

# ***THE IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS OF FAITH OR WORLDVIEW IN THE CLASSROOM***

## ***The Priority and Importance of Character***

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In their quest for universally applicable methods, modern teacher educators have often downplayed teacher identity, including a teacher's worldview or faith. From a postmodern perspective, however, the connections between teachers' identities and practices are being recognized and explored more as the two elements are increasingly being seen as interdependent and virtually inseparable. To explore how students understand this connection, the authors surveyed 58 teacher education students at a Christian university to discover the connections they foresaw between their teaching practices and their faith or worldview. The authors found that while most students did not perceive their faith or worldview directly informing their pedagogical methods or curriculum, the majority of them did foresee indirect ways of integrating their faith or worldview in the classroom. The major way students saw the two connecting involved the teaching of moral virtue. The authors make suggestions as to how teacher educators can develop these connections by educating students about constitutionally appropriate ways to integrate the study of religion and character education in public schools.

In the quest to find effective and objective educational methods applicable to all, modern teacher education usually ignored or downplayed matters of identity. Public school teachers, in this modern view, should teach only facts, common information, and general critical thinking along with basic skills such as reading and writing, without allowing their own identity or the stories and worldviews connected to that identity interfere with these tasks. A teacher who is a Latino, a Pentecostal, a woman, a Democrat, a member of a

two-parent family with five siblings, or a product of life in the American southwest should not allow such factors to influence how she educates children. Instead, she should teach in the same way she would conduct a controlled scientific experiment. This modern perspective on the proper role of teachers is aptly summarized by Barry Kanpol (1998b), "[T]eacher education has been historically caught up in methodological practices that distance the prospective teacher from the self" (p. 57).

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In our postmodern age, which recognizes and explores the connections between one's identity and one's teaching, some scholars are beginning to recognize the impossibility as well as the undesirability of such a scenario. We cannot expect public school teachers to divorce their identity from their teaching. Neither teachers nor students are objects within a scientific experiment. Moreover, asking public school teachers to distance themselves from their various social identities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, race, faith, etc.) may lead to students to feel alienation and the loss of moral guidance and bearings (Hunter, 2000; Kanpol, 1998; MacIntyre, 1984; Nash, 1999; Purple & McLaurin, 2004; Taylor, 1989; Tirri, 2003). In fact, James Davison Hunter (2000) argues that attempts to separate teachers and students from their particular identities and the cultures associated with them actually leads to the impoverishment and even death of character. It is the particular moral content of distinctive worldviews, Hunter argues, that gives them vitality, focus, and force in the lives of those who adhere to those worldviews. Kirsi Tirri agrees and argues, "Teachers cannot separate their own moral character and the professional self from each other" (Tirri, 2003, p. 67)

Yet, despite these arguments, many teacher educators and administrators are likely to remain unsure or concerned about future teachers bringing one particular aspect of their identity—their faith or worldview—into the public school classroom. After all, the U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment as prohibiting endorsement of a particular religion or of nonreligion (Greenawalt, 2005; Haynes & Nord, 1998; Haynes & Thomas, 2001; Nord, 1995; Sears, 1998). As a result, it is widely recognized that the public school classroom may not become a teacher's personal forum for espousing religious beliefs or worldviews. Even if, in a given community, the teacher's religious beliefs were a matter of consensus rather than controversy, the court rulings clearly prohibit inculcating religion (for a clear outline of the boundaries set by Supreme Court

rulings see Haynes & Thomas, 2001). Still, it is not at all apparent the degree to which participation in the public life of a liberal democracy requires that we surrender our deepest beliefs and our identities associated with those beliefs when we enter the public world (Audi & Wolterstorff, 1997; Rawls, 1996; Stout, 2004).

In such a situation, how do future teachers anticipate finding ways of bringing one of the deepest parts of their identity, their faith or worldview, into their educational practices? Do they understand themselves as being required to separate their faith or worldview completely from their teaching or do they perceive constitutionally permissible connections with this intimate part of themselves? Are the connections they might make legal according to current Supreme Court precedent that allows for academic study of religion but not the inculcation of particular religious viewpoints (Haynes & Nord, 1998)?

### ***OUR RESEARCH INQUIRY***

In this article, we examine a sample of future educators' views about how they anticipate their own faiths or worldviews influencing their teaching. While previous studies about the importance of religion focus on the curriculum (Haynes & Nord, 1998; Nord, 1995; Sears, 1998), this study focuses on the possible influence of teachers themselves. We sought to discover the degree to which a sample of teacher education students at a Christian university foresaw their faith or worldview influencing matters such as their philosophy of education, choice of curriculum, teaching methodology, and discipline style.

As this research will demonstrate, we found that most students foresaw integrating their faith or worldview into the classroom in indirect ways that would not only pass constitutional muster but still allow them to preserve a connection between the religious aspect of their identity and their work as a teacher. The indirect influence was primarily understood as

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Au: Kanpol  
1998 a or b?

coming through the teacher modeling, teaching, or practicing particular moral virtues or character qualities such as justice, compassion, or honesty. For the most part, contrary to what we expected, the majority of students did not perceive their worldview informing the substance of the curriculum or particular pedagogical methods.

We believe this type of study will need to be expanded to other campuses and samples before broad generalizations can be made. Nonetheless, our findings may point to the important role of character education as a way for public school educators who have religious convictions to legitimately bring those convictions to bear on how they teach. Educators who have religious beliefs—in the importance of human dignity and justice, for example—understand that they may model and promote such ethical virtues without imposing a particular religious perspective. If public schools and schools of education wish to avoid methodological practices that alienate a teacher’s religious self from her identity in the classroom and also wish to find positive ways for connecting religious teachers to constitutional classroom practices, character education shows promise for both reducing teacher alienation and promoting common moral ground in a religiously diverse public school system.

