

**THE ROLE OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN  
MORAL EDUCATION: APPROACHES AND  
ATTITUDES OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOL  
EDUCATORS**

By

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

*The teacher who wishes to be more than a functionary cannot escape the value problem or the difficult matter of moral choice.*

Greene, 1973, p. 181

*Students need to realize that the very survival of our form of democracy depends on how each of them behaves - on how willing each of them is to listen to the views and ideas of others, no matter how disagreeable these may be.*

Levitt & Longstreet, 1993, p. 147

"What to teach?" This question remains a perennial problem for curriculum developers. What knowledge, or whose knowledge, will ascend to the curriculum summit? As theorists consider this question, they too must consider what will be of most value to the student and to society. Some have proposed that the focus of the curriculum, especially social studies and language arts, should be controversial knowledge.

This idea is certainly not new. Since the turn of the twentieth century, many social studies teachers have considered issues-oriented topics their curriculum model of choice (Parker, McDaniel, & Valencia, 1991). As progressives sought to educate for a democratic society, Dewey and his followers favored the study of controversial material (Nicholls, Nelson, & Gleaves, 1995). And,

presently, controversy can be found in the curriculum of globalism, multiculturalism, and AIDS education.

Trading the security of facts-based content for controversy may invite friction among students, teachers, parents, and the community. It may seem to be too great a risk for many teachers, but proponents cite valuable reasons for taking the risk. Singh (1989) maintains that the aim of teaching controversial moral and social issues is "to create in pupils respect for the rights and feelings of others and to develop a sense of personal morality which takes into account the concern for others" (p. 234). Other advocates claim that placing issues at the center of the curriculum will yield insights into the process of government (Passe, 1991) and will assist students in thinking and reasoning about questions cloaked in uncertainty (Kupperman, 1985).

The avoidance of controversy in the curriculum may be due in large part to the risks that teachers face. Levitt and Longstreet (1993) reported that the risk remains considerable, even to the point of losing employment. Other excuses were documented by Nicholls et al. (1995): "...some teachers told us that their students' lives were chaotic and that, in school, the students needed order, facts and 'basic' skills" (p. 254). Some teachers claim that they have no time for such topics because they are too busy attending to misbehavior. Passe (1991) asserts that if these teachers were to invest time in the open

discussion of controversial issues, misbehavior would reduce as students learn how to deal with conflictual situations.

Fear of conservative activist parents causes some teachers to shy away from controversy. But not all parents are in opposition. Sullivan (1987) recorded parents' responses to a literature unit that tackled sensitive issues. The parents had been well informed of the unit's content and how the content would be implemented. Overall, their comments were positive. One parent wrote, "Since our children are confronted with these problems every day, I certainly approve of discussion on these topics" (p. 876). Others, however, are not as supportive.

Schukar (1993) outlines some of the criticisms from conservative Christian groups targeted at global education: Phyllis Schlafly, president of Eagle Forum, believes that global education censors content about American history, eliminates patriotism, promotes moral equivalence, imposes particular world views, and "brainwashes teachers to use techniques of indoctrination" (p. 53). Eric Buehrer of Citizens for Excellence in Education further argues that global education crowds out the study of western civilization, teaches no absolutes, resocializes students into social liberalism, and preaches a new religion based on eastern mysticism (Schukar, 1993).

Undoubtedly, there are those who color the study of issues in such a way as to indoctrinate young students towards a particular political or religious view, but does



that possibility justify the disregard of controversial issues in the curriculum? "To deny the role of controversial issues in education," Schukar (1993) argues, "is to deny students a quality and essential education" (p. 57). While E. D. Hirsch emphasizes the study of noncontroversial facts (in Nicholls et al., 1995), others risk focusing on friction. They contend that cultural literacy is not the memorization of a narrow knowledge base, but it is "understanding controversy or cultural conflict" (Nicholls & Nelson, 1992).

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Voices from various political persuasions have agreed in recent years that there is an urgent need for moral education. As young people participate in criminal activity at a more noticeable level, voices that are normally at odds are agreeing that schools must immediately teach values. This apparent agreement is rife with many questions that must be addressed. What do these various voices, or world views, mean when they refer to moral education? How do they intend to address controversial values in moral education? And will this moral education be one of indoctrination?

#### **The Issue of Moral Education**

Moral education pervades every school's curriculum. Contemporary character educators such as Wynne (1998) and Etzioni (1998) agree that everything schools do affects

moral education. "There's nothing new about teachers and educational support personnel teaching values," declared NEA President Bob Chase (1998), "What is new is the urgency" (p. 2).

Others are less enthusiastic about the school's role in moral education. "Schools can be effective moral teachers when they represent communities that are morally homogeneous. The trouble is, American society is no longer a morally homogeneous community" (Carlin, 1996, p. 8). Pulliam and Van Patten (1995) describe emerging values in conflict in contemporary American society: "The peer subculture of American adolescents is unconcerned with older traditional belief systems. Rock and roll music, experimentation with drugs, and permissive attitudes toward sex dominate the interests of teenagers" (p. 37).

### The Role of Controversial Issues

Is it possible to teach morality without addressing issues that are controversial? Some curriculum theorists (Kupperman, 1985; Sockett, 1992) perceive moral education and an issues-centered curriculum as inseparable, that to teach values is essentially to address controversy.

Unfortunately, to stress some values in a school community means that other values will be underemphasized; to take a strong stand on an issue may mean sacrificing some dialogue, let alone displeasing some people; to make a rule firm and clear guarantees that someone will plea for an exception. Moreover, true moral growth occurs in individuals only

through what Kohlberg called 'disequilibrium,' the tension and turmoil created when one value begins to impinge upon and come into conflict with another. As much as we may crave the calm which clarity and order seem to promise, a moral community must live with a certain degree of tension and conflict, for true moral growth occurs most fruitfully where there has been one value clashing against another, where understanding issues comes out of opposing viewpoints, and where the uneasiness of community life has been experienced and lived through (Heischman, 1996).

Levitt and Longstreet (1993) distinguish between "the safest of civic values" and "authentic values" (p. 142). Teachers are reluctant to address authentic values that have real meaning for students because of the risk involved in dealing with controversy. Levitt and Longstreet (1993) suggest that efforts to cling only to the safe values in avoidance of authentic values provide a counterfeit education:

If we are to deal authentically with our crisis in civic values, then [authentic values] must be confronted, regardless of the level of controversy that may be invoked and no matter how negative the reactions of parents may be (p. 142).

van Manen (1991) agrees that schools which avoid controversy are being "pedagogically unrealistic" (p. 58). The atmosphere of a school, he suggests, should be safe

enough for dissent - like a family. Schools should "tolerate questioning, protest, dissent. . . . To live as a young person is to live with difficulty. In fact, all adults do well to remain sensitive to childhood's problems and difficulties" (p. 58).

Gerzon (1997) interprets the exodus of students from public schools to home schooling and private schooling as a result of public schools not including enough controversy into the curriculum. Avoiding controversy

has made education monolithic. Dissenting and minority viewpoints were marginalized and were either pushed underground into private schools, the swelling home-schooling movement, or other anti-public school advocacy organizations. The message from the education establishment to their customers all too often boiled down to: 'Love it or leave it.' Not surprisingly, many have left (Gerzon, 1997, p. 8).

### The Problem of Indoctrination

If controversial issues are at the core of the curriculum, what stance should the teacher take? Should teachers make known their opinions or keep them to themselves? It would be absurd for teachers to attempt to be neutral on every issue, but regarding most controversial issues, many, like Kupperman (1985), believe that it would be improper and offensive for the teacher to impose a particular point of view. Cole (1981) also believes that the teacher's role is not to expound his or her own ideas but to help children with their developmental needs.

Singh (1989) defines the practice of the teacher's deliberate withholding of her or his own opinion on controversial issues as "procedural neutrality." Advocates of procedural neutrality argue that it is the best means of avoiding indoctrination of students while still developing their rationality. Though some believe this approach to be the only responsible and professional stance to adopt, Singh points out that it is highly problematic and even unacceptable when teaching controversial moral issues relating to racial or sexual discrimination.

Is teaching a neutral or an intentional act? If it is intentional, what then is the teacher's role? Is it that of change agent, transmitter, facilitator, or another role?

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to seek to understand the specific problems that Christian school educators face as they address controversial issues in the moral education curriculum and to discover how some of these teachers choose to approach such issues. What are their attitudes about the role of controversy? How does this affect their instruction? Do they assume a neutral or intentional role? How do they avoid indoctrination, or do they avoid it? How do religious teachers define indoctrination? Do they struggle with integrity as they endeavor to commensurate their instructional duties with their religious convictions? What role do they believe controversial

issues play in students' moral development?

The following questions posed by Sockett (1992) were instrumental in guiding this study:

What do teachers do by way of moral education in their classrooms?

What are the ways teachers generally confront such issues as racial prejudice and sexism?

What do their strategies look like?

To what extent are teachers more or less influenced by their religious persuasions when they teach?

To what extent do state mandates or local community values inhibit moral training?

To what extent do teachers feel their integrity is compromised by any conflict between their world view in moral terms and the practices of the schools in which they work (p. 569)?

Interviews were conducted with Christian school educators with the purpose of understanding their perceptions and approaches as they struggle with controversial issues and their own religious convictions.

### Definitions for the Study

#### Moral Education

Throughout this study the term "moral education" will be used in a comprehensive or universal sense, meaning all educational efforts to develop character, morality, virtues, or values in students. The study assumes that moral education is pervasive throughout all educational

efforts.

### Controversial Issues

The following definition offered by Nichols and Nelson (1992) will be adopted for this study: "By controversial knowledge we mean knowledge about which there is acknowledged uncertainty and disagreement, though not necessarily acrimonious disagreement" (p. 224).

### Indoctrination

Whitehead's (1994) definition of indoctrination will function as the one for this study: Indoctrination is a system of manipulation of consciousness. This manipulation of consciousness takes the form of the inculcation and indoctrination of certain ideologies and values in young minds. The very terms 'inculcation' and 'indoctrination' suggest a system of teaching by frequent repetitions or admonitions meant to imbue students with a partisan and sectarian opinion, point of view, or principle. . . . (p. 15)

While communication is simply a transfer of information, indoctrination offers no option or alternative point of view (p. 61).

### Intentionality

Intentionality differs from indoctrination. It may encompass indoctrination at times, but in other instances the intention may be not to indoctrinate. Intentionality simply implies an aim, plan, or direction the teacher proposes to accomplish.

### Neutrality

Neutrality will refer to the act of a teacher to remain silent on controversial issues or to acknowledge all views on the issue as equally valuable with no attempt to sway students to a particular notion.

### Christian School Educators

For the purposes of this study, references to Christian school educators will apply to a select group of teachers serving in member schools of the Association of Christian Schools International in the state of Florida.

### **Organization of the Study**

Thus far, the problem of how controversial issues are dealt with in the moral education curriculum has been addressed. Chapter two will review the literature of major historical discourses and contemporary theories; special attention will be given to the influences of Dewey, Piaget, and Kohlberg, as well as select contemporary theories categorized as those for the purpose of transformation and those for transmission. Chapter three will outline the methodology used for gathering the data and for interpreting it. The interview results will be reported in chapter four, organizing the data thematically. Finally, chapter five will summarize the study, draw conclusions, and offer recommendations for further study.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*The teacher who embraces the difficult matter of moral choice is thrust face to face with students in a classroom. At some level she has already addressed a fundamental ethical question, for she has chosen the task of empowering others.*

Ayers, 1993, p. 21

Before exploring the perspectives and practices of Christian school educators regarding the role of controversial issues in the moral education curriculum, a context is needed. Historical and contemporary philosophical discourses abound with themes addressing what it means to be moral and how one becomes moral. Central to these arguments has been the issue of whether controversial issues have a place in moral education and, if they do, what is that role? The following literature review will trace the issue historically, philosophically, and practically.

#### Historical Theories Regarding the Role of

#### Controversial Issues in Moral Education

#### Early Philosophical Perspectives

Ancient Greek philosophers discussed what methods of education would best help a person to become moral (Guttek,

1997). The professional educators of the time, the Sophists, concentrated on developing clever debaters who were capable of persuading others. They claimed that what was considered morally right or wrong was up to the individual; therefore, there were no absolute standards of morality. In contrast, Socrates believed that moral truth could be known. Unlike the Sophists' debate method of teaching, he developed the Socratic method which used a series of questions, answers, and concrete examples with the goal of causing students to think critically about their opinions. Socrates was charged with corrupting the youth of Athens and was eventually sentenced to death.

Socrates's student, Plato, taught that virtue resulted from conforming to the ideas of the Absolute Mind. Therefore, it was not as valuable to discuss students' opinions as Socrates had. Plato was an opponent of the Sophists, viewing them as cultural relativists and criticizing them for accepting too many possible answers as representing the truth. Aristotle, Plato's pupil, believed that what made a person good was his or her ability to reason well.

Of course, there have been many perspectives regarding moral education and the role of controversy since ancient Greece, but perhaps the Puritan culture has had the most profound impact on American education. New England Puritans were not tolerant of any violation of their social norms. Pulliam and Van Patten (1995) list specific values that were ingrained in the Puritan culture:

postponing immediate gratification, neatness, punctuality, responsibility for one's own work, honesty, patriotism and loyalty, striving for personal achievement, competition, repression of aggression and overt sexual expression, respect for the rights and property of others, obeying rules and regulations (p. 36).

These values were considered absolute and were not debatable in Puritan schools. Indoctrination was an inherent component of Puritan education as expressed in the 1647 Old Deluder Satan Act establishing schools for the express purpose of teaching children how to read the Bible (Ryan & Kilpatrick, 1996).

The Puritan influence continued throughout the 1800s. Whereas the Puritans focused on transmitting Christian virtues, the public school movement of the 1830s shifted to the transmission of civic virtues (Fineman, 1994).

#### **The Twentieth Century: Problem Posing and the Progressives**

Early American education, then, approached controversial issues by transmitting a particular set of values, by indoctrinating Christian values or civic virtues. It was not common to introduce controversy and debate on values until the 20th century. Kidder (1991) attributes this phenomenon to the theories of Freud and Marx, "overlaid with a misconception of Einsteinian relativity that presumed there were no longer any universal principles" (p. 30).

