

## **Teachers' Views on Integrating Faith into Their Professional Lives: A Cross-Cultural Glimpse**

**Joonkil Ahn, B.A.  
Danny W. Hinson, Ph.D.  
Sharon T. Teets, Ph.D.**

**Carson-Newman University**

### **Abstract**

AILACTE institutions are often linked to faith-based traditions, and teacher education candidates may attend these institutions as a result of their sense of calling to the profession. However, most graduates of teacher education programs teach in religiously neutral environments. With the high expectations of professional standards for the profession, and increasing cultural diversity of the school population, attention to issues of integration of faith and work may be limited. The present study provides insight into how preservice teachers, graduates of a teacher education program, and teachers in Korea view the integration of their faith with their professional lives. Teachers report various ways in which they draw upon their own faith, and they suggest that the examination of moral dilemmas from a faith-based perspective has been largely ignored in an effort to prepare candidates to function in religiously neutral environments. They also indicate that the examination of case studies and scenarios for moral and ethical implications may be of value to them as they seek to live out their faith in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways.

***Keywords:* moral dimensions of teaching**

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AILACTE, the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education, is committed to the liberal arts as the basis for teacher education. Of the 165 current member institutions, the majority began as faith-based institutions. Many remain intentionally faith-based, and others maintain loose ties to their faith tradition. While many of these institutions provide advanced programs for graduate study, initial preparation for teaching remains as a central focus. Students who choose to attend institutions such as these often make their choice based on the faith-tradition of the institution. Almost all of these students indicate that they enter the teaching profession out of a deep sense of calling (Farkas, Johnson, & Foleno, 2000). Once enrolled in a teacher education program, these candidates soon learn that they are being prepared primarily for careers in schools that are increasingly culturally diverse, and therefore, intentionally religiously neutral environments. Moreover, many faculty in teacher education programs in faith-based institutions have completed their own professional preparation in large, public institutions. For teacher education candidates and faculty members alike, the question then becomes, “How does one prepare to live out one’s calling, which includes a faith basis, in environments that are religiously neutral?” In addition to the importance of this question to candidates in traditional teacher education programs, this question arises as institutions provide professional development in other countries, too.

The current research is being presented as a demonstration of faculty members’ attempts to investigate an issue that lies at the core of teacher candidate professional development and institutional mission. The questions used to frame the research were:

- How do teachers view moral dilemmas within the context of their teaching experience?
- How do teachers draw upon their faith to provide solutions for the moral dilemmas they face?
- How do teachers perceive their preparation to integrate their faith in their resolution of work-based moral dilemmas?

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## Literature Review

Studying the history of education in the United States is a part of teacher education programs throughout the country. Historically, from the time of the Protestant Reformation with Martin Luther's call for German public schools and to the first school started by the Puritans in the 1600s, religious belief has driven public education (Luther, 2005). The study of schooling in colonial days, especially in New England, shows that schools were established primarily to teach people reading for the purpose of salvation. With American independence, the focus changed from education for salvation to education for citizenry. From the founding of the United States, the separation of church and state has been explicit. The courts have repeatedly supported this mutual protection of state from church and church from state. "Public schools may not inculcate nor inhibit religion. They must be places where religion and religious conviction are treated with fairness and respect" (Haynes, 2008, p. 1). As the culture becomes increasingly culturally diverse (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016) teacher education programs are committed to the principle of religious neutrality. Trust has been placed in public school teachers that they will not indoctrinate or proselytize students.

Teaching as a moral activity has been studied from a variety of perspectives (Goodlad & Soder, 1990), and a majority of teachers, regardless of faith orientation, report that they enter the profession with a sense of calling (Eckert, 2011; Farkas et al., 2000; Palmer, 2007). AILACTE has identified Moral and Ethical Dimensions of the Learning Community as one of its four Models of Excellence. Themes of social justice are often found in the unit conceptual frameworks of AILACTE-based institutions (Teets, 2011; Lederhouse, 2011–2012). Moreover, though the current standard-based accountability system puts academic content and student learning as the overarching objectives of schooling (Howard, 2005), schools continue to address issues of character development through character education programs or specifically targeted issues, such as anti-bullying. Despite the interest in character education in teacher education programs, little has been written about

the preparation of teachers to implement developmentally appropriate character education programs or to draw upon their faith traditions as they conceptualize moral dilemmas (Beachum, McCray, Yawn, & Obiakor, 2013; Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1998).