***A PRELIMINARY WORD ABOUT TERMINOLOGY***

In this article and in our survey work, we chose to use two terms, “faith or worldview,” to identify the subject matter we were researching. In our survey, we did not provide a definition of the terms faith or worldview for our college students (for a sample of the survey questions see the Appendix). Instead, we asked them to provide a summary statement of their faith or worldview. We will discuss their answers to this request in our results section.

We chose to use the term “faith” because we were primarily interested in how students

anticipated that their religious perspectives might influence their teaching and students’ learning. As Haynes and Nord (1998) have observed, definitions of faith or religion are rather difficult (pp. 2-4). In our historical overview and literature review section, we understand faith to include both well-known religious traditions of belief and practice (e.g., Judaism, Islam, Christianity, etc.) as well as informal personal spiritual beliefs. In other words, we wanted students to talk about their faith perspective even if they did not consider it to be associated with a formal religious group or denomination.

We added the term “worldview” because we wanted to make sure students who would not consider themselves “religious” would still participate in the survey. Numerous scholars have noted that the term worldview is much more encompassing term than religion or faith, because it includes other belief systems that one would not usually understand as religious (Glanzer, 2004; Nash, 1999; Naugle, 2002; Nord, 1995). For example, Warren Nord (1995) identifies a worldview as “the most fundamental interpretive frameworks we use to understand reality” (p. 11). Later, Nord (1995) provides a helpful, broader summary:

A worldview provides people with their most general concepts for making sense of their experience; it defines reality for them. Worldviews may remain relatively implicit or they may become explicit and formally articulated within philosophy, theology and science. When someone lives within a worldview and is largely unfamiliar with others, that worldview seems natural, a direct encounter with reality rather than one interpretation among others. Worldviews have a coherence that reinforces their plausibility; they are not simply grab bags of abstract beliefs. Their survival requires that they hang together emotionally, institutionally, and intellectually. Although most claims can be tested within a worldview, it is much less clear how one tests the truth of a worldview itself, or how one adjudicates the conflicting claims of competing worldviews. (pp. 13-14)

Au: All instances of Nord & Haynes have been changed to Haynes & Nord.

This broad definition of worldview is similar to the understanding we brought to our study.

### ***HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND LITERATURE REVIEW***

The secularization of American education is a familiar theme among scholars (e.g., Fraser, 1999; McClellan, 1999; Nord, 1995). As Nord (1995) reports, the process of secularization resulted from a variety of economic, social, philosophical, and political factors with one of the most important being the increasing religious pluralism of the United States. In fact, the history of public education in America can be told as the attempt to find a “common faith” or common worldview for public education while also continually limiting teachers from inculcating a *particular* faith or worldview.

Historically, the problem with this endeavor is that sooner or later the epistemological “foundations” that support the “common” faith or worldview begin to lose the credibility and adherence of the majority. In addition, a significant minority and portions of the majority realize that the common worldview is not held by every “reasonable” person and that it involves unfairly inculcating a particular faith or worldview perspective that others find oppressive. For example, Horace Mann, a Unitarian, attempted to unify public schools by establishing “nonsectarian” public schools that would appeal to various religious groups. Yet, these common schools still inculcated aspects of a particular Protestant and Christian faith. For example, Catholics complained that daily Bible reading from the King James Bible and the Protestant nature of much of early American school curriculum demonstrated hostility to their faith (Nord, 1995). The 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court decisions regarding school-sponsored prayer and required devotional Bible can be understood as enforcing the view that a diverse democracy should not coerce school children to support a common Christian or Theistic faith. Nonethe-

less, the 1963 decision on devotional Bible reading also emphasized that public schools should, in the interest of students’ cultural literacy, teach *about* religion and its important role in our history and culture. Future Supreme Court decisions would continually strike down state any form of public school promotion of a particular religion while affirming the public school’s role in teaching about religion.

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While this story of secularization is quite familiar, the story has not been told from the teacher’s perspective. Usually, the process of secularization is identified with issues of funding, curriculum, and various legal changes or Supreme Court decisions. Yet, the beginning of Mann’s “Common School” movement also marked the first major step in limiting how American teachers, actually Protestant teachers, could allow their personal faith or worldview to influence students. In other words, the process of secularization also influenced teachers and the parts of their identity they could overtly bring into the classroom. Teachers from Catholic, Jewish, or other minority religious traditions now felt the public school system less alien and more accommodating, but it also limited the ways they might bring their own religious identity into the educational process.

Expecting public educators to disconnect from their particular identities can be understood as a logical outcome of how to resolve the problem of finding commonality for educators within a public school system. Teachers were expected to limit their authority and power in classroom to inculcating objective knowledge or ideas and a common national identity, while the nurturing of students’ particular religious, moral, political, and other ideological sensibilities was to be completed at home or within a voluntary community. In the modern, scientific world that developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such a distinction was easy to make.

Yet, with the development of postmodern thought and critical theory scholars have begun to realize the problem with trying to find a common curriculum acceptable to all and

asking teachers to separate particular parts of themselves from their teaching. With regard to curriculum, numerous works have sought to point out that the common American curriculum of the past actually failed to include the stories of women, African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and other groups. Thus, various scholars have addressed how public schools should show justice to different identity stories in the classroom (e.g., Feinberg, 1998; Reich, 2002).

Studies or works focusing on this dilemma as it pertains to the religious identity of the teacher have not been as numerous. Nonetheless, Barry Kanpol, a scholar with postmodern sensibilities influenced by the critical pedagogy tradition, has argued (1997, 1998a, 1998b) that critical pedagogy, if it is to influence education beyond academia, must look to spiritual traditions of moral thought such as liberation theology.