Parker (1996) identifies Harold Rugg as one of the first American educators to encourage a curriculum focusing on turbulence. Rugg (1921) proposed a problem-centered curriculum to educate for democracy. He especially believed that the study of history should directly address current problems.

It was primarily John Dewey's (1910) publication of How We Think that greatly popularized and explicated the problem-solving process.

Learning actually begins when a difficulty or problem creates a barrier and prevents an activity from continuing. The problem must be genuine - not imposed from outside by the teacher - and must be defined by the learner. . . . The problem provides motivation, the driving force or interest required for thinking. (Dewey, in Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995, p. 232).

Highly influenced by the theories of Dewey, the Progressive Education Association promoted the idea of a problem posing curriculum during its 36-year existence from 1919 to 1955. In addition to encouraging the centrality of problems in education, it advanced the concept of the teacher's role as that of a guide, not a taskmaster. The association denounced many of the principles of traditional education, advocating an education for transformation - which is a theme that would be repeated later by critical theorists and those for an emancipatory education (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995).

Dewey and the progressives also recognized the

significance of moral education. As a pragmatist, he perceived values not as universal and absolute but as tentative, based on the community's definition and derived from human experience (Guttek, 1997). Although Dewey's theories have made a great impact on how conflict is dealt with in moral education, he has had and continues to have many critics of his pragmatic value system.

To those who saw Western civilization as derived from and resting on the universals of Judeo-Christian culture, Dewey's philosophy encouraged a dangerous relativism. Regardless of changing time and circumstances, there were certain truths that would be forever valid and certain values that would be universally applicable. For them, good and bad and right and wrong were not dependent on changing circumstances and situations but were the moral standards that schools would perennially convey to the young each generation (Guttek, 1997, p. 327).

George Knight (1989), a Christian school advocate, voices the concern that Dewey's pragmatic values are too relativistic, making humanity responsible for truth and removing foundational absolute values on which society needs to lean. His argument is against a values system based upon defining the ethically good as that which works.

Despite the criticism of his contemporaries and later detractors, Dewey's theory of an education for democracy continues to set the pace for how controversy is dealt with

in moral education curriculum.

**Making Sense of Controversy: Piaget and the Constructivists**

Jean Piaget (1965), better known for his stage theory of cognitive development, presented a theory for moral reasoning which later was expanded upon by Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan. Piaget's theory proposes that young children, or any people whose moral reasoning has not completely developed, are bound in their moral reasoning by their reverence for rules as fixed and uncompromising and as having been passed down by an authority figure. Older children, those of approximately eleven years of age or older, are perceived as seeing rules as conditional, flexible, and changeable by the children themselves. These two stages Piaget referred to respectively as moral realism and moral relativism. Moral realism is the condition of regarding right and wrong as absolute, leaving no room for discussion of controversy. Moral relativism, on the other hand, is an awareness of multiple perspectives of right and wrong.

Piaget's theory is compatible with Dewey's in that it recognizes the significance of society in developing an understanding of morality. In The Moral Judgment of the Child, Piaget (1965) draws from Durkheim in the discussion of society's role.

Society, according to Durkheim's followers, is the only source of morality (p. 327).

Each individual expresses the common morality in his own way; each understands it, envisages it from a

different angle; perhaps no one mind is completely adequate to the morality of its own time (Durkheim, in Piaget, 1965, p. 350).

There can be no complete moral autonomy except by cooperation (Piaget, 1965, p. 353).

Just as the priest is the interpreter of God, so he - the teacher - is the interpreter of the great moral ideas of his time and his country (Durkheim, in Piaget, 1965, p. 358).

The assumption that autonomous individuals must interact with other members of society to construct a common morality for a particular time and place implies that controversial issues are to be welcomed in the process of moral development. Therefore, the same critics of Dewey's relativism reject Piaget's notion that values are to be constructed by individual students based upon their interaction with society.

A recent Piagetian constructivist, Alfie Kohn, set off a series of intense responses to his Phi Delta Kappan article "How Not to Teach Values: A Critical Look at Character Education" (1997). In this article, he sharply criticizes the current character education movement for neglecting to permit students

to reflect on complex issues, to recast them in light of their own experiences and questions, to figure out for themselves - and with one another - what kind of person one ought to be, which traditions are worth

keeping, and how to proceed when two basic values seem to be in conflict (p. 435).

One year after the publication of Kohn's controversial article, he responded to the onslaught of negative reviews written about it. His argument was then stated even more forcefully than it had been before. This time he emphasized the values of skepticism over obedience, construction of values over their internalization, and intrinsic control over extrinsic control. He posited that the role of the student should be that of a legislator - a moral philosopher (Kohn, 1998).

In Piaget's theory, as in Dewey's, controversial issues are welcome as a means to assist in the development or construction of personal value systems and moral thinking. It was not, however, Piaget's name that eventually became popularly connected with the idea of intentionally introducing controversial moral issues into the curriculum. It was Lawrence Kohlberg, expanding Piaget's theory, who became permanently associated with the practice of asking students to discuss moral dilemmas, considering multiple options to them and why one would choose a particular option.

### **Kohlberg's Influence**

Until the late 1950s and early 1960s, many textbooks emphasized the teaching of specific value traits (Risinger, 1992). Smith (1989) perceives that the public schools began to neglect the responsibility of moral education by the 1960s for fear of accusations of indoctrination or



imposition of religion; thereby, "many children of the '60s and '70s grew up believing that there are no universal values" (p. 32). During the 1960s, enrollment in college ethics courses reduced drastically until applied ethics courses became popular in the late '60s in which moral delimmias were commonly addressed (Sommers, 1993). The moral dilemma method of ethics instruction was popularized by the moral developmental stage theory of Lawrence Kohlberg and later spawned the controversial values clarification curriculum. Consequently, Kohlberg is credited by some as having provided educators with a tool for moral instruction while others accuse him of destroying the foundation of moral guidance in schools.

Kohlberg was a constructivist, building on Piaget's moral stage theory. Sockett (1992) also identifies Kohlberg as a phenomonologist and a structuralist. As a phenomonologist, Kohlberg concentrated on lived experience as it is interpreted by the actor; "the moral quality of the behavior is determined by the interpretation" (p. 548). As a structuralist, he followed Piaget's concern with the form of the actor's thinking rather than its content.

The choice endorsed by a subject - steal, don't steal - is called the content of his moral judgment in the situation. His reasoning about the choice defines the structure of his moral judgment. This reasoning centers on the following ten universal moral values or issues of concern to persons in these moral dilemmas:

punishment, property, roles and concerns of affection, roles and concerns of authority, law, life, liberty, distributive justice, truth, and sex (Kohlberg, 1976, pp. 204-205).

Kohlberg appealed to the rational tradition of Immanuel Kant, claiming that moral individuals make judgments based on universal principles. He distinguished principles from rules in that rules are the grounds for conventional morality, prescriptions for moral action. Principles, then, are universal guides such as Kant's categorical imperative to respect all humanity (Kohlberg, 1976).

**Moral reasoning and moral dilemmas.** Kohlberg (1976) identified three major approaches to moral education: developmental, character education, and values clarification. He asserted that the developmental approach avoided problems inherent in character education and values clarification. The chief problem in character education was its indoctrinative imposition of the teacher's values on the child, a "bag of virtues" approach (p. 209). Values clarification, though seen as having been popularized by Kohlberg, was criticized by him for making self-awareness of one's values an end in itself. "If this program is systematically followed, students will themselves become relativists, believing there is no 'right' moral answer" (p. 210).

The developmental, or moral dilemma, approach is similar to values clarification in that it too opposes

indoctrination and utilizes Socratic peer discussions of value dilemmas. The crucial difference, Kohlberg (1976) noted, was in the purpose for doing so. The aim of the developmental approach is to stimulate movement to the next stage of moral reasoning. He explored change in moral judgment by using intense discussion among peers in a classroom setting. His intent was to expose children to judgments one stage above their own.

Using the moral dilemma method, some investigators have found that 63% of children do move up one stage (Singh, 1989). Others found that a variable in the success of the moral dilemma approach is whether teachers communicate their own moral reactions (Perry, 1996); students advanced the most in classrooms with teachers who made public their own responses to questions under debate and who permitted values to be judged as acceptable or unacceptable.

Despite the apparent success of the moral dilemma approach to moral instruction, many educators and parents oppose it because of its neutral approach to controversial issues (Herbert, 1996). Kilpatrick (1992), a character education proponent and author of widely-read Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong, points out that Kohlberg himself retracted his support of the neutral dilemma method:

In 1978, writing in The Humanist, Kohlberg said: 'The educator must be a socializer, teaching value content

and behavior, and not only a Socratic or Rogerian process-facilitator of development. . . . I no longer hold these negative views of indoctrinative moral education and I believe that the concepts guiding moral education must be partly 'indoctrinative.' This is true, by necessity, in a world in which children engage in stealing, cheating and aggression.' (p. 92)

**Values clarification.** Although commonly attributed to Kohlberg, values clarification was actually conceived by psychologist Louis Rath and his colleagues in their 1966 book Values and Teaching (Smith, 1989). The quick popularity of the approach was due chiefly to the societal milieu to which it was introduced (Sockett, 1992). The dynamic youth culture of the 1960s openly challenged traditional establishments and practices. Controversies - such as the Vietnam protests, the feminist movement, and the sexual revolution - were broadcast over the media and became the topics of typical conversation as had never been before. "All society seemed embroiled in unresolved disputes" (Sockett, 1992, p. 545). Values clarification, then, matched the turmoil of the times in the procedures it devised for assisting children to sort out what they valued.

The process of values clarification instruction involves the teacher facilitating experiences which bring students to choosing their own values, prizing them, and acting on their chosen values. In order to have a choice, there must be alternatives presented in a neutral fashion

as not to coerce students into choosing values that they do not truly appreciate. Teachers benefitted from the practice of neutrality by being able to resist parental criticism of indoctrinating their children on social issues; the children were choosing for themselves and responsibility for their choices could not be placed on the teachers (Sockett, 1992).

Values clarification is rarely practiced today, yet it remains a target of much criticism - especially from conservative character educators who promote an indoctrinative approach (Herbert, 1996; Kohn, 1997).

**Critics of moral reasoning and values clarification.**

Since the conservative resurgence of the 1980s, there has been much criticism of approaches that rely on discussion of controversial issues and on neutrality on the part of the teacher. Attacks have targeted Kohlberg's moral dilemma approach and values clarification.

According to Sommers (1993), there are serious flaws with using moral dilemmas in hopes of developing character in students. The characters in moral dilemmas lack moral personality, existing outside of typical real-life situations. They are not obviously heroes or villains, and there is no obvious right or wrong, vice or virtue. Dilemma ethics is criticized as having minimized "basic ethics" or reliance on "plain moral facts" (Sommers, 1993, p. 11).

Citing Plato for support, Kilpatrick (1992) maintains

that moral delimitations are not age-appropriate for children. "Plato maintained that [the Socratic method] was to be reserved for mature men over the age of thirty. One great precaution is not to let [students] taste of arguments while they are young - the danger being that they would develop a taste for arguments rather than a taste for truth" (Kilpatrick, 1992, pp. 88-89).

The harshest criticism from conservatives about moral education has been reserved for the values clarification (VC) process. Some of the major concerns are as follows:

Values become mere preferences.

VC is a form of client-centered therapy derived from Carl Rogers.

Because religion is usually taught to children and not chosen by them, it is ruled out as a value (Sockett, 1992).

Teachers maintain a passive, neutral position which leads students to believe that there is no right or wrong (Smith, 1989).

Children are led to believe that their individual opinions of what is right or wrong are satisfactory. There is no moral guideline for conduct or thought (Nelson, Carlson, & Polonsky, 1996).

Students may harm themselves in their search for their own values (Sommers, 1993).

VC teaches that there are no absolutes.

The individual becomes the source for all ethical wisdom (Noebel, 1991).

**Select Contemporary Theories Regarding  
the Role of Controversial Issues in Moral Education**

In contemporary literature, the definition of what constitutes a moral person continues to be a controversial matter. Within the issue of moral education lies the more specific question of how or whether teachers should use controversial issues. Several contemporary theories address the argument, some more directly than others. This section of the literature review has divided the contemporary theories into two categories: those for the purpose of transformation and those for the purpose of transmission.

**Theories for Transformation**

Theories for transformation are those that find their roots in the "free, open, child-centered, humanistic, and socially oriented movement" (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995). They are grounded in the work of John Dewey, A.S. Neill, the social reconstructionists, and humanist-existential authors. Transformation theorists stress critique (Parker, 1996) and oppose transmission approaches because they are "alarmed at what they see as a wave of simplistic nostalgia gaining force in the country. In their view, it is a bullying reformation designed to mold moral automatons incapable of genuine judgment or citizenship" (Herbert, 1996). Select transformational theories will include postmodernism, multiculturalism, and critical pedagogy.

**Postmodern educational theory.** Postmodernism has been

described as an antimodernist position - deconstructing and rejecting modern values such as universal truths (Burbules & Rice, 1991; Elkind, 1997). It is significant to the present study in that postmodern discourse addresses issues of morality, indoctrination, controversy, and dialogue across differences.

There is no single morality according to postmodernists (Burbules & Rice, 1991). The term "metanarrative" is used by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1992), a leading postmodern theorist, to represent hegemonic moral frameworks which are used as instruments to manipulate and to control marginalized social groups. Therefore, any educational program established for the purpose of indoctrinating a particular moral code would be rejected by postmodern theorists.

While explicating Lyotard's perspective that all pedagogy equates to oppression, Marshall (1995) points out that Lyotard advocated "apedagogy" (p. 186) - a nonmanipulative, reciprocal relationship of mutuality between teacher and student. Any form of pedagogy is perceived as restrictive, "a ploy to discourage further investigation or to allow investigation only on one's terms" (Burbules & Rice, 1991, p. 394).

Acknowledging that this position might incite a fear of instability in the minds of traditionalists, Doll (1993) assures skeptics that the collapse of traditional values leads to a new kind of order, not necessarily disruptive in nature, but chaotic, nevertheless. Postmodernism embraces



chaos in its form of complexity theory, and, in so doing, invites controversy into the curriculum: "There needs to be just enough perturbation, disturbance, disequilibrium, or dissipation built in so that self-organization will be encouraged" (Doll, 1993, p. 284). Reminiscent of Piaget, Doll sees disequilibrium as a requirement for the making of meaning. "The curriculum needs . . . to be filled with enough ambiguity, challenge, and perturbation to invite the learner to enter into dialogue with [it]" (p. 287).