The moral and ethical dimension of the Korean education system has a different background. Unlike U.S. public schools, where teacher participation in student-initiated religious clubs is only in a “nonparticipatory capacity” (Haynes & Thomas, 2007, p. 85), teachers can initiate a religious club, participate in it, and share ideas with students in the Korean public school system. The teaching profession is highly respected by the Korean people with the salary of teachers ranked at the top of the scale in public schools worldwide (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015). However, unlike many western countries where teachers are not expected to do non-teaching work (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011), Korean teachers are often required to deal with significant administrative tasks and work 12–16 hours a day (Ahn, 2016). Organizational silence in the Korean public sector is an element that exacerbates the dilemmas experienced by teachers. Organizational silence is believed to originate from authoritarianism which emphasizes hierarchy, dominance, and obedience in organization; it often forces familism, which is a habit of mind that regards official work as a family affair, forcing its members to cover up or ignore conflict and illegal practice (Kang & Ko, 2014).

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Survey respondents included 31 American local teachers who were graduates of a small liberal arts university with a strong faith tradition, 36 preservice student teachers from the same institution, and 33 Korean teachers who were participating in a professional development seminar, sponsored by a Christian teacher association and led by one of the researchers. Korean teachers were included to obtain perspectives regarding how Christian teachers in another

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culture (a) view moral dilemmas within the context of their teaching experience, (b) draw upon their faith to provide solutions for the moral dilemmas they face, and (c) perceive their preparation to integrate their faith in their resolution of work-based moral dilemmas. It was intended that we could obtain implications for teacher education programs in faith-based institutions in the U.S. by having insights from the similarities and differences between the two cultures regarding the three research questions.

Korean teachers were also included in the research due to the historical connections with the researchers at an AILACTE liberal arts university. Ten Korean students completed initial teacher's licensure at this institution, and many other Korean exchange students and visiting Korean faculty members have spent a significant time studying at the university. Including the Korean teachers in the research provides an international perspective on teacher preparation programs at our institution. Preservice teachers were included in the study to see if there are any similarities and/or discrepancies with inservice teachers in their perception of the effectiveness of their teacher education program in a faith-based institution. These findings can provide insights on what should be added to improve teacher education programs regarding the issue of moral/ethical dilemmas in the field. Both preservice and experienced domestic teachers were included to observe potential developmental differences in how teachers view moral dilemmas.

### Data Collecting

Data were collected through an electronic survey that contained four open-ended questions regarding the kinds of ethical/moral dilemmas which participants have experienced, the resources to resolve them, and the perceived effectiveness of their teacher education programs in preparing them for dealing with their dilemmas. The survey also contained ten closed response items for which teachers were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale their views about how they use their faith in the resolution of moral/ethical dilemmas. All responses were anonymous.

### **Data Analysis**

Frequencies and means were computed for each of the groups of teachers for each item on the questionnaire (see Table 1). Qualitative data were analyzed through the repetitive review process of identifying patterns of words and phrases which later became the coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

### **Findings**

The findings are organized per the three research questions that guided the study. Specifically, the findings reflect: (a) observations about the moral dilemmas experienced by teachers, (b) their reported strategies for dealing with the dilemmas, and (c) their perceptions of their preparedness for handling moral dilemmas by their teacher education programs.

### **Moral Dilemmas Experienced by Teachers**

Twenty-nine of 31 domestic teachers identified situations considered to be moral and/or ethical dilemmas related to their personal religious beliefs. Domestic teachers expressed a concern with balancing their personal religious beliefs in a public-school setting where their actions could be perceived as a proponent of a particular faith. One teacher expressed her frustration with teaching children tolerance when the situation goes against everything that her religious faith teaches: “We are supposed to teach children to tolerate all different religions, beliefs, etc., but we cannot openly share our faith.”

Prayer in the school was a specific dilemma mentioned by several participants. One local teacher noted that she could not tell her student “No” when one of her students asked her to pray aloud for her dad. Half of the preservice teachers responded that they found it difficult to know how to respond to a child-initiated comment about matters involving religious content.

In the survey, only four of the American participants noted inappropriate/illegal administrative leadership problems, with the main issue being the pressure exerted on teachers and their role during standardized testing. One participant shared about being asked to do

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illegal things with a student's IEP by the principal when no testing or permission forms from parents were there to back it up to make the school look good. The teacher replied: "Not only was this illegal by the state, it went against my morals as a person. I don't lie!"