In contrast to Kanpol's work, which seeks to draw on a particular religious tradition for an ideological agenda, our study attempts to start by understanding potential teachers with religious backgrounds. We do not necessarily disagree with Kanpol's argument that teachers should be taught to understand possible connections between their faith or worldview and some form of pedagogy; however, we think that before making suggestions about how to guide teachers in this area, teacher educators should first be aware of how future teachers themselves anticipate their faith or worldview influencing their teaching. Consequently, we sought to discover the degree to which a sample of future teachers from a religious university was conscious of how their faith or worldview may influence their teaching.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We chose a qualitative research design because this type of inquiry allows for a richer representation of what is studied—holistic representation. Education requires those of us in the profession to look at the particular prob-

lems where local knowledge is needed. In other words, it requires us to contextualize what is being studied (Berliner, 2002).

The participants in this study ( $N = 58$ ) represented emerging teachers (sophomores and juniors) who are receiving their teacher preparation and certification at a Christian university. A random purposeful sampling procedure was applied in the identification of participants and the participants randomly selected were invited to respond to a hardcopy questionnaire. All participants' information was considered confidential, and there were no perceived or implied risks in participation or nonparticipation in this study.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, we developed a hardcopy questionnaire that used a multiple data response category design that included three distinct data-collection category methods: (1) demographic data response categories; (2) experiential data response categories; and, (3) narrative/journal perception response categories. The multiple data response category design allowed for the triangulation of data collected to ensure a thick-descriptive data reserve for analysis and interpretation. Questions in the last two categories asked each future educator to describe his/her faith or worldview, philosophy of education, and the interaction between the two. Specific questions prompted each educator to describe the connection between his/her faith or worldview and various educational decisions (e.g., choice of curriculum, classroom management, choice to enter the teaching profession). Data were collected from January 2003 through January 2005 from sophomores and juniors.

As Glesne (1999) points out, "the qualitative researcher draws on some combination of techniques to collect research data, rather than one single technique" (p. 31). We used a constant comparative method of data analysis for all three data-collection categories. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state the constant comparative method is "a research design for multi-data sources, which is like analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins

early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection” (p. 66). While the method can be broken down into steps, it is important to remember that this is actually a process that is constantly occurring in the analysis of the data gathered. The “steps” are occurring simultaneously, and the “analysis keeps doubling back to more data collection and coding” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 68). For example, as we read through one set of responses we noticed a pattern that emerged regarding the use of virtue language. As a result, we went back to earlier results to recode the results in light of this finding.

The constant comparative method applied in this study allowed us to begin the formal analysis of the data early in the study which resulted in both *axial coding* (i.e., distinct) and *core coding* (i.e., bounded) throughout the study. Both the inductive and deductive analysis methods used in this study resulted in the discovery of themes, categories, and patterns in the data represented. As Patton (2002) points out, these themes, categories, and patterns emerge “out of the data, through the analyst’s interactions with the data, in contrast to *deductive analysis* where the data are analyzed according to an existing framework” (p. 453). For example, as we mention in the Results and Interpretations section, the major thematic finding of this study actually emerged as a result of a study of our data and did not conform to our prior hypothesis. After establishing the categories, themes, and patterns through axial and open coding we developed our conclusions that are reported in the results and interpretations section of this study.

## **RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

### ***How Students Defined Their Faith or Worldview***

As mentioned above, we did not define for students what we meant by faith or worldview in our survey. Instead, we asked students to provide a faith or worldview statement. We

received two major types of responses and one smaller third category.

First, almost half of the other respondents (28 of 58), gave a broad doctrinal statement of their worldview using Christian language or theological terms. We identified this group as the Belief respondents. The following response was typical of this group:

I believe that there is one God who created the world. Man was separated from their creator when sin entered the world. I also believe that God reconciled us to himself by sending Jesus, his only son (who was wholly human and wholly divine) to die on a cross and take away our sins. I believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God.

The second group contained almost one third of the respondents (18 of 58). These students described themselves as Christians, gave a specific denominational identity, or did both. We identified these respondents as the Tradition group. In other words, a specific identity label from a Christian tradition was offered as representative of their beliefs. For instance, one respondent stated, “I am a Christian—(Baptist) and follow those beliefs” while another wrote, “I believe the teachings of the Catholic church.”

A final smaller group of students (9) used more general religious language (“We are all children of God and should all be treated equally”), identified themselves as part of another religious tradition outside of Christianity (“I am Jewish—reformed”), or identified themselves as nonreligious (“I’m not a religious person”). We described this group as the Generalist group because these respondents were either non-Christian or spoke about their faith in terms that focused on religious beliefs that emphasized the general equality of humanity. For instance, as illustrated by the first quote, almost half of these respondents stressed humanity’s creation by God and equality before God.

- I believe there is a God who has created everything in our world. However, our

world is not surrounded by God and faith (violence, etc.) for the most part.

- Everyone is the same no matter of race or sex. We all have come from the same God, and will all die one day under the same God.
- I believe in God. I believe that we should live like we were made in the image of God. I ... want everyone to know God, they don't have to choose a religion just God.
- I believe there is a God but I don't think I believe in religion or institutions like it.

Overall, these results were not surprising. Since we undertook the survey at a Christian university we expected most respondents to refer to their faith perspective, and as expected, most respondents identified their faith or worldview in a religious, specifically Christian, manner.