Dialogue across differences is a prominent concept in postmodern educational theory. The purpose of dialogue in a postmodern framework is not to eliminate differences or to acquire Truth, but to understand a multiplicity of voices in an effort to enhance a sense of community, personal development, and moral conduct (Burbules & Rice, 1991). The success of dialogue across differences depends on the following communicative virtues as identified by Burbules and Rice (1991):

tolerance, patience, respect for differences, a willingness to listen, the inclination to admit that one may be mistaken, the ability to reinterpret or translate one's own concerns in a way that makes them comprehensible to others, the self-imposition of restraint in order that others may 'have a turn' to speak, and the disposition to express one's self honestly and sincerely (p. 411).

Perhaps the strongest critics of the postmodern

worldview are Christian fundamentalists. Christian authors (Colson, 1994; Shin, 1994; Tapia, 1994) decry postmodern thought as detrimental to spiritual, political, and social institutions. Shin (1994) fears that the relativism promoted by postmodernism may invite despotic dictatorships, political oppression, moral decline, and social disintegration. Colson's (1994) greatest fear is that Christianity's ability to effectively proselytize may be diminished. "If there is no truth, then we cannot persuade one another by rational arguments. All that is left is power: Whatever group has the most power imposes its opinions on everyone else. . . . All principles are preferences - and only preferences" (p. 80). While Tapia (1994) acknowledges these concerns, he notes that the Christian community can enhance its proselytizing efforts by adapting its evangelistic methods to fit a postmodern social mind. He challenges churches to stop telling people what to believe, but rather to "create a discussion with provocative questions that will engage them" (p. 21). Overall, the postmodern and the fundamentalist-Christian worldviews appear to be incommensurable. German contemporary critical theorist Jurgen Habermas (in Taylor, 1994) stresses the incommensurability of the fundamentalist Christianity and postmodern thought: "In multicultural societies, the national constitution can tolerate only forms of life articulated within the medium of . . . non-fundamentalist traditions" (p. 133).

**Multicultural education.** The discourse of

multiculturalism is relevant to the present study in that it addresses cultural and social conflict and how these might be dealt with in the moral education curriculum. The aim of multicultural education is to "create in pupils a respect for the rights and feelings of others and to develop a sense of personal morality which takes into account the concern for others" (Singh, 1989, p. 234). It does not avoid or minimize cultural conflict but openly attends to clashes in current events, identifying sources of conflict and suggesting positive solutions (Biehler & Snowman, 1997).

Multiculturalism emerged in the United States as a continuation of the racial debates and protests of the 1960s (Martusewicz & Reynolds, 1994). African-Americans in particular began to reject the notion that they must conform to "white" ways of thinking, knowing, and valuing. Molefi Kete Asante, leader of the Afrocentric education movement, explained that pedagogy must change for African-Americans because they think differently than Europeans do (in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). Concerns regarding curriculum content confronted the dominance of Eurocentric viewpoints in social studies texts and the one-sided victor's perspective in history (Willis, 1993). As the feminist movement advanced during the 1970s, multiculturalism was perceived as an alternative to patriarchal principles in schools and society (Giroux, 1992).

More is written about the process and attitude necessary for a successful multicultural curriculum than about what content is required. Bhikhu Parekh sees multicultural education as (1) permitting "communities" their own spaces in which to grow at their own pace, (2) creating spaces for these communities to interact, and (3) creating a "consensual culture" in which each community recognizes its own identity (in Giroux, 1992). Feminist author bell hooks also refers to the building of "community" in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor (1994). A pervasive theme throughout the literature is the requirement of dialogue: "A multicultural perspective requires dialogue between people with different points of view, acknowledgment of different experiences, and respect for diverse opinions. It creates space for alternative voices, not just on the periphery but in the center" (Singer, 1994, p. 286).

Critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is yet another model of transformational education. It too espouses the idea that controversy should be central to the curriculum. Reminiscent of John Dewey, critical pedagogy promotes problem posing, discussions revolving around issues drawn from learners' real-life experiences. The central tenant is that education has value only insofar as it helps students liberate themselves from the social conditions that oppress them (Peyton & Crandall, 1995).

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has denounced traditional education as an imposition of one man's choice

upon another (1970b). He criticizes education for having as its primary aim to reproduce the dominant ideology rather than to generate a critical consciousness (Freire, 1973; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Freire (1973) indicates the inadequacy of traditional education in that it does not permit an open exchange of ideas, debate or discussion of themes; rather, it dictates and lectures to students, and - instead of working *with* them - it works *on* them.

Behaviorism, the dominant model for traditional teaching, is repudiated by Freire (1970a) because it negates men as machines and fails to acknowledge the dialectic relationship between individuals and the world. The act of memorizing is valued over that of knowing, resulting in a sterile, bureaucratic operation.

Purpel and Shapiro (1995) also criticize behaviorism. They assert that behaviorism causes the student-teacher relationship to become manipulative. It "attempts to instill in the young an attitude of passivity and unthinking docility" (p. 102). Democracy relies upon the engagement of citizens as they act upon their opinion. Yet, our educational system denies students opportunities to express their opinions or to act on them. John Goodlad's research (in Shor, 1992) showed that barely 5% of instructional time in most schools is designed to create students' anticipation of needing to respond; not even 1% required some kind of open response involving reasoning or even an opinion from students. If this is the case, then

whose opinions occupy the remaining 99% of school time, and what does this communicate to students?

The term "banking system of education" was introduced by Freire in his 1970 book Pedagogy of the Oppressed. The banking approach to learning is rooted in the notion that students consume information as it is fed to them by the instructor. Students are then expected to memorize and store what was fed to them. The student's role in the banking system is that of a passive consumer rather than an active participant. There is little or no responsibility on the student's part to contribute to learning in the classroom. Furthermore, the banking system assumes a dichotomy between individuals and the world. It separates them from interacting with the world or with others. As an alternative to "banking pedagogy," Freire presented a "problem-posing" curriculum whereby students become aware of problems they encounter and how they might respond to these problems. Community, reflection, and conscientization are vital elements in Freire's teaching methodology. According to author and professor Gloria Watkins, Freire builds a sense of community among his students by creating an atmosphere of shared commitment and by valuing each individual voice (hooks, 1994). This produces a climate of openness and intellectual rigor.

Reflection is another critical component of Freire's pedagogy. Students are encouraged to unite theory with practice to create a new social order (Freire, 1970b). Freire emphasizes that true reflection always leads to

action. He uses the term "praxis" to refer to this type of reflection. Praxis requires both reflection and action on the part of the learner. Shor (1992) refers to this as "reflexive teaching" whereby the teacher re-presents to the students what they have said so that they then can reflect further and more deeply on those thoughts.

In addition to community and reflection, Freire values conscientization. Conscientization is a "process in which people acting as knowing subjects - not as recipients - achieve a deepening awareness of their socio-cultural reality, how it shapes their lives, and how they can transform that reality" (Freire, 1970a, p. 27). In order for conscientization to exist, dehumanizing structures in society must be denounced. Otherwise, these oppressive structures will continue to act upon individuals as objects, rendering them powerless. Conscientization is an awareness that people themselves can be knowers and actors as they solve their own problems. Reliance on others to solve those problems is dehumanizing and oppressive.

Some educational environments may claim to offer students choice and voice, but in reality it is an illusion. Somehow students are fooled to believe that they are deciding and being heard when they are actually being manipulated; others are doing the thinking and deciding for them. Freire (1973) equates this manipulative illusion to an act of violence. Freire (1970a, 1970b) refers to this type of an environment as a "culture of silence," where

individuals are prohibited from creatively participating in societal transformation. He parallels the position of students in this type of environment with that of colonies under European imperialism. Colonization instituted a "culture of silence" whereby colonies were mere objects not to be heard but to be used. However, "every human being, no matter how 'ignorant' or submerged in the 'culture of silence' he may be, is capable of looking critically at his world in a dialogical encounter with others" (1970b, p. 13).

**Conclusion.** Many of the transformational curriculum theorists cross discourse lines. Their emphases may be different, but their commonalities lie in their rejection of indoctrination as a means of moral education. They define morality less in terms of prescriptive guidelines for living and more in the context of communication and understanding diversity. Controversy in the curriculum is seen as an opportunity to address issues of oppression and marginalization and to create ways for the disenfranchised to be emancipated.

#### **Theories for Transmission**

While theories for transformation stress critique, transmission theorists stress socialization and oppose the transformation approaches as the cause of today's moral confusion (Parker, 1996). They call for the "rediscovery of firmness, regimentation, deference and piety to counter our culture's decline" (Herbert, 1996). Jacques Barzun (in Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995) has said, "Nonsense is at the



heart of those proposals that would replace definable subject matter with vague activities copied from life or with courses organized around problems or attitudes" (p. 180). Select theories for transmission will include literature from character education and the Christian school movement.

Character education. In his 1996 state of the union address, President Clinton urged American schools to perform character education (Ryan and Kilpatrick, 1996). He was joined in his effort by many who usually find themselves on opposing sides of political, social, and religious issues. Supporters of character education are motivated by a common concern with the increase in juvenile crime rates, and they are strengthened by statistics reporting reduced pregnancy and dropout rates, along with fewer fights and suspensions, after character education programs have taken effect (Stephens, 1997).

The character education movement started during the 1980s conservative political resurgence, reacting to efforts in moral education that were contrary to conservative ideals. By the early 1990s, a large number of states passed legislation requiring the implementation of a prescriptive character education curriculum (Ryan, 1996). Fueling the movement were several popular authors whose works gained national attention. Two of the most outstanding were William Kilpatrick's (1992) Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong and William Bennett's (1993) The Book of Virtues which appeared on The New York Times

best-sellers list for sixty-two straight weeks (Ryan, 1996).

Bennett (1993) addresses the issues of moral education and the role of controversial issues. He defines moral education as "the training of heart and mind toward the good. . . . It involves rules and precepts - the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of life with others - as well as explicit instruction, exhortation, and training" (p. 11). The formation of character is a prior activity, he claims, to the discussion of difficult ethical controversies like nuclear war, abortion, creationism, or euthanasia. Bennett recommends that tough controversial issues such as the ones listed above not be dealt with until senior high school or after.

Ryan and Cooper (1998) define character education as "the effort to help the young acquire a moral compass - that is, a sense of right and wrong and the enduring habits necessary to live a good life. [It] involves helping the child to know the good, love the good, and do the good" (p. 422). The movement does not deny accusations that it is indoctrinative in nature, rather it embraces indoctrination of values as one of its chief methods (Ryan, 1996).

In describing the contemporary character education movement, Ryan (1996) outlines five things that it is not: (1) it is not the teaching of students about various views currently held on unsettled social and political topics; (2) it is not particularly concerned with stages of

cognitive moral development; (3) it is not moral reasoning; (4) it is not the same as the democratic schools movement; and (5) it is not the subject of a special course or class. These distinctions are made to differentiate themselves from programs claiming to be character education but not prescribing the same values that conservative character educators teach. One such curriculum is called Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO). FHAO fosters critical analysis of controversial issues to educate students about the meaning of human dignity, morality, law, citizenship, and human behavior. Conservative groups, such as Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, campaigned against FHAO as a promoter of moral relativism (Greene, 1996).

Character educators are disturbed that programs such as FHAO are so concerned with social morality that they ignore private morality altogether (Sommers, 1993). Kilpatrick (1992) identified curricula relying upon decision making, moral reasoning, dilemma methods, or values clarification as fads which not only fail to encourage virtuous behavior but actively undermine it, "leaving children morally confused and adrift" (p. 15). "The proper emphasis at the outset is to teach the . . . basic qualities of honesty and hard work and decency, justice, caring, loyalty, friendship and so on. And to save other issues for later on down the road" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 38). Ryan (1996) does not disregard moral reasoning altogether but fears that if it stands alone, it will fail to bring students into moral maturity.

One of the most common challenges to prescriptive character education programs is in deciding which values or whose values will be indoctrinated. The difficulty of this task is compounded in the United States where there is such diversity of cultural backgrounds and where freedom of thought and expression are encouraged. Ryan and Cooper (1998) attempt to resolve this issue by recommending the teaching of civic virtues necessary for life in a democratic country: respect for the rights of others, courage, tolerance, kindness, and concern for the underprivileged. Smith (1989) addresses the problem by offering the Constitution as the source for core values: compassion, courtesy, freedom of thought and action, honesty, human worth and dignity, respect for others' rights, responsible citizenship, and tolerance. C.S. Lewis (1947) offers what he calls a tao of moral principles, having existed in all enduring civilizations.

It is the Nature, it is the Way, the road. It is the Way which things everlastingly emerge, stillly and tranquilly, into space and time. It is always the Way which every man [sic] should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar. . . . This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Christian, and Oriental alike, I shall henceforth refer to . . . as 'the Tao' (pp. 28-29).

From Lewis's Tao emerges a collection of principles

that he bases on multicultural wisdom: human kindness, loyalty to parents, responsibility to posterity, rights and responsibilities of marriage, honesty, assistance to the less fortunate, and property rights (Lewis, 1947).

In an attempt to address the problem of defining universal virtues, a group of educators and philosophers met in the mountains of Colorado in 1992 to produce what character educators call the Aspen Declaration. It listed six core elements of character that should be inculcated by all "youth-influencing institutions:" trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Fineman, 1994, p. 30). An overwhelming majority of Americans, regardless of religion, class, or racial background, support the teaching of such universal values (Etzioni, 1998; Ryan & Cooper, 1998).

Some are troubled that the character education movement is simply a cloak for religion to be taught in public schools (Ryan & Kilpatrick, 1996). Major spokespersons for the character education movement are also outspoken about their religious faith. While there are Protestant and Jewish proponents, the most prominent authors in the movement are Roman Catholic - William Bennett, William Kilpatrick, Thomas Lickona, and Kevin Ryan (Lickona, 1998). Although they make no attempts to hide their religious affiliation, they make it clear that religion is not a necessary element of character education programs. This brings criticism from others in the religious community who believe that "character education

without the worship of God is worthless" (Fineman, 1994, p. 30).