Unlike the types of dilemmas experienced by domestic teachers, those perceived by the clear majority of Korean participants were related to their administrators. Administrators were reported to impose undue pressure on teachers by ordering them to be overly harsh in disciplining students, stop teaching and finish up the paperwork for reporting to higher authorities even during the class, and object to teachers leading Christian student clubs, which is allowed in Korean public schools. Some of their orders which were reported by six participants were even illegal, which included telling the teachers to make a purchasing contract with certain commercial providers he/she appointed for the sake of administration's personal benefit. Some of them ordered their teachers to tell the answers to students while administering national tests, and made the teachers do the paperwork for principals' embezzling school budget for personal use.

Taking expedient ways to complete their work was a type of dilemma expressed by several Korean participants, which might originate from dealing with the overwhelming amount of administrative work and the limited amount of time to complete the work. For some of the Korean participants, the heavy drinking culture was the main source of their dilemmas, which often caused conflict with religious, personal, and family values.

Nineteen out of the 36 preservice teachers did not identify any situations that they would have considered to be ethical and/or moral dilemmas. Of those reporting dilemmas, the responses were about equally divided between concerns about other teachers' behavior and issues related to separation of church and state. An example of the kind of dilemma about teachers' behaviors is reflected in the following statements reported: "Teachers gossiping or sharing snapchats of their students," or "Teachers discussing 'problem' students from different cultural backgrounds—students being punished for being different, but not wrong." An example

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of an issue related to separation of church and state was expressed by this comment: “Students often bring up church and Jesus, and I’m not sure how to respond.” In the question asking preservice teachers to identify resources used for dealing with dilemmas, four more students shared a resource, even though they did not describe specific moral dilemmas they had encountered.

### **Teachers’ Responses to Moral Dilemmas**

Teachers were asked to report on how they responded to moral dilemmas in the school setting. Twenty-four of the 31 domestic teachers reported that they consulted administrators, other teachers, or teacher mentors. Many of the participants cited the importance of drawing upon the experience of co-workers of faith who had more experience in teaching than they had; as indicated by a participant who said, “I turn to a few key mentor teachers to think through difficult situations.” Half of the preservice teachers identified the cooperating teacher as the most helpful resource for dealing with moral dilemmas.

Thirty out of 31 responded that they pray for students or families about whom they have a concern. They often pray with coworkers of faith, family, friends, and through individual daily prayers for the dilemmas they face in their work. Only 17 of the domestic respondents mentioned reading or studying scripture for guidance in these difficult situations. However, it is important to note that many of the domestic teachers wrote that it was important to share their faith by example, as implied by the following statement: “Did my kiddos see Christ through me today?” Preservice teachers also indicated that seeing the modeling of culturally and morally responsive strategies by faculty members was of great value.

Responding to the same question of resources, half of the 33 Korean teachers reported that they consulted with leaders and teachers who belonged to Christian teacher organizations. It is reported that there are 12 Christian teacher organizations in Korea with national networks and weekly meetings. Participants said they talked, shared, and consulted with people in those organizations and shared their dilemmas as prayer requests in those meetings.



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For slightly more than ten Korean teachers, their colleagues in their schools were the people who they shared their dilemmas, and others used Christian resources such as praying and reading the Bible, and religious books.

### **Teachers' Views of Preparation for Moral Dilemmas**

In response to the question about how their teacher education programs prepared them for integrating their faith with their work, overwhelmingly both domestic teachers and preservice teachers indicated that the modeling by faculty members was the most salient factor in their understanding of how to integrate faith in religiously neutral environments. When asked how their programs could have prepared them better, the most commonly reported suggestion by both domestic and preservice teachers was the use of case studies and/or scenarios that could be examined through a variety of lenses, including a faith-based perspective. The areas of providing scenarios and specific advice about legal issues were suggested to be effective, such as teachers' rights and responsibilities, conflict resolution, and dealing with religious issues in schools. In all three groups surveyed, discussions about what is acceptable and not acceptable concerning the sharing of their personal religious beliefs in public school settings were suggested to be addressed in their teacher education program. Understanding cultural differences of the students and their families was another recommended area of study to be included in their teacher preparation program.

Regarding the efficacy of their teacher education program in dealing with their moral/ethical dilemmas in school, more than 20 out of 33 Korean participants responded that their teacher education courses did not help them in dealing with issues and dilemmas in school. One of the participants even said: "I don't remember a single piece of curriculum that helped me to deal with ethical dilemmas."

The participants said the courses in their teacher education program were mainly about education theories, rather than dealing with more real issues such as student discipline. They reported that

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they never discussed issues such as teachers' rights/responsibilities in relationship to education laws, the value of teacher collaboration and shared leadership, conflict resolution, or dealing with religious issues in schools. Many of them said their Christian student clubs in college, church retreats, Christian world view books, and Christian teacher organizations have been, and are more helpful to them to deal with their moral/ethical dilemmas in school.