### ***Connections Between One's Faith/Worldview and Classroom Practice***

#### *The Philosophy of Education*

When asked to summarize how their faith or worldview influenced their philosophy of education, only three respondents indicated that their faith or worldview had little or no impact on their philosophy of education. All three were from the Generalist group. The majority of the positive respondents (23) viewed their faith as having an influence pertaining to issues dealing with character education. For instance, one student wrote, "My faith in God influences how I teach. I try to carry my morals and values into my teaching. I think it is important to be a good person and above all I teach that and model it to my pupils." Like this respondent, most of these respondents claimed that their worldview would guide the nature of their social relationships with students. Other students wrote:

- Due the fact that I am a Christian, I see myself as a servant to the Lord and to the

community around me. I will attempt to pour out my life for my students and to teach them more than just math. I hope my students will learn honesty and integrity from my actions and mannerisms.

- I am a Christian and intend to treat my students in a Christian-like manner, with the kindness and respect that they deserve.
- My faith will influence the way I act in the classroom—how I present information and my behavior towards my students—I will respect my students and teach w/encouragement, yet realistically. I want the joy of my spiritual life to flow into the everyday activities in my classroom.

In what we will see is a common pattern, the majority of respondents not only understood the influence of their faith or worldview involving the moral dimension of their teaching, but they also described this influence by using "virtue language." By virtue language, we mean that they make reference to positive character traits or qualities that they hope to demonstrate and promote in the classroom setting. They often mentioned particular virtues such as kindness, respect, honesty, integrity, etc. when describing these connections. This result was consistent with almost all the respondents. Interestingly, we did not find respondents drawing connections using the language of moral values or principles (for example, "I will integrate values into my teaching" or "My classroom will be based on the Golden Rule"). The language of virtues reigned supreme.

The nature of the connection to one's faith or worldview was also quite consistent. Those respondents who saw a connection between the moral aspect of teaching and their faith often used theological language, especially language about God, Jesus Christ, or the Spirit, as their inspiration or model for virtue or good character:

- The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. I can *have* these fruits through the Spirit and I can *use* these fruits as gifts to my students. I pray that I can have a loving, teacher's heart like my Savior when He sat with the children.
- My Christian faith tells me to love others and teaching gives me the opportunity to share God's love (even if it has to be indirectly) with students. I also want to make a difference in the life of a child and be a positive example for them.
- My faith directly influences my philosophy of education. To be Christ-like is my goal in life and he loved all and taught all. His model of that I want to reflect.

For these respondents, their faith informed and inspired their outlook on moral virtue, and they clearly believed this moral perspective would influence their classroom practices through the demonstration and development of particular virtues.

Beyond this one major point of commonality, small groups (five to seven respondents) mentioned particular ways the moral influence of their faith might influence their motivation for teaching, their concern with equality, or their view of the purpose of education. Seven teachers mentioned that their faith would give them a strong concern for the equal treatment of students. As one student wrote, "All children are children of God and should all be given equal access to education and treated equally." Another student simply stated, "I believe God sees everyone as equal, therefore everyone should have equal opportunities at education," while another wrote, "No matter what race or sex, everyone is capable of learning to think for themselves. It might be harder for some but God will guide them through to see the light." For a couple of students, this concern with equality was paired with the virtue of love. Thus one student claimed, "Christ's love should be given to all," and

another wrote, "Christians feel that everyone, including the students, should be loved and cared for."

Another important sub-theme involved how a student's faith would influence the importance they placed upon moral matters in their understanding of the overall purpose of education. For instance, the following student articulated a theologically informed and guided moral concern similar to that of the students quoted above and connected this concern to her unique view of education's purpose:

Not only do the morals that I gain from my faith affect the way that I teach, but I have Jesus as an example of the ultimate teacher, the Holy Spirit within me guiding me in whatever educational endeavors I am faced with, but my faith also shapes my view of what a successful life means, therefore affecting my POE [philosophy of education].

A different student mentioned a similar point about her faith, namely, that it would influence the priority given to the moral sphere of life over knowledge. She wrote,

I think that my faith has an impact on my philosophy of education because I think that it is more important to be a moral and virtuous person than to know everything. The love of Christ is so great that everyone should find ways to spread it, through education even.

Individuals and groups who are concerned about teachers' unconstitutionally promoting their religion may wonder about the intentions of teachers making claims such as those above. However, these students typically thought about their future public school influence in nuanced ways consistent with their faith or indicated that they wanted to teach in a private school. For instance, one student claimed, "Biblical principles, even if the Bible itself cannot be used, should be evident in education." Another stated, "My faith allows me to see the end, and understand the 'big picture' of choices and their outcomes."



Overall, few respondents thought their faith or worldview would have an influence on their philosophy of education in an overt way, and in fact most understood that they should not espouse their particular faith or worldview. As one student noted, “My faith gives me patience, but I don’t really believe I should preach to my students.” There were a few students who indicated that they would push to the edge of the law, but even in these cases what was indicated in the answer was a desire to encourage certain moral, not theological, perspectives:

My faith is not separated from my philosophy of education. The fact that I am a Christian affects every aspect of my life. I want to be the best Christian teacher that I can be. I want to be able to convey my faith to my students as much as I am allowed to do. Of course, this will not make me feel superior to my students who don’t share the same faith, I see myself not only as an intellectual guide, but a moral guide to all of my students by setting my own example to the best of my ability.

What should be clear is that these future teachers do not believe that they must separate their spiritual selves from the classroom. Instead, they still believe that constitutional ways exist for them to make various connections. The following expression summarizes some of the multi-faceted ways students understood this connection:

My faith will influence the way I act in the classroom—how I present information and my behavior towards my students—I will respect my students and teach w/encouragement, yet realistically. I want the joy of my spiritual life to flow into the everyday activities in my classroom.

As can be seen, teachers understood their religious identity as having an important influence on their classroom practices.