The role of controversy is not completely eliminated in the discourse of character educators. Greer (1998) recommends that "students with other backgrounds should be drawn out to discuss virtues in their cultures" but only after a foundation of "the best that Western thought has provided" has been established (p. 46). In rare circumstances when controversial issues are addressed only in the secondary curriculum, Cage (1997) suggests that students be engaged in serious research and activities involving speakers with opposing viewpoints. "If all controversy is taken out of the curriculum, it doesn't prepare kids to deal with the complex ethical questions that all of us face as adults" (Cage, 1997, p. 16).

Character education uses pedagogical practices that resemble Ralph Tyler's (1949) rationale and Skinnerian behaviorism. Wynn (1998) outlines steps in developing a character education curriculum that clearly reflect the influence of Tyler and Skinner:

- (1) Identify and list the virtues and relevant behavior traits.
- (2) Establish those virtues and traits as goals for students and faculty.
- (3) Provide occasions for students to practice traits and virtues.
- (4) Praise students for desirable behavior.

(5) Enforce unpleasant consequences for undesirable traits.

(6) Integrate these activities through curriculum and ceremonies.

(7) Develop faculty who support such policies (p. 444).

Competition is evident in the implementation of character education programs. Students compete among themselves individually to receive recognition for having displayed particular virtues, and classrooms compete for awards for displaying the most patriotism, service, etc. These incentives are woven throughout programs integrating assertive discipline techniques and behavior modification (Smith, 1989).

If character education seems to rely heavily on methods for transmission, Wynne (1998) makes no apologies for that. He clarifies that character educators intend such words as "instill in, transmit to, and habit formation" (p. 444) to describe the process of character development and mature moral decision making. And Perry Glanzer (1998), Education Policy Analyst for James Dobson's Focus on the Family, agrees that behavioral methodologies are necessary in character education: "In our moral lives we cannot think long and critically about every action. Most of our behavior stems from habit. It is those habits of behavior that we need to develop if we are to sustain our moral lives in the flurry of life" (p. 438). Glanzer (1998), unlike most character education proponents, does

address diversity within communities and the need for character education programs to acknowledge and to respond to this diversity. His suggestion is that communities allow their diverse visions of virtue to be critiqued by students in hopes that as they explore various perspectives, they will discard elements of their own worldviews for the truth they discover.

Other methods implemented in character education include the following: modeling virtuous behavior, studying heroes and heroines in literature and history, directly studying the virtues themselves, providing community service, and cultivating school rituals (Ryan & Cooper, 1998). Because values issues permeate all subject matter, character education curriculum programs are not intended to be taught as separate ethics courses but are designed to be integrated in all subjects, especially history and literature (Ryan & Cooper, 1998). Engaging students in discussion is a method of instruction recommended by the Character Education Institute. Quoting an Institute document, Kohn (1997) criticizes the directions to teachers regarding how they should lead discussions:

Since the lessons have been designed to logically guide the students to the right answers, the teacher should allow the students to draw their own conclusions. However, if the students draw the wrong conclusion, the teacher is instructed to tell them why



their conclusion is wrong. (p. 433-434).

Critics of Character Education are concerned for a number of reasons. Nelson, Carlson, and Polonsky (1996) see that character education is too closely tied with the back-to-basics movement, both movements relying much too heavily on indoctrination and regurgitation of one supposedly right set of knowledge, and both devaluing diversity and independence as they pursue conformity and obedience. There are also fears that character education programs have political intentions. While most of the values promoted are unobjectionable, some of them conjure up notions that political conservatism is actually the order of the day. Kohn (1997) questions the actual motive behind stressing virtues such as respect, responsibility, and citizenship. Both the political left and right have their concerns about character education. Organizations like Concerned Women for America and Citizens for Excellence in Education display hostility toward character education because they believe that public education cannot be trusted with moral issues (Rosenblatt, 1995). These people believe that if parents want attention to moral values, they ought to put their children in private school (Ryan & Cooper, 1998).

Christian school philosophy. Moral education is a major pillar in the philosophic foundation of Christian schools, pervading every aspect of the curriculum (Knight, 1989). As Christian school literature addresses moral education, it also discusses moral reasoning,

indoctrination, and the role of controversial issues in the Christian school curriculum.

According to Paul Kienel (1986), a prominent figure in the contemporary Christian school movement, the objectives of moral education in the Christian school are "to develop the mind of Christ toward godliness and sin, to teach the students how to overcome sin, and to encourage the development of self-discipline and responsibility in the student based on respect for and submission to God and all other authority" (p. 75). Whereas other worldviews develop values from nature, society, or the individual, the Christian school's source of values is the Bible (Knight, 1989).

David Noebel (1991), a Christian philosopher, expounds on the worldview that is the basis for Christian school ethics. He confronts moral reasoning as ethical relativism where "no absolute moral code exists, and therefore man [sic] must adjust his ethical standards in each situation according to his own judgments" (p. 200). Noebel is concerned that such a system of relativism produces intolerance towards those who do espouse some form of absolute ethical standard such as the Bible and that it ignores the realization that when students are asked to make a moral judgment, they in essence are always being asked to refer to some standard on which to base their judgments. "Without a standard, there could be no justice; without an ethical absolute, there could be no morality"

(p. 240). In response to the idea that Martin Luther King, Jr., Ghandi, and other civil rights leaders may have developed a new morality by their ethical judgments, Noebel quotes C.S. Lewis who wrote that "The human mind has no more power of inventing a new moral value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in" (in Noebel, 1991, p. 239).

Without an absolute standard, Christian school advocates do not believe that it is possible for students successfully to make moral judgments.

If there is no absolute moral standard, then one cannot say in a final sense that anything is right or wrong. By absolute we mean that which always applies, that which must be an absolute if there are to be real values. If there is no absolute beyond man's ideas, then there is no final appeal to judge between individuals and groups whose moral judgments conflict. We are merely left with conflicting opinions" (Schaeffer, 1976, p. 145).

Is there no place at all, then, for relativism in the Christian worldview of ethics? Knight (1989) teaches a "limited relativism" (p. 174) where relativism is limited by laws, allowing for "relativity in different situations, historical periods, and cultures while maintaining the absolute elements of God's unchanging character and moral law" (p. 175).

Critics of Christian education argue that the teaching of absolute truth is indoctrination and is an illustration

of the extent to which Christian schools are closed to intellectual dialogue and pursuits. Recently, however, Christian school authors have begun to respond to this charge while not apologizing for their indoctrinative approaches. Black (1995) writes of the need to teach students to discern truth. Braley (1995) challenges Christian school teachers to go beyond the facts and concepts to helping students begin to think and reason independently. Guillermin and Beck (1995) differentiate Christian ethical reasoning from values clarification: Christian ethical reasoning is teaching students to think with truth as a goal while values clarification does not teach students how to think but to base moral decisions on feelings rather than truth.

"God commands that we indoctrinate our children" (Braley, 1986, p. 106), writes one Christian school administrator before he goes on to explain that our methods of indoctrination should not rely too heavily upon the "pouring-in" approaches of lecture and drill which tend to instill values only for materialistic purposes. Dependency upon the teacher as a disseminator of God's truth is an acceptable role until students "mature in their knowledge of Biblical morality, [when] they can make moral judgments independent of their teachers" (Gangel, 1986).

There is not much literature available on the role of controversial issues in the Christian school curriculum. Most references to controversial issues are similar to

those of the Character education discourse which places them in the context of the values clarification debate. Christians historically have fought the inclusion of controversial issues in the public schools, and the Christian schools promote themselves as an educational environment in which controversial issues are left to the family. Christian parents have brought suit against public schools in various parts of the country asking that their children not be required to participate in discussions involving controversial issues (Eisner, 1992; Greene, 1996; Venezky, 1992). Phyllis Shlafly, president of politically conservative activist group Eagle Forum, argued in her popular book Child Abuse in the Classroom that "requiring students to think about controversial, conflictual subject matter is not in the best interests of adolescents" (in Greene, 1996, p. 216).

### Conclusion

A review of contemporary discourse evidences a distinct difference in the role of controversial issues between theories that stress transformation and those that stress transmission. Transformational theories embrace controversy as a means to promote critical thinking and action while theories for transmission either give controversy a minor role or none at all. When transmission theorists do address controversy, it is usually with the approach that the authority figure has a fixed answer that the student is expected to accept.

## Approaches to Dealing with Controversy

### Attitudes

Studies conducted to discover attitudes and practices of teachers as they deal with controversy express varying results. Franklin (1972) questioned 1,370 teachers of which the majority responded that they were not willing to engage in discussion of conflict in the classroom. Of the 337 teachers that Engel (1993) surveyed, 75% reported spending up to 25% of classroom time discussing issues such as abortion, abuse, drugs, gangs, racism, suicide, and teen sex; issues they would not discuss with students, however, included controversy over religion and school policy. Especially regarding sex education, teachers were much less supportive of programs that deal with such controversial issues as homosexuality and safe sex practices (Sockett, 1992). There are two primary fears that teachers have reported as keeping them from addressing controversial issues in classroom discussions. The first is the fear that young students will not be able to understand the more serious controversies of life. The second is that young people might accept wrong beliefs if they open their minds to new ideas (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968). In their evaluation of these fears, Hunt and Metcalf (1968) respond that

young minds are actually more likely than adult minds to profit from reflective study of deeply controversial issues. If postponed until adulthood, such study never is likely to occur (p. 112).

The fear that students will accept wrong beliefs, they claim, is actually only a fear that they will open their minds to different ideas. "The aim of reflection is never to destroy a belief, but to evaluate it in light of the best evidence and logic" (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968).

Teachers who advocated an issues-centered approach to education were asked to list its defining characteristics. The five most common characteristics mentioned were as follows: use of reflective questions, use of open-ended questions, emphasis on examination of social practices, use of issues reflecting both personal and public components, and centering the curriculum on the diversity of opinions (Schott, 1996).

A study of 128 African-American students (Nicholls, Nelson, & Gleaves, 1995) asked them to compare collaborative inquiry about controversial topics with individual memorization of noncontroversial facts. Younger students saw the remembering of facts as slightly fairer than collaborative inquiry about controversial matters. As grade level increased, so did tendency to see collaborative inquiry as fairer. By middle school, the preference for collaborative inquiry into controversial topics was especially strong.

The Social Science Education Consortium (1996) encourages preservice teachers to prepare how they will deal with controversy, especially in the history curriculum. Geise (1996) and Hill (1996), both authors connected with the Consortium, see advantages to students

when controversy is intentionally interjected into the curriculum.

Teaching that emphasizes facts and the textbook puts students in a passive role and conveys the impression that history is a settled story. The avoidance of controversy makes the story told rather unreal, if not downright suspect (Geise, 1996, p. 302).

The investigation of issues can motivate learners; humans are often intrigued by conflict and diverse interpretations and points of view. When subject matter is framed by real-world issues and real data, the student may see its relevance and be less inclined to ask: Why are we studying this? (Hill, 1996, p. 263).

Schukar (1993), a proponent of global education, encourages preservice teachers to prepare to deal with controversial global issues by recognizing their own biases and world views that they bring into the educational setting. Schukar further contends that, once preservice teachers assess their own perspectives, they must balance their own views with contending views. To achieve this, a familiarization of multiple perspectives and comparative approaches is necessary during the teacher preparation program.

### Content

The question of appropriate content is a common theme throughout the literature. Content for issues-centered



curricula can be drawn from pervasive human problems revolving around values such as justice, equality, freedom, democracy, and human rights; real problems are preferred to the contrived problems presented in the values clarification curriculum (Nelson, Carlson, & Polonsky, 1996). Artificial moral dilemmas are not as effective as issues that occur in the real world and that have both perennial personal and global implications (Hill, 1996). Some specific topics listed by Hunt and Metcalf (1968) include race and minority-group relations, social class, economics, sex, courtship and marriage, religion and morality, and national and patriotic beliefs. The most relevant topics are those that are local (Passe, 1991) and those that have primary documents available for study (Risinger, 1992).

### **Methods**

Various methods have been evaluated and several recommended as means to present the issues in an effective manner. The use of simple classroom discussion has been reviewed in its many forms. Kupperman (1985) recommends that, as controversy is interjected into the curriculum, students should be required to personalize the issue by openly discussing whether they themselves would want to be treated in the way a particular action or policy treats people - to evaluate whether the likely consequence of an action or policy involves more harm than good. Levitt and Longstreet (1993) support a less guided sort of discussion open to all constitutionally-protected speech where at

least two sides of every issue are presented and where students are not punished in any way for what they or their parents might communicate about the issue.

In addition to discussion, debate is a common method of interjecting controversy. It is valued especially by cooperative learning theorists and is held by them as important for intellectual development (Sockett, 1992). Constructivist teachers also value debate as it allows students to process the content actively, putting it into their own words, and identifying implications which might affect them (Brophy, 1995).

Bibliotherapy, a more specific method of dealing with controversy, purposes to address issues which have already made an impact on students' lives. Bibliotherapy is typically conducted with students individually; an issue is presented in the context of a story with follow-up questions which help students deal with their own emotions about the issue and to gain skill in making decisions regarding this issue in their lives. Typical bibliotherapy topics might address sexual abuse and divorce. Parents are usually involved with the therapy and encouraged to continue it at home (Sullivan, 1987).

### **Teacher Neutrality**

Carl Rogers, perhaps, is credited with promoting non-directive teaching more so than any other one individual. For the purposes of this study, this approach will be referred to as teacher neutrality. Rogers used the phrase

"unconditional positive regard" (quoted in Kilpatrick, 1992, p. 35) to refer to a therapist's response to opinions and actions of a client. In education this has translated into a nonjudgment of students' values. In Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong Kilpatrick (1992) comments on this nondirective approach to addressing controversial issues:

One problem with the nondirective technique is that it can never be truly nondirective. . . . Certain topics seem more fruitful than others to the therapist, and those are the ones he chooses to reinforce. . . . Clients usually develop a sense of what the therapist is interested in, and that is the sort of material that tends to come up (p. 58).

Kilpatrick (1992) also points out that Abraham Maslow, as well as Carl Rogers himself, had misgivings about the nondirective approach stating that it especially should not be used with children. Referring to one of his own curriculum programs which had been implemented in a Catholic school, Rogers dubbed it a "failure" and a "crazy plan" (quoted in Kilpatrick, 1992, p. 35).

