the prophetic and liberating

goal of interacting with the discipline and its students in a biblical and transformative manner, aiming to be salt and light through the integration of this discipline and our Christian faith (2019). Building a community with Christian educators with the sole purpose of equipping, empowering and encouraging them for ministry in public and secular schools will create transformation aiming to be salt and a light through what faith-learning integration can look like into their workplace.

Premise 3: Encouraged From Shared Interpretations

Thirdly, Christian educator meanings can constructively be modified and managed through an interpretive process as each individual encourages others as they share. Having a space that allows for shared testimonies will help educators bond over shared meanings and interpretations. Sharing and finding support helped with solidarity and healing. (Suzanne & Reiss, 2023). From a faith-based perspective, it allows participants to seek guidance from scripture and depend on God for help. In John 15:5, Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (NASB, 2020).

This time of sharing and vulnerability will be especially helpful in meeting the participant’s psychological needs. Through providing a safe space for participants to share how they are interpreting their experiences, and in sharing where they need prayer, it allows for vulnerability and empathy. “Lifesaving medicines and psychological interventions are important parts of rescue and recovery; however, they are not enough. Religion and religious participation can address the many issues that lead people to alcohol and/or drug dependency that medical interventions alone can fail to address (Grim & Grim, 2019). There is no denying the importance of people needing their faith to help them through life. As participants experience God working

in their lives and being able to share praise reports of how God has helped them will be a great encouragement. Participants become more confident in the authenticity of their shared experiences which will solidify a sense of belonging.

Purpose

The purpose of this intervention is to establish a faith-based support group for Christian educators to equip, empower and encourage them in working in public and secular schools.

Objective

The objectives are for Christian educators to feel supported using six psychological areas: safety, affiliation, positive self-regard, interdependence, engaging activities, and noble pursuits (Pollack, 2020, p. 7; Pollack, 2017)..

Sociological Theory

I will use the Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Symbolic interactionism and systems theory align well with Christian approaches to sociological intervention. The principle origins of Symbolic Interactionism trace its origins to the works of G. H. Mead (especially, 1934). Mead's ideas have been expanded by several sociologists throughout the years. H. Blumer, one of his best known students, advanced interactionism through his teaching and writings. Blumer interpreted interactionism with three basic premises. First, human beings act towards things on the basis of 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).

Faith-Based Considerations

Truth

At the center of the entire project, I will focus on N.T. Wright's Universal Longing, truth. With the diversity of religions in our country, truth is relative to many different beliefs, but for the Christ-follower, truth is absolute (John 14:6).

To meet the needs of Christian educators in the support group, I will center the program around Pollack's six psychological needs, which are safety, affiliation, positive self-regard, interdependence, engaging activities, and engaging activities.

Target Group or Issue

Christian Educators serving in public and secular schools, colleges and universities.

Plan Strategy

The intervention will be conducted beginning with an in-person kickoff followed up with four to six virtual weekly meetings. Participants during this time will interact through whole groups, small group and individual virtual and in-person meetings, texts, and telephone calls and through communication with leaders that I am developing, I will monitor using the six core psychological needs of the participants.

Resources

All participants will need time to attend in-person meetings with Bibles, and virtual meetings with laptops, Bibles, notebooks or pads for notes.

Six-Week Timeline

The timeframe for this intervention will occur over six weeks beginning with an in-person kickoff event on Saturday, September 30 and followed up with virtual meetings on

Mondays at 7:00 p.m. on October 2, 9, 16, 23, 30. The Bible teachings and discussions in these will center around the Book of Daniel.

Ethical Considerations

Educators are employees who must work within the institutions that hire them despite the contradictions in moral values. In this section, I will explore what that means. This is the greatest challenge. We also servants of God called to the great commission to bring others to Christ (Math 28:18-20). It will be important to know how to do that within in alignment with school policies and the First Amendment. As I explore ethical considerations, the Word of God does give us some guidance in Galatians as the Word teaches us about the fruits of the Holy Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23).

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