### *Faith/Worldviews and Pedagogy*

When it comes to more specific practices in the classroom, however, future teachers were

less able to see possible connections. When asked how their faith or worldview might influence their decision on the types of pedagogy they plan to apply in the classroom, over one third (23) of the students either failed to respond or indicated that it would have no relationship. Again, where the vast majority of students perceived connection between their worldview and pedagogy related to how they might infuse certain character qualities or virtues into their pedagogy (e.g., “Not only will I educate the students, but I will also emphasize morals and what is considered right/wrong. Values, responsibility, effort, and morals will be emphasized.”). These students did not perceive pedagogy merely as a set of techniques or methods but understood it in a holistic manner that would include the moral dimension. Once again, students understood this moral dimension to involve the mention of specific virtues. The actual list of what virtues might be emphasized varied a great deal and included almost a dozen different virtues. The quotes below contain examples of the various virtues students would apply to their pedagogy or the mention of specific practices that would promote these virtues.

- “All children should be treated w/ equal respect.”
- “I will treat students equally and with respect.”
- “My faith will promote me to be an honest and compassionate teacher that the children can learn and acquire worthy knowledge.”
- “My faith will help me be patient because God makes me realize some children need more help than others.”
- “I want to adapt to every student and help them achieve the most that they can. I believe in being a servant and that includes doing whatever it takes to help my students achieve in the classroom and in their lives.”

The three sets of virtues usually mentioned were those pertaining to care, openness, and

encouragement (or a positive classroom environment). Sometimes, as can be observed in the responses below, these virtues were grouped together.

- My Christian faith will help me apply a positive and caring background to my classroom.
- I plan on loving and caring for my students. The way you teach determines the way the might act.
- Again, I want my classroom to reflect the qualities of Christ—I want it to be a fun, happy environment that students look forward to coming to. I will also encourage my students to treat others w/ respect and love.
- Care about my students—make learning fun for them—impact their lives in a positive way
- It is the basis for which I tend to teach. One that is open and not one where there is judgment. One that desires the best from the students and is challenging.
- I will be a Christian based teacher so I will be open to all views
- I plan to encourage my students, be uplifting, and always have an attitude like that of Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5).
- I will be encouraging to the students. I will not allow any slander of other students or God in my classroom. I want to shape my teachings after the example provided by the greatest teacher of all.

It is interesting to note that while the care ethic is sometimes understood as a unique emphasis of feminist ethics (e.g., Noddings, 2002), these teachers understood their care ethic as emerging from their Christian faith or worldview.

Only four students understood their faith as pertaining to specific teaching methods or strategies. One mentioned, “Because my education has been so unique and my faith and world views being mainly self-taught, I want to teach my students to learn strategies from me, but find information out on their own,”

while another claimed that they would prize “more collaboration ... because of our dependence on others to obtain knowledge.” Another four teachers indicated that their faith might prevent them from using certain methods, although not one of the respondents gave an example of what such pedagogy might be. Students were more inclined to mention the positive options such as one student who wrote, “I will not employ a pedagogy that is contrary to my faith, and will lean towards those that are inclined to promote a highly relational style of teaching.”

### *Faith/Worldview and Classroom Management*

Classroom management/discipline is the one area of classroom practice where a greater percentage of teachers understood their faith or worldview having an influence on their practices. Only 12% (7 out of 58) of respondents indicated that it would not influence their approach to school discipline. Once again, the majority of these responses were from the Ecumenical group. Interestingly, a couple of these respondents saw themselves as future adherents of the system in this area (“None, we will abide by school policy”; “It will not influence my decision. In today’s public schools, there are so many guidelines to follow pertaining to discipline.”).

Those who answered this question affirmatively understood themselves as empowered to apply part of themselves. Similar to the questions above, the responses demonstrated that most teachers understood the application of their faith or worldview as pertaining to the character qualities they would apply during the discipline process. Five sets of virtues were mentioned by at least seven teachers. As the quotes below indicate these virtues included love, equality/fairness, forgiveness/grace, patience and respect:

- “Loving my students as Christ loves them and not becoming discouraged with poor behavior.”

- “Just to be fair to every student. You can’t have favorites and in God’s eyes we are all equal and as a teacher we need to treat our students as equals and that not one person is better than another person.”
- “There should always be a small amount of grace in the classroom because I am so undeserving of all of the grace that I have been given from God. Students will make bad decisions, but I think that the best way to help them make better decisions is to give them a second chance in a loving environment.”
- “I will try to be as Christ-like as possible—loving all of my students equally with patience and encouragement.”
- “I plan on showing them lots of respect, but I also expect it to be returned to me. High school kids can get a little rowdy, but I know they understand authority. Therefore, I won’t be judgmental and assume things about certain students. I will try to show the love of God through my actions, and be a good example/witness of a morally good person.”

As can be seen from the quotes, the moral reasoning for applying these virtues once again stemmed from an appeal to the Christian theological language such as the example of God or Christ.

On a few occasions, students would also extend this type of theological reasoning to the whole understanding of the child or of discipline. For example, one student noted about discipline, “I will discipline my students because they are mine because that is what God does. He disciplines us because we are His and He loves us.” Another student simply wrote, “I will not hesitate to discipline—God disciplines—but I will do it out of love for the kids, not because I take pleasure in their pain.” Another student wrote about how, not only her perception of discipline, but also of children in the discipline process would be changed due to her faith, “Because the Holy Spirit is alive in me, I see all children as wonderful creations of

God. I see their potential and will always seek to look beyond the surface of the child’s actions to see the thing that caused the action. I will be forgiving and show my children grace.” What is interesting to note is that almost all the comments focused on the process of discipline and not on the actual content of what might be included in a code of conduct. Only two students drew content connections or used Biblical language (e.g., “People will be courteous to one another and honor their neighbors. There will be no use of crude language”; “I think Christian values and morals are already much of the basis for ‘right and wrong’ in our society. These same principles will apply in my classroom.”).