While blanket neutrality is rarely espoused, there are many, especially in constructivist camps, who believe that neutrality with certain controversial issues is the most responsible approach. Kohn (1997), who promotes a constructivist Character Education approach, agrees with the transmission theorists regarding the use of literature, but he disagrees with the type of literature used and the

methods of instruction that traditional Character educators utilize.

Rather than employ literature to indoctrinate or induce mere conformity, we can use it to spur reflection. . . . Discussion of stories should be open-ended rather than relentlessly didactic. Instead of announcing, 'This man is a hero,' teachers may involve the students in deciding who - if anyone - is heroic in a given story (Kohn, 1997, p. 437).

Rosenblatt (1995) is another who is outspoken about the teacher's need to remain neutral regarding certain controversial issues.

The teacher's own bias will always be a factor. Some people split on this issue and think that the educator, in assuming a neutral position in the classroom, teaches a bad moral lesson - that the hottest fires of hell are reserved for those who seek to preserve moral neutrality in the face of a crisis. And yet there's an issue of accountability. The teacher has to avoid using the classroom to influence either side of the controversial question because there are parents out there and constituencies out there who do not want the classroom used to promote one or another position on certain issues (p. 38).

Kupperman (1985) agrees that while it would be absurd for a school to remain neutral on every issue of value, that it is improper and offensive for schools to impose one point

of view when addressing controversial value issues.

Philosophically, existentialists in practice also tend toward neutrality in order to allow students to create their own essence, to choose what they will become, to experience the totality of freedom. Therefore, existentialist educators may not tell students that their choices are right or wrong (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1996).

How do teachers and students perceive neutrality as a method of instruction? Liu's (1996) study of teachers' attitudes and perspectives regarding controversial issues revealed that overwhelmingly teachers supported an issues-centered approach in which teachers simply stated the facts and remained neutral themselves. In studying student conceptions, Nicholls and Nelson (1992) found that students agreed with teachers on this matter - that it is right for teachers to present various positions, but that they should never favor their own positions on controversial matters.

### Teacher Intentionality

Traditional Character Education programs openly discuss the need for intentionality. Opponents counter that traditional attempts toward intentionality are actually methods of indoctrination. A brief review of the literature will show that both transmission and transformation theorists address the need for intentionality; they do argue, however, over where the line is drawn between intentionality and indoctrination.

Risking accusations that they may border on indoctrination, institutions adopt policies regarding

controversial values that declare their commitment to intentionality. The Character Education Partnership adopted eleven principles, one of which declares, "Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life" (Lickona, 1998, p. 450). Indeed, traditional Character Educators assert that schools by their very nature cannot be morally neutral: "They are moral cauldrons of rewards and punishments, winners and losers, and a continuing parade of issues calling out to be labeled 'right' or 'wrong'" (Ryan & Kilpatrick, 1996, p. 20). While most educational institutions have policies encouraging a cautious neutrality when dealing with controversial issues in the classroom, the Utah State Office of Education (1981) holds a policy that teachers "need not be neutral, but must be fair - not indoctrinators" (p. 2).

When issues of racial, sexual, or other forms of discrimination based on religion or culture are the topic of study, how intentional should the teacher be? Singh (1989) holds that neutrality in discrimination issues can be harmful and in a different way becomes indoctrination itself when it is left to chance that students might learn to act justly and fairly towards other people, races, and sexes.

To allow them to decide what is right or wrong, good and bad is to inculcate in them the conceit of being

able to know and judge anything and everything by one's own 'criteria'; by one's own puny intellect and of not needing to defer to anything or anyone. . . . Teachers should make clear not only what their own position is, but also what the position of the community is as well (Singh, 1989, p. 233).

Max van Manen (1991) discusses the fine line between intentionality and indoctrination in The Tact of Teaching. It is tyranny, he maintains, whenever the pedagogical relationship contains extremes in the level of adult direction. Both too much adult direction and too little, permissiveness and neglect, are tyranny. "It is tyranny to abandon children to the sole influence of peers and of the culture at large" (van Manen, 1991, p. 60). Even nonjudgmental teaching is characterized by a certain intentionality, and teachers who do attempt to completely step out of the pedagogical relationship are not sincerely practicing what van Manen (1991) calls the tact of teaching.

According to Raywid (1995), whatever the teacher's intent - to be neutral or intentional, the teacher remains the "arbiter of meaning" (p. 82) within the classroom. The teacher stipulates the designation not only of words but also of gestures and actions. Teachers cannot waive the power innate in their position. "It seems to me that the hands-off posture is not really as neutral as it professes to be. You have to be dead to be value neutral" (Sommers, 1993, p. 11). Because values and ideology pervade the

educational enterprise, much of the literature expresses this perspective - that neutrality is false; there is always an intention whether its methodology borders on indoctrination or not (Lincoln, 1992; Sockett, 1992).



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

*Hermeneutic phenomenological research edifies the personal insight, contributing to one's thoughtfulness and one's ability to act toward others, children or adults, with tact or tactfulness.*

van Manen, 1990, p. 7

How is compelled by why; practice is driven by purpose. If the purpose is to understand, a research methodology must be chosen which will promote meaning-making and comprehension of a particular experience, practice, or phenomenon. For this reason, hermeneutic phenomenological research methods are applied to this study.

As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to seek to understand the specific problems that Christian school educators face as they address controversial issues in the moral education curriculum and to discover how some of these teachers choose to approach such issues.

Attitudes, definitions, perspectives, intentions - all are under scrutiny in this type of study. Granted, these constructs could be measured by some type of paper and pencil assessment. Studies have been completed which measure what percentage of teachers spend a certain amount of instructional time on controversial issues. The issues

have been identified and the frequency of each issue discussed in class has been tabulated. This study is not interested in such pursuits. As referenced in the review of literature, the quantitative research on this topic is helpful; it does assist the interested educator in knowing which topics are being addressed, to what degree, and by what various methods. And although teachers' attitudes are revealed to some degree in the quantitative research, it does not disclose the emotions of the teachers as they struggle with their own convictions. Hermeneutic phenomenological research is best suited to accomplish this task.

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research:**

#### **Definition and Purpose**

Max van Manen (1990) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as a human science which studies persons and the essences of their lived experiences. It uses interpretive description to explain a particular aspect of the lifeworld while acknowledging the complexity of lived life. The word phenomenology is derived from the Greek word *phenomenon* which means "to show itself" (Ray, 1994, p. 118). It is the meaning of an experience that is intended to be shown as it is described in the language of the participant. The data of hermeneutic phenomenological research is not statistical but narrative in nature. The researcher collects and analyzes extensive narrative data

for the purpose of acquiring a greater understanding of a particular situation (Gay, 1996) which ultimately contributes "to one's thoughtfulness and one's ability to act toward others, children or adults, with tact or tactfulness" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7).

### Research Design

"Indeed it has been said that the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method" (van Manen, 1990, p. 30). While it may appear that phenomenological research is non-methodical, it is actually emergent in nature. McMillan and Schumacher (1989) describe what they call a circular research design that is incremental, dependent on prior information. Specific procedures are identified by the researcher during the collection and analysis of data rather than having been specified ahead of time. Being a constructivist manner of research, phenomenology requires a level of spontaneity in research design; however, a guideline or level of research commitment prior to the study adds a measure of security for the researcher and a measure of credibility for the reader.

Morse (1994) offers a list of three conditions necessary for achieving maximum comprehension in a phenomenological study:

First, the researcher should enter the setting as a 'stranger'. . . . The second condition for obtaining optimal comprehension is that the researcher must be

capable of passively learning - of absorbing nonjudgmentally and with concentrated effort - everything remotely relevant to the topic of interest.

. . . The third essential condition is that the participants must be willing to tolerate intrusion and to share their world with the researcher (pp. 27-28).

Morse's three conditions for optimal comprehension were strived for throughout this study's data collection and analysis. In addition, the six research activities presented by Max van Manen (1990) were heeded as well; it is a "dynamic interplay" (p. 31) among these six research activities that is the essence of hermeneutic phenomenological research:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research process by considering parts and whole (p. 31).

While details of the research design emerged during the process, Morse's three conditions and van Manen's six research activities were used as guides for the study. Furthermore, plans for sampling, data collection, and data

analysis and interpretation were committed to prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

### Sampling of Participants

While random sampling is a characteristic of quantitative research, Gay (1996) points out that sampling for qualitative research is purposeful. Data sources are chosen because it is believed that they will be rich sources of information needed for the study.

Purposefulness, convenience, and practicality were all considerations in the sampling for this study. It was necessary to sample teachers of Christian schools in order to obtain the researcher's desired information. Teachers in member schools of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) were selected because this is the largest worldwide association of Christian schools, and all these schools have adopted a particular philosophical framework that makes them somewhat homogeneous - as opposed to investigating a variety of religious schools that may be Catholic, Jewish, Lutheran, Mennonite, etc. Florida schools were chosen for convenience's sake as this is the residence of the researcher. And, finally, practicality played a role in every sampling decision. Cooperation of the participating teachers remains a factor in the sampling process as well as the willingness of the researcher to travel the distance necessary to conduct the interview.

Gay (1996) also emphasizes that complete understanding of the studied behavior will not occur if the context, or

the site of the behavior, is not understood beforehand. In chapter two of this study, a review of the literature representing Christian school philosophy is presented to assist in the understanding of the context. These schools may have been established for the explicit purpose of avoiding controversial issues in the curriculum. They may have written policies on how teachers are to respond when a controversial topic is brought up in class discussion. All of these schools focus strongly on the moral development of their students. Understanding the data of this study is enhanced when the philosophical foundation of Christian schools is also understood.

Thirteen teachers, representing four schools, were interviewed initially for one hour or more each.

## **Data Collection**

### **Nature of the Data**

The data of this study are the thoughts of teachers regarding their experiences, intentions, practices, and motives of dealing with controversial issues in the moral education curriculum. Data includes policies developed by the Christian school regarding their expectations or guidelines relating to moral education and the treatment of controversial issues.

Phenomenological studies relying on others' experiences gather the data usually by interviews or documents written by the participants themselves. The goal

in data collection was to capture the "richness and complexity of behavior that occurs in natural settings from the participants' perspective" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989, p. 42). This study relied on face-to-face, open-ended long interviews with 13 teachers from four Christian schools. As the study progressed, follow-up telephone interviews were necessary for clarity. Written accounts of selected experiences also were requested of participants who expressed a desire to share more information than time allowed in the interview session.

### The Interview Process

In accordance with the interview suggestions of McMillan and Schumacher (1989), interviews were in-depth and minimally-structured. A general interview guide was used with a list of questions. Some questions were emphasized with some participants more than with others, and additional probing questions were interjected as needed. Participants were encouraged to talk in detail about their areas of interest pertaining to the study.

Questions sought to discover how the participants felt about their efforts in moral education and the role controversial issues play in the curriculum. Questions also attempted to uncover beliefs and meanings attached to the practices of these teachers.

### The Interview Guide

Below is a guide which was used by the interviewer in each session. However, the researcher digressed from the guide for the purpose of probing:

**Regarding moral education.**

- (1) Describe your moral education curriculum.
- (2) How is it implemented?
- (3) What is the intent of your moral education curriculum?

**Regarding the role of controversy.**

- (4) Have controversial issues arisen within the moral education curriculum? If so, describe the situation.
- (5) How did you address the situation?
- (6) What role do you believe controversial issues play in the moral development of your students?

**Regarding intentionality, neutrality, and indoctrination.**

- (7) When controversial issues arise, what stance have you taken?
- (8) Why have you taken this stance?
- (9) Do you believe the stances you have taken in the past were the best ones for the students' moral development? Why or why not?
- (10) In what instances have you chosen to remain neutral? Why have you done so?
- (11) What does indoctrination mean to you?
- (12) Do you practice indoctrination? Why or why not?
- (13) How might you summarize your beliefs regarding the discussion we have had on moral education, controversial issues, and the intent of the teacher?



The above interview guide, as well as the following participant consent form has been approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on March 12, 1999.

**Consent Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby authorize Samuel J. Smith to interview me regarding my attitudes, motives, practices, etc., regarding the role of controversial issues in the moral education curriculum of my classroom.

**Procedure** - Participants understand that they will be asked to participate in an oral face-to-face interview. Participants may at times be asked to write out any particular experiences that they believe would pertain to the study. For the sake of clarifying data, the researcher might contact the participant by phone in the future. Participants will also have an opportunity to review all data they have contributed to the study to verify its accuracy and correct representation.

**Duration of Participation** - Initially, participation will begin with the oral interview of approximately one hour in length. Within six weeks, a short follow-up telephone call might follow to clarify data. Within three months, participants will have an opportunity to review the data.

**Confidentiality** - Participants' names will not be disclosed to anyone other than the researcher. Care

will be taken not to identify participants in any way that would jeopardize confidentiality.

**Possible Benefits** - It is believed that the data gathered by this study will benefit many audiences concerned about moral education. Not much research has been done regarding the intent and approach of Christian school educators as they address controversial issues in the classroom. The goal of this study is an increased understanding by all interested parties.

This interview is conducted as part of a dissertation study entitled "The Role of Controversial Issues in the Moral Education Curriculum: Attitudes and Practices of Christian School Educators."

I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty after notifying the researcher.

I may contact Samuel J. Smith at telephone number 904/767-5451. I may also contact Gay Clarkson, IRB Executive Secretary, 305 Whitehurst, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078; telephone number: 405/744-5700.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date:\_\_\_\_\_ Time:\_\_\_\_\_

Participant

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the participant before requesting the participant to sign it.

Researcher

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_

### **Recording the Data**

Frequent, extensive note-taking is usually necessary in this type of research (Gay, 1996; Morse, 1994); however, for the purpose of encouraging continuous, uninterrupted dialogue, note-taking was minimized and audio tape-recording was utilized. The interviews were transcribed to enhance analysis. At the conclusion of the study, cassette tapes were erased and destroyed.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Research data was analyzed for the purpose of enhancing understanding of the phenomenon under study. Morse (1994) and van Manen (1990) was used as guides in the process of data analysis.

### **Personal Reflection**

Chapter four of this study will begin with a personal reflection of the researcher's experiences, feelings, and beliefs about moral education, the role of controversial issues in moral education, and indoctrination. This will assist in identifying any biases the researcher might hold.

It will also assist the reader in her or his own interpretation of the study.