### **Discussion**

The report of this study has been the result of several years of informal research and discussion. This work has culminated in a formal study of preservice and domestic U.S. teachers, with the addition of a Korean sample of teachers of Christian orientation.

As the data were reviewed for the three different groups of participants, it became clear that the three groups of educators have varying degrees of interest and/or concern about the integration of faith in their professional practice. Some think it should not even be considered; others express the views of frustration of not being able to discuss religion openly. Many express the view that their own personal example is the best way to integrate their faith in their practice.

The findings regarding the first research question reveal that while the clear majority of domestic teachers indicated that their moral/ethical dilemmas were related to their personal religious beliefs, the dilemmas experienced by Korean teachers were predominantly related to their administrators who were reported to impose undue pressure in disciplining students, prioritize paper work over teaching, and even ask them to commit illegal acts in some cases. Unlike Korean teachers' being mostly concerned about their administration, only four of local teachers noted inappropriate or illegal administrative leadership problems. While half of the preservice teachers indicated concern about how to respond to child-initiated comments about matters regarding religious content, the other half of them did not identify any situations of moral/ethical dilemmas. Though the high rate of failure to identify dilemmas may not truly represent the actual presence of dilemmas for

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preservice teachers, we envision this study as a springboard for further research about whether incorporating more elements of analyzing moral dilemmas into teacher education programs in the form of case studies and/or scenarios could be a way to raise awareness of preservice teachers in these issues.

The findings for the second research question indicate that while the clear majority of domestic teachers reported that they consulted administrators, other teachers, teacher mentors, and their cooperating teachers (in the case of preservice teachers), the majority of Korean teachers reported they consulted with leaders and teachers who belonged to Christian teacher organizations. The 12 nation-wide Christian teacher associations with more than 150 regional branches are reported to be one of the most influential and supportive community for Christian teachers in Korea. As shown in the survey data, while more Korean teachers resorted to groups of teacher friends for Christian response/solutions than prayer, a relatively greater number of American teachers responded that they pray for the dilemmas they face in their work, with a smaller percentage of them seeking solutions from groups of teacher friends (See Table 1). Contrary to their seeking guidance from either praying, groups of teacher friends, or their cooperating teachers, it was somewhat surprising that relatively few among all three groups of educators mentioned reading or studying scripture for guidance.

### Implications

Insights from this study can be applied to teacher education programs that are rooted in faith-based institutions. First, as the culture becomes increasingly diverse, candidates will benefit from greater attention to issues of cultural diversity, as well as understanding how their faith traditions support the inclusion and acceptance of all P-12 students and their families. Second, preservice teachers can benefit from an open discussion of the realities of the teaching profession and how their own faith may be used as a resource for dealing with difficult issues. Furthermore, preservice teachers will benefit from greater understanding of the increasing cultural diversity of the P-12 school population, and the implications for living

out their own faith, by example, in the classroom. For preservice teachers who have a limited view of their own faith tradition, open discussion may help facilitate greater understanding of the multiple faith traditions that are represented in P–12 children and their families.

In addition to these benefits for preservice teachers, graduates of programs may be invited to share moral and ethical dilemmas faced in the classroom, and currently enrolled candidates can analyze those dilemmas from different points of view. A collection of dilemmas that are collected anonymously from practitioners may be used as case studies for preservice teachers. Preservice teachers can also benefit from active engagement in role-play situations in which legal and culturally sensitive strategies may be practiced and modeled.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study demonstrate that faith is of importance to both preservice and practicing teachers, and that teacher education programs could be doing more to provide support for preservice teachers to integrate their faith traditions in their professional lives, in legally and culturally sensitive ways (Elliott, 2015; Lee, 2010). When it comes to teachers' views of preparation for moral dilemmas, preservice and domestic teachers reported no other examples of preparation regarding integrating faith/practice than modeling by their faculty members. Korean teachers also reported very little preparation for dealing with moral and ethical dilemmas from any perspective. Although the sample size in this study was small, the evidence seems relatively clear. In an effort to prepare candidates to function in religiously neutral environments, the examination of moral dilemmas from a faith-based perspective has been largely ignored. Korea has a very few number of faith-based higher-education institutions, some of which do not have teacher education programs in them. Given that, Korean Christian preservice/inservice teachers are known to deal with their moral, religious, and, ethical dilemmas in other venues such as Christian teacher associations and churches. On the other hand, AILACTE

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institutions can be thought of as being more favorable in providing support for preservice teachers regarding the analysis of dilemmas from professional and faith-based perspectives as preparation for dealing with dilemmas in the P–12 classroom. Support for being more active in helping candidates to think about moral and ethical dilemmas is consistent with Palmer's central theme, that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher," (2007, p. 10). Analysis of cases through the lenses of various theoretical, philosophical, and faith-based positions may help teachers to develop that sense of integrity, which as Parker Palmer suggests, is essential to good teaching.