#### *Faith/Worldview and the Curriculum.*

Interestingly, students often saw few ways the actual content of their faith or worldview might be involved in teaching. For instance, when asked how their faith or worldview might influence their decision on the types of curriculum and resources they plan to apply in the classroom, almost half of the students (26 out of 58), saw no connection (e.g., “It doesn’t. I’ll teach what I’m supposed to teach”) or were unsure of what connection might occur (e.g., “At this point, I am unsure of this answer.”). Another seven students said they might not teach certain things although what they would not teach varied. For instance, one said “evolution,” another replied, “I will not use anything promoting witches or goblins etc.,” while still another mentioned “anything that will degrade or influence them in wrong ways.” Another seven mentioned that they will include moral content because of their Christian faith (e.g., “I want to read stories where we can discuss morals and life lessons and learn from the mistakes of others.”). A few also indicated that their faith or worldview would lead them to emphasize fairness and balance in the curriculum (e.g., “I want my curriculum to not be one-sided, but to express, in an unbiased way, all sides of ideas and theories, no matter how

brief the sides may become—the kids will be getting more well-rounded ideas.”)

It is also in this area that one student mentioned activities that might not be considered legal according to Supreme Court precedent if done outside of a purely educational context. The student wrote, “If able, I will use nativities and crosses at Christmas and Easter.” A couple of other students mentioned general activities that would likely be unconstitutional if carried out in the distinctly Christian manner they suggest.

- My faith will influence my curriculum because I will try and teach faith and qualities they should possess through my curriculum.
- My faith will be involved when I question things in history, and I’ll look at things from a Christian viewpoint. There are many debated issues in history, and the Bible is full of that! I can use it as a resource for making comparisons to our own history.

Yet, the vast majority of students’ ideas did not advocate practices that would promote or favor one particular religion and some even expressed awareness of proper Establishment Clause lines as well as an awareness that student religious freedom, according to Supreme Court rulings, can be respected (e.g., “In the public school I will have more limits on this; however, any students wanting to use Christian materials in projects would be encouraged.”). Of course, a number of teachers also made it a point to mention that they hope to teach in a private and not a public school environment (e.g., “Well, hopefully I will be teaching in a private school so I can put up Bible verses and I can teach my students Bible lessons.”). What is intriguing about all of these responses is that these students understood their faith or worldview to have the least application in the arena of substantive ideas, although this is perhaps understandable in light of legal considerations or the broad nature of the questions we asked.

### *Faith/Worldview and Assessment*

Our final question concerned how their faith or worldview might influence the students’ decision about the types of assessment they plan to apply in the classroom. Again, a large percentage (40%) of students did not reply, anticipated no connection between the two or could not foresee a connection (e.g., “I don’t really know”). The rest of the students gave a variety of answers that demonstrated two consistent themes.

Most teachers again identified that their faith would influence the moral aspects of evaluation. Almost 20% of respondents indicated that their faith or worldview would make them take the fairness of evaluations seriously (e.g., my tests will be fair and unbiased). Interestingly, some saw this fairness as involving a lack of bias and the promotion of equality (e.g., “I will have an unbiased opinion of each child, and attempt to give an equal assessment”), while others understood their faith or worldview to entail taking into account differences and possibly giving different assessments. For instance, one teacher stressed the importance of multicultural sensitivity in evaluation, “I will try to make the assessments culturally diverse because not all of the children are going to be Caucasian Christians and I would like for all of my students to benefit equally from my teaching.” Another student wrote in a similar vein, “My faith will influence types of assessment I will give because I know God makes everyone different which means I will have to assess different kids differently in the classroom.” As can be seen in this quote, theological connections were also drawn with some drawing particular comparisons to God’s character (e.g., “I will give a fair test and grade them fairly. I will give partial credit. God is fair, and I will try to be also”).

Beyond this virtue of fairness or justice, another 20% of students also indicated that their faith or worldview would lead them to envision evaluation more holistically to include components beyond mere academic evaluation. The areas that would be considered

beyond mere academics varied from involving a moral component, a relational component, a developmental segment or even a broader type of assessment. Below are responses that demonstrated an interest in one of these areas.

- All of the assessment will have a moral meaning.
- I want students to be able to apply a greater worldview while applying their own beliefs and morals to historical issues. I want to equip them with skills to look at how they can apply history to their own lives, and applying their own truths to history and to their own beliefs.
- Assessments will not only be based on academic achievement, but also on personal growth as a growing adult.
- Hopefully, I will assess my students on their desire and how much effort they have, rather than the amount of knowledge they know. I guess some of this comes from my faith in that I believe in having faith in everyone and seeing their full potential.
- I will try to assess students not only with test scores, but with an overall assessment during the year. I think it is important to look at the person as a whole and not focus on small parts of their knowledge. Each part of their knowledge feeds into their wholeness as a person. The overall is more important than the details.

The consistent theme in these answers is that these students understood their worldview as taking a broader view of successful education. They perceived their worldview as expanding or perhaps challenging the reductive nature of educational evaluations that measured success by test scores or purely academic measures. Interestingly, there was only one student who saw her faith as basically upholding current administrative practice. This student wrote:

Assessment is very important, and I plan on applying assessments that are authorized by my higher authorities as "proper assess-

ment," because I do trust their judgments and honoring authority is a quality the apostle Paul advocates, unless the actions the authorities encourage are disobedient to God's Word.