### **Decontextualizing Data**

In order to implement the inductive reasoning necessary for phenomenological research, a decontextualization of the data must occur. Morse (1994) refers to this process as sorting and sifting. The data are removed from their contexts of persons and instances and are isolated into individual descriptions.

The data of this study underwent an interparticipant analysis and a categorical analysis. The interparticipant analysis involved the comparison of transcripts from several participants while the categorical analysis will entail a sorting by commonalities.

### **Theme Identification**

After the data was categorically analyzed, a coding sorted the information for the purpose of uncovering underlying meanings in the text. Themes emerged as metaphorical references, idiomatic phrases, and descriptive words were highlighted. According to van Manen (1990), themes formulate as the data is simplified and the phenomenon's meaning is captured.

### **Recontextualizing Data**

Morse (1994) points out that theory is the most important product of qualitative research. While this study does not intend to recommend a best practice based upon any given theory, it does seek to understand the

practices and attitudes of Christian school educators regarding the role of controversial issues in moral education. The research is recontextualized when it is found to be of value to others, and it is believed that the results of this study will interest and inform many audiences. Teachers, administrators, and parents of students in Christian schools will gain an understanding of what might be occurring in the moral education curriculum and why. Public school and private school audiences alike may be informed by the data and, thereby, understand the implications of controversial issues in their own arenas. They may be challenged in some way by the data to evaluate their own decisions about moral education curriculum. Once the data become applicable in such a way, it is then recontextualized or viewed as having "transferability" (Leininger, 1994).

### **Research Credibility**

Because all qualitative researchers do not observe, interview, or study documents alike, the qualitative research process is personalistic. Reliability, therefore, is more difficultly evidenced in phenomenological research. Its reliability is dependent upon factors that must be made explicit in the design of the study. McMillan and Schumacher (1989) identify external and internal reliability factors to consider.

#### **External Reliability**

The following descriptions of external factors are

intended to increase reliability by explicating the research design to the reader.

Role of the researcher. In order to identify possible researcher bias and to increase reliability, information regarding the role of the researcher and his status within the group of participants is necessary. First person pronouns will be used here for ease of writing.

I served as the sole researcher for this project. I initially contacted administrators of Christian schools to request documents outlining their moral education curriculum and their policies regarding the handling of controversial issues in classroom instruction. At that time, I also requested permission to interview teachers. I then contacted each teacher to arrange a face-to-face interview time. If clarity was needed after the interview, telephone conversations were made to probe further.

My status within the group of participants is that I am presently serving as the headmaster of a Christian school accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International. I did not interview teachers at my own school nor use documents governing the school in which I am employed. Having taught elementary and middle school grades in Christian schools, I believe that I had a certain immediate rapport with participants; however, my present status as an administrator might have hindered interaction to some extent. Personal reflection regarding the research topic will be included in chapter four to further explicate

possible researcher bias.

**Informant selection.** Teachers were selected who teach various grade levels and subjects in elementary and secondary classrooms. Teachers serving in member schools of the Association of Christian Schools International were selected as participants because all member schools in ACSI are required to hire only teachers who claim to adhere to a Christian worldview. A degree of reliability of the study depends upon all participants claiming to adhere to a Christian worldview, although it is understood that opinions differ about controversial issues among persons in this category.

**Social context.** Eight of the interviews occurred on the campuses of the schools where the teachers taught. The remaining five were conducted at an ACSI teacher convention center in Orlando, Florida.

**Data collection and analysis.** The external reliability factors regarding data collection and analysis have been carefully described above including interviewing methods, data recording, and the analytical premises informing the study.

### **Internal Reliability**

The following strategies as outlined by McMillan and Schumacher (1989) were used to reduce threats to internal reliability:

**Low-inference descriptors.** This was the principal method for establishing internal validity. Interviews were audio-recorded. Transcripts were verbatim, and

descriptions were precisely taken from field notes.

Participant researcher. Prior to final analysis, corroboration with the informant occurred regarding what had been observed and recorded. At this time, interpretations of the participant's meanings were discussed. This increased the reliability of the study by including the participant as a researcher himself or herself. The participants' voices became richer and their own ideas were re-presented to them to re-think and to re-examine.

#### Validity

Efforts to increase reliability also assisted in assuring that validity occurred. In addition to those measures, the following actions were also taken to enhance validity:

Lengthy data collection period. Considering the practical constraints to this study, data collection and analysis were extended only over a period of approximately six months. This provided opportunities for continual data analysis and ensured a better match between researcher interpretations and participant reality.

Disciplined subjectivity. Being mindful that "the 'goodness' of the data depends on the 'goodness' of the researcher," the researcher will submitted all phases of the process to self-monitored rigorous questioning and reevaluation.



### Conclusion

While much of the research design emerged during the process, the guidelines outlined in this chapter served to provide a level of security and structure to the researcher and provides a degree of confidence to the reader that the results are reliable and valid.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

"Why can't a woman have a right to choose what she does with her own body? I'm tired of Christians masquerading their political agendas as spiritual ones and making me feel like I can't be a Christian if I support a woman's right to have an abortion!" A student spoke these words in my freshman Bible college composition class and with them ostracized himself from the class for the remainder of the semester. Although the social issue that day was abortion, another pedagogical question lingered on my mind thereafter, demanding that I explore it to gain a better understanding of the dynamics that occur in a Christian school setting when controversial issues arise.

As an educator, I sensed a professional obligation to respect all opinions, to encourage critical thinking, and not to impose my personal beliefs on students. As a Christian in a Christian educational institution, I desired to transfer to that student what I perceived to be the truth based upon biblical interpretation. In this instance, however, I chose to practice procedural neutrality. The result was that many of the other students in the class spoke out openly against him, not changing his mind but building a social wall between them and him that

seemed to get higher as the semester continued.

Was what I did right? Should I have been more coercive by presenting my own opinion and the reasoning behind it? Was I the diplomatic negotiator that I should have been? How could I have fostered a better cooperation among the students while still permitting them to explore such a heated topic? The above experience and many others like it have led to my desire to pursue this study. While previous chapters have explored the available literature regarding moral education, controversial issues, and teachers' intentions, this chapter will report the results of my own interactions with thirteen Christian school educators from four different schools who teach various grade levels and subject areas. Seven of the teachers were female and six were male. Their years of teaching experience ranged from three to 27 years with an average of 11 years. Their present teaching assignments were distributed as follows: primary elementary, 3; upper elementary, 2; middle school, 3; and high school, 6. All thirteen were Anglo-American.

Eight of the teachers were interviewed on the campuses of their schools. Five of them were interviewed at a convention center in Orlando, Florida, during a convention of 1,800 Christian school educators. The final interview was conducted with a group of three male high school teachers. This was a unique session in that the participants interacted with each other, responding to one

another's answers either in agreement or disagreement. The dynamics of this session lessened the influence and control of the researcher as the participants seemed to guide the discussion more on their own.

Each initial interview was approximately one hour in length. The cassette tapes were transcribed and mailed to the participants requesting written reflective comments or clarifications. Follow-up conversations with three of the participants were conducted for the same purpose. In the follow-up writings and conversations, the participants confirmed their original statements but took the opportunity to re-present them in a clearer, more succinct fashion.

### **Categorical Analysis**

The three broad categories that will first be examined are those of moral education, the role of controversy, and the teacher's role.

#### **The Moral Education Curriculum**

**Description.** Upon initially being asked about their moral education curriculum, five of the thirteen teachers immediately named publishers who distribute either Bible class courses or biblically-based character building textbooks. The three publishers named were A Beka Book Publishers - a subsidiary of Pensacola Christian College, Bob Jones University Press, and Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) - ACSI also serves as the accrediting agency for the institutions.

Most other references were made to the Bible as the foundation for the moral curriculum. It was referred to as the "stand-alone truth," "the moral measure of our lives," and "the bottom line for any moral education curriculum." While those who mentioned packaged curricula were identifying moral education strictly within a Bible class context, those who mentioned the Bible as their source for moral education spoke in terms of interdisciplinary integration of biblical principles throughout various subject areas: history, physical education, science, and math.

Three of the male high school teachers described their moral education curriculum as a list of rules and expectations that they enforce in the classroom. They explained how they communicate the standards and the actions they take once the guidelines have been violated.

"My life" was the response given by one who emphasized that his moral education curriculum is an informal process of serving as a "good moral example."

**Implementation.** A variety of responses were given as to how the curriculum is implemented. Bible class was mentioned again along with descriptions of how the integration process is conducted throughout the subjects with Scriptural principles being integrated when appropriate. Class discussion and application were reported as common means of implementation with application involving the selection of Bible verses that would comment

directly or indirectly on a particular moral issue.

Teachers commented regularly on their awareness that moral education was pervasive and that they believed it occurs more in an informal series of interactions with students than it does in any particular class or program.

Intent. Above all, the primary intent of the Christian school's moral education curriculum as voiced by these teachers was that students be converted to Christianity if they are not already Christians upon coming to the school. This was expounded upon in many ways: teachers' intents are that students "love the Lord and His Word," "see the consequences of obeying or not obeying God and how that affects their lives and others' lives," "listen to God," and "live godly lives." Teachers spoke of their desire that students have a "personal relationship with God."

One teacher spoke of her primary intent as that of developing an awareness of diversity in her students, that all people are "created differently with a purpose by God." The individualistic nature of the teachers' intentions were expressed in references to God's plan for individual students and that part of their moral development is in finding their places in God's plan.

A final intent that was consistently voiced related to the desire to see students develop a "general sense of right and wrong." This was couched generally in terms dealing with the goal of developing decision-making skills, Christian character, and ownership of convictions.

Our goal in the moral education is to create an ownership of the convictions that the Scripture teaches we should have. It's not enough just to say, 'Here's the standard; you've got to live it.' Because we can't on our own. Without the cross, we have no hope. So, the power by which we live our lives is in the cross. To get a kid to own the convictions we're talking about would be the ultimate goal.

### Controversial Issues in Moral Education

The presence of controversy. Two teachers, a second grade teacher in her ninth year and a middle school math teacher in her 18th year, claimed that controversial issues have never arisen in their classrooms at all. Later, the second grade teacher commented that daily issues of students getting along with one another have indeed been controversial and that the issue of students' parents going through divorce have been controversial. Also after being probed, the middle school teacher identified the school dress code as a regular topic of controversy among her students.

Listed from most frequently mentioned to least frequently mentioned are the following controversial issues: (1) abortion; (2) various forms of sexual expression - premarital sex, masturbation, and oral sex; (3) entertainment - music, videos, and television; (4) various distinctive denominational church doctrines; (5) the scandals surrounding President Bill Clinton's

administration; (6) homosexuality; (7) evolution versus creation; (8) New Age beliefs and practices; (9) divorce; (10) violence in schools; (11) AIDS; (12) school dress code regulations; (13) roles of men and women in society and specifically in marriage; and (14) slavery.

The teacher's response to controversy. While many cautioned that students might introduce controversial issues for the sole purpose of getting teachers off task, all teachers interviewed stated that they would normally proceed cautiously to address the issue in class. Five of the thirteen said that they would "just tell them what the Bible has to say about it." Three of the others also would refer to biblical references only after giving students time to discuss their own beliefs together. Whether referencing the Bible initially or waiting until the end of the discussion period, the intent appears to be to settle the issue by drawing upon a final authority. The others reported that they would encourage students to talk, that they would hit the issue "head on, no holds barred," and that they would attempt to present real-life examples for students to examine.

I try to let them talk about it. And then let's go to Scripture and see what we can find in the Bible that speaks about this issue. And sometimes that may take a day or two, and I encourage them to try and seek out passages of Scripture that will speak to that issue. It's not something that I want to push aside because if it is a concern to them, then I think it has value.



And I don't tell kids that they can't speak about something like that if I don't agree with them. That's something that we need to talk about. So, I encourage kids to talk whether I have the same opinion or not.

**The role of controversial issues.** All 13 teachers unanimously agreed that controversial issues play a significant role in the moral development of their students; however, their reasons for this were extremely varied. Two of them put qualifiers on their positive responses: ". . . if the students have a good Bible background" and ". . . if they're guided." Others reported that the inclusion of controversial issues in the curriculum fosters student thinking, helps them to understand why others believe what they believe, and assists them in developing their own values and morals. It also provides opportunities for students to practice articulating their reasoning in a safe environment before possibly having to defend their beliefs in a hostile environment.

### **The Teacher's Role**

**The teacher's initial stance.** Depending on what the issue is and whether there is a clear biblical mandate connected with the issue, about a third of the interviewed teachers would directly turn to Scripture to respond to a controversial issue in the class. "If according to God's Word I can see where I can become dogmatic on something, I

will be dogmatic on it." The others claimed that they try to attempt to remain neutral until invited by the students to give an opinion. Several expressed a measure of frustration with this procedure; below is an example of the reasoning one teacher articulated:

That's a hard one because sometimes your first reaction as a young teacher would be to jump at the side of that which is right automatically. And that's the easy way to go, but as a teacher there is a responsibility we have to maintain an objectivity at least for as long a period as possible to get the kids to be able to share, because I think if you side one way or the other quickly - I know I'm speaking from a teacher's standpoint here - then you're forcing the kids either to an adversarial position or the position where they just agree with you and nothing gets discussed. So I will eventually share with them what I think. But initially, I'm trying to get them to come to me with 'Well, what do you think about that? What is your position on that? Why do you think it's wrong? And what about these issues? Have you considered these things in relation to what you are saying?' Teachers who can do that not only create lively discussion but I think also position a kid to be equipped to make those hard calls.

**The teacher's justification.** There were two types of justifications offered for the stances that teachers take when controversial issues arise. Those teachers who had

said that they were likely first to present to the students what the Bible had to say regarding a particular issue offered justifications such as "It works" and "It's the truth." In the group interview one teacher commented, "That's the whole purpose of a Christian school teacher, to direct the students to a Christ-like behavior. And Christ-like behavior is not the world's behavior. You can't be stepping on the fence expecting to have both worlds." "He brings up the fence," a second teacher continued, "I think a line has been drawn, and you have to be on either side of it. There is no straddling of the line any longer. 'Let your yea be yea and your nay be nay.'"

Another type of justification was offered for those teachers who maintained that they would attempt neutrality until questioned about their opinion by students. These teachers said they did so in order to foster thinking in their students and so that they would remain open to the teacher's instruction and would not be alienated.