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Appendix

Table 1.

Perception of Integration of Faith with Professional Life

Statement	Likert Scale	Local N=31			Korean N=33			Pre-Service N=36		
		Frequency	%	Mean	Frequency	%	Mean	Frequency	%	Mean
I think about my faith with regard to moral dilemmas in the classroom with students.	N/A	0	0		0	0		1	2.7	
	1	2	6.5	2.65	0	0	2.72	1	2.7	2.58
	2	7	22.6		9	27.3		10	27.0	
	3	22	71.0		24	72.7		24	64.9	
I would like to integrate my faith with classroom discussions, but I am not allowed to do so.	N/A	0	0		0	0		1	2.7	
	1	12	38.7	1.84	5	15.2	2.12	5	13.5	2.25
	2	12	38.7		19	57.6		14	37.8	
	3	7	22.6		9	27.3		16	43.2	
I think about my faith with regard to interactions with colleagues and peers in the school.	1	3	9.7	2.58	0	0	2.51	2	5.4	2.61
	2	7	22.6		16	48.5		10	27.0	
	3	21	67.7		17	51.5		24	64.9	
I often think about what Jesus would do if he were a teacher in the classroom.	1	3	9.7	2.39	1	3.0	2.55	2	5.4	2.50
	2	13	41.9		13	39.4		14	37.8	
	3	15	48.4		19	57.6		20	54.1	
I have a group of teacher friends with whom I share dilemmas, and we try to think about what a Christian response/solution might be.	1	7	22.6	2.13	4	12.1	2.61	7	18.9	2.28
	2	13	41.9		5	15.2		12	32.4	
	3	11	35.5		24	72.7		17	45.9	
I have a support group outside of my professional work life that helps me integrate my faith with my work.	1	6	19.4	2.35	3	9.1	2.52	4	10.8	2.50
	2	8	25.8		10	30.3		10	27.0	
	3	17	54.8		20	60.6		22	59.5	
I pray about students or families about whom I have a concern.	N/A	0	0		1	3.0		4	10.8	
	1	1	3.2	2.81	1	3.0	2.24	1	2.7	2.31
	2	4	12.9		20	60.6		11	29.7	
	3	26	83.9		11	33.3		20	54.1	
I read or study scripture for guidance in difficult situations.	N/A	0	0		0	0		4	10.8	
	1	5	16.1	2.39	1	3.0	2.55	2	5.4	2.25
	2	9	29.0		13	39.4		11	29.7	
	3	17	54.8		19	57.6		19	51.4	
I read or study other texts that have a faith basis to guide me in my work.	N/A	0	0		0	0		4	10.8	
	1	7	22.6	2.55	4	12.1	2.33	3	8.1	2.11
	2	12	38.7		14	42.4		14	37.8	
	3	12	38.7		15	45.5		15	40.5	

Note. Likert Scale 1 = Does not represent what I say, do, or think at all; 2 = Represents what I say, do, or think some of the time; 3 = Represents what I say, do or think most of the time



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Joonkil Ahn is a graduate student at Carson-Newman University. Joonkil taught in several high schools in South Korea for 17 years, and joined Carson-Newman in 2014. He enjoyed the privilege of serving as the President of TCF (Teachers' Christian Fellowship) Korea for three years, and learned the value of Christian teachers' fellowship in it. During his educational journey at Carson-Newman, he found passion in education research. He presented his paper in the 14th Hawaii International Conference on Education (Jan. 2016), and was awarded the AILACTE Graduate Student Scholar Award in Las Vegas this year.

Danny W. Hinson is an associate professor of TESL at Carson-Newman University in the Education and Counseling Department where he teaches graduate courses in language assessment, phonology, language curriculum development, and second language acquisition theory. Danny has presented and been involved in teacher training seminars in numerous international settings including: South Korea, North Korea, China, Japan, Thailand, Russia, and most recently in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Sharon T. Teets is a professor of education at Carson-Newman University in the Education and Counseling Department where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in human development, early childhood and elementary education, and foundations of education. Sharon served as a Foxfire course facilitator and coordinator of the East Tennessee Teachers Network for many years and continues to be an advocate of learner-centered and community-based education.