But what is noteworthy is that this type of reasoning was the lone exception against the 20% of other teachers who understood their faith as challenging limited forms of assessment. Moreover, we should note, not one of the 58 students expressed a connection between their faith/worldview and an assessment practice that would be considered unconstitutional even under the strictest of church-state scrutiny.

### ***Conclusions About the Importance of Virtue***

Overall, the results we received actually surprised us. Initially, we hypothesized that students would make more content-oriented connections between their faith or worldview and their teaching practices, such as including specific views about the intelligent design-evolution debate, more content about religious history, a particular approach to discussions about sexuality, and so forth. Moreover, we anticipated that they might suggest a number of unconstitutional practices, such as teaching children about the "true meaning" of Christmas and Easter, teaching children Christian Christmas carols, teaching particular views about sex education, and so forth. This proved not to be the case. Instead, as the results indicate, the future teachers constantly used various forms of virtue language to articulate connections between their faith or worldview and their philosophy of education, their approach to the curriculum, their pedagogy and their approach to assessment. Although we anticipated that students would perceive some form of direct or indirect character education as a way they connected their faith or worldview to classroom practice, we did not anticipate that it would be the primary way. The results revealed that character education can be an element of education that allows teachers to connect the religious part of themselves to

their teaching practices, and it can do so in a way that does not violate constitutional limitations on religion in public schools and actually establishes a means to connect particular religious beliefs and traditions to the common enterprise of character education.

While we did not set out to support a particular theoretical perspective about the connections between character and virtue and religious tradition, it is noteworthy that these results provide evidence for the arguments of a number of theorists who emphasize these connections. For instance, James Davison Hunter (2000) argues, "Character is *not*, as the psychologist would have it, solitary, autonomous, unconstrained; merely a set of traits within a unique and unencumbered personality" (p. 15). As a sociologist, he argues that we must remember that character is fundamentally social in nature and "inseparable from the culture in which it is formed" (p. 15). These cultures contain the particular moral imperatives, ideals, and explanations "rooted in specific situations grounded in concrete circumstances, situated in distinct systems of social relationship" (p. 20). Likewise, in *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) argues that virtues are sustained by larger traditions that draw upon narratives to inform their understanding of the virtuous life. These students clearly embody this philosophical argument in that the teachers perceived the Christian tradition as supporting and informing the virtues that they bring to the classroom.

Hunter and MacIntyre, as well as Charles Taylor (1989), also point out the moral fragmentation that occurs when individuals are separated from their social identities or traditions. Interestingly, a few teachers also mentioned that their faith or worldview influences them to understand children in a more holistic way that reintegrates the moral element of life. One teacher noted, "I believe that teaching is a calling and as a teacher it is my responsibility to 'teach the whole child.' It is my desire to teach children in a way that honors God and instills moral virtues within the hearts of the

children." As this quote indicates, this teacher saw her faith or worldview countering the fragmentation of the self described by MacIntyre, Hunter and Taylor. Of course, we realize that this qualitative analysis would need to be expanded to a larger sample in order for these theoretical arguments to receive more substantial empirical support.

An important question that would need to be followed up with these teachers is whether the culture of bureaucratic individualism that tends to characterize public schools, and that Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) claims undermines classical traditions of the virtues, would do the same for these teachers once they enter public schools.

Another key question is whether the teaching of virtue to which these teachers aspire can be accomplished in public schools. Hunter (2000) makes the point that effective moral education requires a coherent moral culture, similar to the one that motivates these teachers, that one is not likely to find in public schools. Since public school moral/character education cannot draw upon the thick traditions and beliefs of particular faith and other communities but must instead settle for the thin "common ground," he argues, public schools will not be effective and may actually lead to the "death of character." Thus, Hunter would probably argue that it is unlikely that these teachers would really be able to transmit the virtues they hope to emulate without wider social support for coherent moral culture. The fact that that only 10 of the 58 respondents attended a private elementary, middle or secondary school and only five anticipated teaching in a private school perhaps indicates that these students would likely disagree with Hunter. In fact, they saw teaching virtues as one of their primary contributions. For many of these future educators, a commitment to being a loving, patient teacher derives its power from the student's religious commitment, but it does not reduce their ability to be a moral model or teach virtue in the classroom.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The guiding premise behind our research is that teacher educators need to discover more about how the faiths and worldviews of their students may influence their approach to teaching if they wish to educate effective future teachers. We believe future teacher educators should be encouraged to confess or become conscious of how their faith or worldview—indeed, their personal identity, whatever its foundation of beliefs and experience— influences their approach to education and then learn how to connect their worldview to their teaching practices in intellectually informed, ethically considerate and constitutionally appropriate ways.

Our surveys demonstrate that second and third year student teachers already possess some awareness of how their worldview influences their outlook when it comes to character education. The major way that these future teachers saw their faith or worldview influencing their teaching involved the moral realm. Their rationales or justifications for these connections were often explicitly theological in that they drew upon the example of God or Christ and in a few rare cases, the nature of students in light of their relationship to God. Most Christian teachers who understood their faith or worldview as involving a set of beliefs (the Belief respondents) or connection to a particular Christian tradition (the Tradition respondents) saw their faith or worldview as relevant to their teaching practices. Students in the Generalist group, perhaps because they focus less on distinctive religious creeds or traditions, were the most likely to find little connection between their faith/worldview and various aspects of education. A related theme found through the surveys is that a number of students perceived their faith or worldview as challenging reductive views of education that may understand education primarily in intellectual terms or as career preparation. For these teachers, their faith or worldview would result in the inclusion of the moral dimension of life.