One teacher who had previously commented that he typically played the "devil's advocate" with students gave his justification as wanting to prepare students to be articulate "in the market" and to prepare them to take whatever "abuse" might come as a result of their viewpoints.

**Teacher Self-evaluations.** Self-evaluations of whether teachers' stances were always for the students' best moral development produced mixed results. Nearly half the

respondents gave confident affirmations that they believed their stances in dealing with controversial matters were always for the students' best moral development.

One teacher expounded, "I try not to ever say, 'This is right and this is wrong because this is what I believe.' I don't do that. I use the Bible. So that doesn't ever really make you doubt what you've done." A teacher who had earlier said that his moral education curriculum was his life explained,

Paul said that he wished everybody was like him. And I always thought that was pretty cocky and egotistical, and yet I can truthfully say that if people had my beliefs and morals, that I would have no trouble with that. It's not cockiness, but I believe that what I believe is right, and I hope the kids will see that.

Those who evaluated themselves as not always having taken the best stance for their students' moral development addressed the issue of alienating their students or of undermining parental authority. "If the discussion causes them to doubt something that their parents have taught them and gives Satan a wedge to use against - their parents are ultimately responsible for them, and even the best intentions, if it causes them and gives them some iota of rationalization to disobey or disrespect their parents, I have been wrong." This particular teacher made regular reference to parental authority throughout the interview. She repeatedly described the Christian school as a place

where parents would not be undermined. In her school, at least one parent must sign a statement that he or she is a Christian. This concern might not be as strong in Christian schools that make no such requirement.

Other negative self-evaluations communicated a self-awareness of behavior that possibly could offend students and thereby alienating them altogether. "There have been times when I've been very opinionated and maybe not tactful with students."

I can tend to be pretty sharp. I have to watch how I say things, not necessarily what I say, but the tone of voice. And having been around as long as I have - the idea that I'm throwing my weight around like 'Who are you, you little pipsqueak?'

"Now, what's good and what's best are two different things, and sometimes our good is the enemy of God's best. So, whenever I'm trying to push what's best, at times I alienate the children."

**Neutrality and intentionality.** Only two of the thirteen teachers clearly stated that they do not remain neutral when controversial issues arise. Of those who gave examples of times when they considered themselves as practicing neutrality, most of them, in fact, were not neutral based on their own accounts of the situations. They interpreted their tactfulness as neutrality believing that consideration for students' opinions, whether the teacher agreed or not, was the measure of neutrality. This

can be seen in the following teacher's statement:

She could see that I wasn't buying it, but I chose to pretty much remain neutral on it and not -- and she did comment to me later. She said, 'I know you don't believe what I said, but at least you didn't put me down like Mrs. So-and-so did.' So I remain neutral in that way.

Another teacher, in claiming to remain neutral at times, said that she would tell her students,

'If you want to know my reasoning, I'll give you my scriptures. Then you can think about it, pray about it, and when you come to the age where you are not under the authority of your parents, then you can make up your own mind. But make sure you base your decisions on truthful ideas.'

By far, the most commonly mentioned issues on which teachers felt an obligation to remain neutral were those relating to denominational doctrines. Many participants described their schools as inter-denominational or non-denominational as they explained why it would be crucial for them to remain neutral on such issues. Other issues mentioned on which teachers prefer to remain neutral were as follows: music, movies, presidential sex scandals, divorce, women working outside the home, Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy.

Roman Catholic doctrines were cited often as being those that would surface in class and that would require that the teacher remain neutral. One teacher explained

that he would remain neutral only if a Roman Catholic student were in the classroom; otherwise, he would teach what he believed to be wrong about the doctrine. This is similar to what another teacher stated about homosexuality; she would remain neutral if she knew that a student in the class had a homosexual relative but would otherwise clearly speak out against homosexuality.

A common response in dealing with denominational differences is that teachers regularly refer students to their pastors or their parents to discuss such issues.

Indoctrination. For most, it was difficult for them to render their definition of the term indoctrination. They struggled with the negative connotations of the word while believing that it is something that they themselves do in the Christian school. Some explained that indoctrination is wrong except in the case of significant teachings such as salvation by Christ alone. Others identified it as always wrong while a few saw nothing wrong with indoctrination as long as it is based on the truth of the Bible.

A few images were offered to describe the associations connected with the word "indoctrination."

My immediate reaction is to think of somebody joining the military, and the first they do is sit you down, and you're probably going to listen to an hour lecture. You stand in line . . . . You're told what the rules are. You're told how you should behave . .

. . . There's no grey area. There's no room for you to question. You do it, and you do it with no questions. "I'm thinking of the Communists, the Cold War."

Each student is a basket. When you put them into the river . . . , they're full of water. They are in an indoctrination process in the Christian school receiving all about the lordship of Jesus Christ. We are submersing them in that indoctrinating process.

As difficult as it was for the participants to offer a definition of indoctrination, it is just as difficult to clearly summarize the variety of mixed thoughts and feelings in each response. A verbatim transcript may be found in the appendix, but below are select words and phrases from their definitions: "not thinking," "spitting out rote," "training," "forcing," "steering," "submersing," "instill," "habit," "manipulate," "infuse," "pigeonhole," "to bury into the mind," "investing."

Two elementary teachers expressed no negative connotations in their definitions as they described indoctrination as "teaching philosophy" and as "what you are taught about the Bible."

Answers became even more complex when participants were asked whether they themselves practiced indoctrination. Eight responded positively with the remaining five answering negatively. Two of the negative respondents offered alternative terms for what they attempted to accomplish instead of indoctrination; one stated that he was "investing" in his students, the other



that he was "disciplining" them.

In the eight responses of those who acknowledged that they did indeed practice indoctrination there seemed to be a sense that they had no other option, that indoctrination was a means they had to use especially in matters of spiritual issues such as salvation.

I would only [indoctrinate] with Scriptural things when it comes to salvation. Other lesser things I would be very careful not to do that. Obviously, you want to see people go to heaven. I'm not pushy-pushy, but I don't back down. I don't waiver. I'm not tolerant of other ideas. 'This is what God says, and this is the way it has got to be in this particular instance. It's black and white.' And I say, 'If you've got a problem with me, then go to the Lord because He is the one who said it. I'm just passing the message on.'

### Conclusion

Considering the homogeneity of the participants, it is interesting to note the variety of responses especially in the category relating to teacher intent. The moral education curriculum was described as a published curriculum, a process of biblical integration, the establishment and communication of rules, and the informal living out of the teacher's life before the students. Intentions of the curriculum were to bring about the salvation of non-Christian students, to promote an

understanding of diverse views, and to develop a general sense of right and wrong.

Participants unanimously acknowledged the pervasive nature of controversial issues and said that it is common for them to turn to Scripture to find solutions to share with their students. Based on their reports, it is just as likely that the teacher will permit a discussion of the topic exploring the various beliefs relating to the issue at hand. The participating teachers also unanimously acknowledged the significant role of controversial issues as they foster student thinking, assist them in understanding others, and provide opportunities for students to articulate their beliefs.

Teachers justified their use of the Bible as the final authority in controversial matters by their belief and the belief of their school that the Bible is the only source of all truth. Those who attempted neutrality justified their actions by claiming that their goal was to promote student thinking. Self-evaluations revealed that nearly half of the teachers believed that at one time or another they had alienated students by inappropriately communicating their convictions in an overly strong manner. When issues prove to be extremely sensitive in nature, especially those relating to denominational doctrines, teachers typically remain neutral and refer inquisitive students to their pastors or parents. In matters of eternal salvation, teachers feel compelled to use indoctrinative measures despite the negative connotations that they themselves

identify with the practice.

### Interparticipant Analysis

As the categorical analysis above intended to survey the topics discussed by all thirteen teachers, the interparticipant analysis will summarize and compare each individual interview.

#### Teacher #1

Teacher #1 is a female teacher from school "A" who teaches 7th and 8th grade math, and has taught for 18 years. She describes herself as a deliverer of truth to the students. Pointing out that her subject area is math, she does not see that controversy is inherent or natural in her classes. Because ACSI requires the incorporation of Biblical principles, she makes efforts to "bring in," "tie in," "throw in," and "instill in" scriptural truths but considers them non-controversial.

Teacher #1 tells a lengthy story of an informal interaction she had with a student at a basketball game. A student made a statement about the school dress code with which she disagreed and "before I could say anything" another student opposed the first student with an argument similar to that of the teacher's. Throughout the interview, teacher #1 referred to this strategy of addressing controversy. "Generally always there is one who is strong enough to take what I would consider, well, my side of the issue. And I try to encourage that . . ." She

recognizes her tendency to be "sharp" and a temptation to perceive students who disagree with her as "little pipsqueak[s]."

Teacher #1 expresses appreciation towards the school administration for "weeding out" those students who might promote controversy. School "A" is a discipleship-oriented school rather than an evangelical outreach, meaning that school "A" attempts to develop Christian students from Christian homes as opposed to proselytizing those who are not already Christians. Teacher #1 perceives this condition as eliminating much of the moral controversy that might occur otherwise.

Without hesitation, teacher #1 unapologetically declares her role as an indoctrinator although she sites images of Communism and the Cold War in her definition of "indoctrination."

### **Teacher #2**

Teacher #2 is also a female from school "A." She has taught for 12 years and is a 6th grade language arts and science teacher. It is significant that Teacher #2 sends her own teenage daughter to public school. References are made repeatedly throughout the discussion that this arrangement has made her daughter a stronger person morally with a superior understanding of moral issues because her daughter has had to face opposing sides of an issue at school to what Teacher #2 teaches her daughter at home.

Teacher #2 defines indoctrination as "Not thinking . . . Spitting out rote." However, she confidently states

that she clearly indoctrinates her own daughter at home but only wishes that she could indoctrinate her students at school. It is her fear of "irate parents" that keeps her from attempting to indoctrinate her own students on all controversial issues except for issues of "the infallibility of the Scriptures and the attributes of God and the blood atonement of Jesus." Because the school "A's" published mission statement and statement of faith will support the teacher, she has no insecurities about directly teaching these issues as "things that we don't argue about."

As with many of the other interviewed teachers, teacher #2 makes strong statements that are clearly antithetical to other strong statements she makes. For instance, while claiming that she would avoid voicing her opinion on certain controversial moral issues "because there are parents who would chew me alive who don't believe that," she relates two incidents that are incompatible with such a supposedly neutral stance. The first instance is that of her complete censorship of a school-adopted science textbook because it taught theistic evolution instead of a six-day Genesis account of creation. The second instance was "an argu-- a discussion" that she participated in with her six graders over whether humans are mammals or not.

I know how to direct the discussion. I had kids in my class that were crying for me because I was in the

minority. Some of these little girls were just, tears were coming down their faces because 'these children are arguing with Ms. [Teacher #2].' . . . it was good because I got them to think.

### Teacher #3

Teacher #3 is a male teacher at school "A" with nine years of experience who teaches 7th and 8th grade history. He acknowledges the pervasive nature of moral education and of controversy and discusses at length the significance of the teacher's role in moral development. While clearly intentional in his desire to convert students to Christianity, he frequently referenced the importance of student choice, the need for students to "exhaust their thoughts," and the dangers of coercion. "They need room to reach the decision themselves."

As with most other participants in this study, Teacher #3 refuses to remain neutral on issues that are clearly explained in the Bible. When he is aware of a Biblical mandate regarding an issue, that is either where the discussion immediately turns or that is where it concludes after a thorough discussion of various perspectives. When there is no Biblical mandate, Teacher #3 considers "age appropriateness" before deciding whether to express his own views or to remain silent on the issue.

### Teacher #4

Teacher #4 is a female middle school physical education and pre-algebra teacher at school "A." Moral education is evidently an area that she has thought

carefully about and has applied much effort in conducting in a systematic way. Her primary method of moral education is to evaluate professional athletes and their success as public role models. The first athlete is selected by her. She develops a bulletin board which displays the positive character traits exhibited by the athlete. The bulletin board serves as an instructional tool to lead discussion of the values and of the athlete. All other athletes and values are selected by the students who also develop the bulletin boards.

As with Teacher #3, Teacher #4 also spoke frequently of student choice. She repeatedly used the phrase "something that they see of value" when she was referring to character traits that were discussed in her class. Student discourse was frequently referred to as not just an instructional mode but as a vital element in the process of moral development.

On the issue of teacher intentionality or neutrality, Teacher #4 told brief stories of her interactions with students surrounding the topics of Dennis Rodman and of the White House sex scandal. Upon being asked her opinion by students, she asked the class's permission to share her opinion.

As with the other teachers, Teacher #4 also references the Bible. She refers to it as a basis for her personal belief. "They like to talk to you about them, and they like to get your reasoning defined. And they've got to

find that you have some basis for that. And that's where the Bible comes in."

### Teacher #5

Teacher #5 is a male teacher of high school Bible, personal fitness, and team sports at school "A." This is his fourth year of teaching.

Teacher #5 is the only teacher who presents the Bible as something that can be open to critical evaluation by the students. The Bible is referenced often in his curriculum including the topics of family, dating, and marriage. However, Teacher #5 asks students "to reason out, 'Why is this biblical? Why would God say this?'" For all other teachers in this study, the Bible was used as a final authority to settle the controversial matter. Teacher #5's introduction of Scripture is used to complicate the reasoning process rather than to put an end to it.

Teacher #5 also describes his role as that of a play actor at times. He takes on the role of devil's advocate with the intent of challenging the student to better articulate an argument he or she may be presenting. "The challenge to me is that I don't position myself to make the child think that I am antithetical to him, that I disagree with him." Teacher #5 seems to be desiring to create a boot camp type experience. His perception is that his students are generally homogeneous in their worldview and, therefore, need some artificial controversy to provide them with an opportunity to practice their apologetic skills. At other times, he may intentionally play the



role of a moderate when he in reality is self-proclaimedly extreme on the particular issue at hand. His purpose for this facade is to avoid alienating students who would reject his teaching if they identified it as extremist. On the other hand, he believes that teenagers desire to be extreme in their own right, and he wants to leave that position for them by not taking it himself.

In the end, Teacher #5 reveals to his students his true beliefs. And while he describes indoctrination as "to infuse . . . to bury into the mind . . . to pigeonhole kids into one thought process," he confesses that he indoctrinates and justifies it in that "if I don't, somebody's going to." Also, he points out that the indoctrination is conducted openly and with the support of the school and the parents. "I would call it investing more than anything else."