Another one of our normative premises is that teachers also need to be aware of the importance of showing justice to various worldviews and faiths and the ethical and constitutional problems with subtly using their position of power to promote their own worldview or faith. Our survey demonstrated that many already shared some knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate connections. They saw these connections primarily being made through the moral influence they would have on their students. We would argue that there is nothing ethically or constitutionally wrong with bringing commonly agreed upon moral virtues into a classroom, and in fact we should consider it a moral and civil imperative to do so.

Some might perhaps argue that since teachers already see these constitutionally appropriate connections, little needs to be done to address this reality. In contrast, we would argue that teacher educators should attempt to take advantage of these students' awareness in a couple ways. First, they should reinforce their desire to take a holistic approach to education. Modern tendencies to reduce education to intellectual knowledge and skills should be resisted. Second, teacher educators should help these future teachers gain a greater understanding of the ways to approach character education and how their religiously inspired moral perspectives might relate to these approaches in order to ensure constitutionally and morally appropriate attention to these matters. For example, teacher educators could aid students by providing a course on moral and/or religion and education. Since many students already see this connection, students would be helped by discovering sophisticated and democratically appropriate ways they can constitutionally address matters of character or moral education in the classroom as well as teaching about religion. Teacher educators could take advantage of the sympathy these teachers-to-be have for nonreductive approaches to education and expose them to theories of character education that follow appropriate constitutional guidelines.

Within a course on moral and religious education, teacher educators could educate students about the various constitutionally permissible ways of approaching both religion and character education and the necessary limitations required in a liberal democratic school system.

This class should focus on ways that allow both teachers and students to draw on their faith and worldview. In other words, we advocate the exact opposite of what Robert Nash (1997) recommends. He contends, “if the virtues such as humility, faith, self-denial and charity are to have any functional utility in secular educational institutions, and in a democratic society, they have to be ‘decoupled’ from their religious roots and secularized” (p. 166). “Decoupling” or separating a plant from its roots, however, rarely bodes well for the plant (Hunter, 2000). In contrast, we argue that public schools need to respect and nurture *both* religious and secular roots of virtue and even allow teachers and students to draw from those sources if they so desire. Future teachers should merely make sure they do not use their position of government power to favor a particular religious approach to moral virtue.

In closing, we would like to suggest some of the following ways that class could help nurture the roots of virtue, especially if they are religious, in both future teachers and their students.

1. For those future teachers unaware of how their worldview influences their understanding of character, help student teachers become conscious of the different way their worldview or faith influences this area.
2. Help future teachers discover character education related activities that also encourage the religious freedom of all students. Here we can think of a variety of examples
  - a. For instance, if a school agrees upon the promotion of common moral virtues, the teachers could encourage

students to think about what reasons they could find for acquiring such traits. Such activities, while promoting common virtue, also allow students (and teachers) to reflect upon the reasons they find in their own particular faith or worldview for supporting such virtues. In other words, it connects the common virtues to the nourishing roots of particular faiths and worldviews. Teachers should also be reminded of the advice of Charles Haynes and Oliver Thomas (2001):

Sound character education programs will acknowledge that many people look to religious authority and revelation for moral guidance. Such programs will affirm the value of religious and philosophical commitments and avoid any suggestion that values are simply a matter of individual choice without reference to absolute truth.... Character education can be hollow and misleading when taught within a curriculum that is silent about religion. When religion is largely ignored, students get the false and dangerous message that religious ideas and practices are insignificant for human experience. (p. 163)

- b. Another example might involve a literature teacher encouraging students to look for individuals demonstrating particular character qualities in both secular and sacred literature of their choice. They could encourage them to explore the reasons authors suggest these character qualities should be prized. Such exercises not only encourage common virtue, but they also allow the student to go to the particular models and sources of that virtue which they find compelling (religious or secular). Too often, character education curriculum tries to find moral models that will appeal to a broad audience (e.g., Mother Theresa, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr.), instead of allowing students to

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- draw on their own cultures, traditions, faiths or worldviews.
- c. When engaging in service activities or service learning, allow students to choose service activities in both secular and religious contexts.
  - d. When performing activities to promote character education, such as hanging pictures of heroes or heroines in the classroom, think about how to incorporate all faiths and worldviews (e.g., allow students to choose their own heroes and heroines who represent the civic virtues). If religious ones are chosen, do not be afraid to display them (as long as everyone's choice is treated equally).
  - e. If students do assignments on moral heroes or heroines (local or national), allow them to incorporate any faith or worldview elements.
  - f. If celebrating the birthday of heroes or heroines, allow students to choose other heroes or heroines besides the standard set of national figures usually set forth.
3. Finally, explore what showing justice to different worldviews in the curriculum might mean.

These are just a few of the ideas that allow students and teachers to connect character to various facets of their identity and not merely their identity as citizens. The humanization of future teachers and their students deserves it.

### ***APPENDIX: SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS***

**Section IX: Faith or Worldview Statement** (Please summarize your expression of faith or worldview belief.)

**Section X: Philosophy of Education Statement** (Please summarize your philosophy of education.)

**Section XI: Faith/Worldview and Philosophy of Education Influence** (Please summarize how your faith or worldview influences your philosophy of education.)

**Section XII: Faith or Worldview Influence on Decision to Become a Teacher** (Please summarize how your faith or worldview influenced your decision to become a teacher.)

**Section XIII: Faith or Worldview Influence on Decision Making and Practice** (Please provide a statement on how your faith or worldview influences the following categories.)

- A. How does your faith or worldview influence your decision on the types of pedagogy you plan to apply in the classroom?
- B. How does your faith or worldview influence your decision on the types of classroom management/discipline you plan to apply in the classroom?
- C. How does your faith or worldview influence your decision on the types of curriculum and resources you plan to apply in the classroom?
- D. How does your faith or worldview influence your decision on the types of assessment you plan to apply in the classroom?

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