#### Teacher #6

Teacher #6 is a female second grade teacher of seven years at school "B." Her model for moral education is clearly Skinnerian behavior modification, a Christianized version of conservative character education. Students earn points and increase their rank in the "Lords army" as they learn definitions of virtues and as they display them. "They start out in boot camp and hopefully get to be a four star general by the end of the year." "Army money" is rewarded and can be redeemed for items in the treasure

chest. Points can also be lost if the student portrays an undesirable trait in class.

"It is the duty of a teacher in a Christian school to indoctrinate the children . . . because that's the purpose of the school." As with other teachers in this study, Teacher #6 notes that the school does not hide its intent to enrolled families and that teachers are assisting parents. Teacher #6 also is not alone in her belief that if the process is carried out "with gentleness" that it is acceptable to indoctrinate, "forcing your opinion on someone else and not really wanting them to think for themselves" - her own definition.

#### Teacher #7

Teacher #7 is a female fifth grade teacher of five years at school "B." She succinctly and clearly communicates her approach of turning to the Bible upon any instance of moral controversy. When the Bible addresses a particular issue, neutrality is not an option for her as she communicates clearly to the students that this is not her opinion but that it is a directive from the Bible.

#### Teacher #8

Teacher #8 is a male high school math and computer teacher in his 21st year at school "B." He describes his moral education as "my life." He repeatedly speaks of teachers as role models and examples. Like Teacher #4, he waits until students invite him to offer his opinion on issues and will do so at the end of the discussion. Saving one's opinion until the end may be interpreted as either an

effort towards courtesy or a way of getting in the final word of an argument in a supposedly tactful way.

Teacher #8 sees the moral instructor as a discipler who lives out the curriculum rather than an indoctrinator who delivers the curriculum to the student. Interestingly enough, Teacher #8 is the only research participant who made no mention whatsoever of the Bible.

#### **Teacher #9**

Teacher #9 is a female middle and high school history and Bible teacher with 17 years experience at school "C." She stresses the significance of questioning students about their stand on particular issues. Her questions challenge them to consider the implications of their choices and how those choices will affect them spiritually. She attends to her body language as students discuss controversial issues and attempts not to display an expression of shock at anything they might say.

Teacher #9 would only consider using an indoctrinative method "when it comes to salvation." "Sometimes you can word things to help them realize, to try and push them the right direction when you know it's the right thing."

#### **Teacher #10**

Teacher #10 is a female second grade teacher with nine years of experience at school "C." She held strictly to the concept that teachers should remain not only neutral but completely uninvolved in controversial issues that arise unless the students were unable to discuss the issue

in a civil manner. At the point where students could not properly discuss the controversy is when she believed she should enter as a mediator or as a judge, whichever the situation called for. "We shouldn't condemn another person because he has an opinion that's different from ours. But we do need at least to let them air their concerns." To this teacher, indoctrination is simply the teaching of philosophy, and she believes that she clearly teaches philosophy to her second graders.

#### Teachers #11, #12, and #13

These three teachers were interviewed together. Their individual responses influenced the others as the discourse would build and digress based on a particular comment made by another participant. Such discourse made for rich discussion but causes it to be difficult to report individual responses. Usually, the three would agree with the first spokesman's comment and simply add a few illustrations or examples. All three of these teachers are male high school teachers at school "D." Their subject areas are English, science, and history with years of experience being ten, four, and three, respectively.

These three are the only interviewees who described their moral education curriculum as their set of rules and guidelines for student conduct. They perceived its implementation as the communication of those standards and the delivery of consequences if the standards are violated.

Similar to other teachers in the study, all three of these teachers explained that their first response to

controversial issues is to consult the Bible in order to communicate to the students what it might convey about the topic. They agreed, however, that they would avoid discussions revolving around denominational doctrinal issues because of the variety of interpretations among the students' families. The English teacher relayed a story of his own experience as a Christian school student when he was a seventh grader and of how he had voiced a doctrinal position in class that was contrary to the school's belief. The teacher had called him a "wolf in sheep's clothing . . . . Because that left a lasting impression on me about how critical one can be in their dogma, I never could be that way as a teacher."

After grappling with the term "indoctrination," all three decided that, despite the negative connotations, there were positive ways of conducting indoctrination and that they themselves did so. The science teacher viewed instructing and indoctrinating as synonymous activities. "I think you don't have a choice. Every single time you teach, you are indoctrinating."

### **Conclusion**

Upon facing controversial issues in the moral education curriculum, Christian school educators perceive their role in a variety of ways. The following categories were developed from the participants' descriptions, stories, and beliefs.

**Recruiter of mercenary soldiers.** The recruiter of

mercenary soldiers solicits the assistance of a student who holds the same beliefs as she does. She then encourages that student in a variety of ways to verbalize the argument that she would rather not risk verbalizing herself.

Censor. The censor removes the controversial material before students have the opportunity to be exposed to it; thereby, avoiding the controversy altogether.

Herald of truth. The herald of truth sees his role as that of messenger of the proclamation to those who may be unaware of the expectations held by the Author of the message.

Facilitator. The facilitator creates an environment conducive to discussion. She values the opinions of students and encourages their expression.

Spiritual boot camp drill sergeant. The spiritual boot camp drill sergeant intentionally creates a militaristically rigorous environment. Students are rewarded and punished until they perform as automatons on demand. An artificially adversarial environment is created to prepare them for the day when students will face a true adversary and will need to defend themselves.

Selective indoctrinator. For the selective indoctrinator there are certain issues whereby the ends justifies the means. If salvation or righteous conduct appears to be the result, indoctrination is an appropriate means to arrive at this end. For all other matters, it is inappropriate.

## Document Analysis

Each participating school was requested to submit documents that might communicate to parents the school's moral education curriculum and any statements relating to the school's approach to controversial issues. Since many teachers who unapologetically claimed to indoctrinate stated that they did so with the support of parents and the school, it is helpful to evaluate what is communicated by the schools to their enrolling families.

### School "A"

School "A" is not affiliated with a sponsoring church. It is made up of a "group of parents who constitute a non-denominational community Christian school . . . . Families from more than one hundred churches entrust their children to [School "A"] being confident that they are instructed in a manner which complements the values taught at home and in the church." With such a heterogeneously denominational body of families, teachers at School "A" are cautious to enter into controversial issues that relate to opposing denominational teachings. This could disturb their support base for the school. Therefore, transdenominational principles are core elements of the curriculum.

While the school's documents do not support a teacher who may openly teach a controversial denominational doctrine, it clearly supports them as they choose to refer to the Bible as the final say on any matter controversial. As stated in School "A's" statement of faith: "We believe .

. .the very words of the original Scriptures are infallible and inerrant and that they are our final and absolute authority in every area of life and knowledge." Parents are required to sign that they are in agreement with the school's statement of faith. This enrollment procedure removes much controversy that might be present otherwise; it also provides teachers with the assurance that if they are in alignment with biblical principles, that they may openly teach that perspective of a controversial issue. If teachers are unsure of biblical support, they are more likely to remain neutral.

Promotional materials of School "A" refers to "character-building" as "an essential part of molding a young life." The clarity of the intentionality as expressed in School "A's" promotional material is paralleled by the intentionality voiced by the teachers. The teachers know what issues can acceptably be addressed with intentionality and which ones should be approached with neutrality.

#### School "B"

School "B's" promotional materials state that "We are forbidden by God to even hear words which cause us to depart from God's words or ways" and that "We must guard our minds and the minds of our children from the philosophies and the ways of the world." These statements provide support to the teachers for censoring out of the curriculum issues that might be in opposition to biblical teaching.



**School "C"**

School "C" states in its enrollment packet that "Explicit Scriptures are taught without demanding specific student alliance to traditionally controversial denominational beliefs which are rightfully the province of the local church." Teachers were consistent with this statement as they reported that they preferred to refer their students to their parents or their pastors regarding controversial denominational matters and that they preferred to be neutral on those types of issues.

**School "D"**

School "D" makes no direct reference in its initial materials to parents regarding its moral education or how controversial issues are addressed. It does state that "[School 'D'] is interested in attracting students . . . who are amenable to Christian instruction" and that their mission is to work "in harmony with Christian homes and local churches." The first page of School "D's" initial communication to enrolling parents lists student standards. It should be noted that the group of three teachers from this school all described their moral education curriculum as their class rules.

**Conclusion**

The documents promoting these four schools do communicate to some extent the moral education curriculum and how these schools perceive the role of controversial issues. Also, based on the self-reports of the teachers,

they are knowledgeable of the schools' philosophies and do attempt to carry them out as outlined.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Two pairs of themes are apparent throughout the responses of the thirteen teachers participating in this study - themes that illustrate the struggles that teachers face as they address controversial issues while attempting to develop morality. Institutional loyalty and critical thinking constitute the first pair. Selective indoctrination and sensitivity to possible student alienation constitute the second.

#### **Institutional Loyalty Versus Critical Thinking**

On one hand, controversial issues are valued for their ability to promote critical thinking and lively discourse. Teachers realize that disequilibrium is necessary to bring about serious cognitive consideration of a matter and that evaluation of a controversial matter can lead to positive moral action on the student's part. On the other hand, however, teachers struggle with their own personal convictions and the mandate from school and home to promote institutional loyalty to family, church, government authority, and biblical absolutes.

When should the Christian school teacher promote critical thinking? In matters where there is clearly a biblical mandate or a school policy, Christian school teachers prefer to directly teach the mandate and possibly discuss the benefits of following the mandate. In matters

where there is no biblical or institutional mandate, it may be professional suicide for the teacher either to permit open discussion while remaining neutral or to share with students his or her own personal convictions. The risks of facing the retribution of parents or school cause Christian teachers often to limit the promotion of critical thinking as it relates to controversial moral issues.

### Selective Indoctrination Versus Sensitivity to Student Alienation

Christian school teachers express positive feelings about indoctrinating selectively. While struggling with the negative connotations related to the word itself, teachers believe that it is imperative and unavoidable that they indoctrinate students in the way of eternal salvation and in moral absolutes as expressed in Scripture. These are the only issues in which they are comfortable using such a tactic. In all other instances it is perceived as inappropriate.

Another theme expressed in the data reveals that although teachers are compelled to indoctrinate on certain issues, they are keenly aware that students might become alienated because of these tactics. They acknowledge that their success as teachers depends upon their ability to maintain a positive relationship with students and that some coercive instructional strategies might very well alienate a number of students, thereby hindering the pedagogical relationship.

Based upon the documents published by the schools and distributed to enrolling parents, students and parents in these schools should expect a measure of indoctrination of select issues. Parents not interested in submitting their children to that type of instruction are free to choose not to enroll. Therefore, the teachers' fear of alienating students is more present with issues outside the realm of biblical mandates and eternal salvation.

Teachers may be less neutral than they claim to be at times. While trying not to alienate students, they may be resorting to strategies that may seem less coercive but are quite manipulative nevertheless. The characterizations mentioned earlier in this chapter illustrate some of these strategies that may be less offensive to students but that are extremely manipulative. One such example is that of the "recruiter of mercenary soldiers." To solicit, encourage, and reward those who openly voice the opinions of the teacher while the teacher appears to be neutral is a disingenuous manner of relating to students.

Another artificial relationship with students is the one in which the teacher chooses to play a role, such as devil's advocate, without clarifying with the students that it is a role play. This characterization mentioned earlier in the chapter was called the "spiritual boot camp drill sergeant" because of the intent of the teacher to strengthen students in their arguments before they faced true opposition.

A secret means of manipulation is to censor out

controversial material before students have an opportunity to be exposed to it. This constitutes what has been referred to as the null curriculum - that which is intentionally not taught.

### Conclusion

Overwhelmingly, the 13 respondents claimed to value the role of controversial issues in promoting students' moral development. They had difficulty in explaining how they made room for them in the curriculum or how they permitted them to be explored by students in a meaningful way. The most difficult issues to address are those dealing with contradictory denominational doctrines. In denominational matters, teachers remain neutral; in some schools, they do so by school policy.

The themes of loyalty, critical thinking, selective indoctrination, and student alienation were prevalent in the participants' responses. Teachers sensed a moral obligation to promote loyalty of students to their parents, church, governmental authority figures, and to biblical absolutes. While not promoting a critical analysis of the Bible, teachers did desire to promote critical thinking of the values held by parents, church, and government based on biblical standards. Also, the theme of selective indoctrination seemed to compete with the theme of the teachers' awareness of possible student alienation.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?*

John Milton, quoted in Whitehead, 1994, p. 258

This study set out to explore the specific problems that Christian school educators face as they address controversial issues in the moral education curriculum and to discover how some of these teachers choose to approach such issues. The intent was to listen to the voices of these teachers in order to better understand what they experience as they attempt to fulfill their professional and spiritual obligations. They expressed a variety of perspectives about their moral goals for students, the role of controversy in the moral development of their students, and their own roles as teachers.

#### **Summary**

The data supplied by the teachers in this study contain many anecdotes, opinions, and directives. To summarize the content of the transcripts would be less

meaningful than to consider the recurring themes prevalent throughout their conversation.

The first notable theme is that of loyalty. To be loyal is to be true to or faithful to another entity. In this case the objects of the teachers' loyalties were family, church, government, and biblical absolutes. By far, the greatest loyalty for these teachers is to biblical absolutes. If the Bible directly or indirectly addresses a controversial issue, the principle is presented as the final authority on the matter. If there is no biblical mention of the issue, teachers overwhelmingly prefer to refer the matter to parents and pastors while remaining neutral themselves. And when controversial issues revolve around governmental figures, teachers cite biblical defense for continuing loyal prayer support and submission to governmental authority.

A seemingly competing theme is that of critical thinking. Teachers acknowledge the value of controversial issues in that they "get students to think." Because of the political climate of the Christian school, however, teachers may not welcome the controversial issues into the curriculum. Fiscal control of most Christian schools is based in homes and churches. Parents' tuition and church support are what feed the Christian school budget. To encourage critical thinking of principles or doctrines taught in the students' homes and churches could bring the demise of the teacher.

Selective indoctrination is yet another theme present

in the data. Despite negative connotations and definitions provided by the participants of indoctrination, they overwhelmingly acknowledged their practice of selective indoctrination. This is compatible with the literature of character educators who embrace indoctrination of values as one of their chief methods. Participants in the study repeatedly stated that indoctrination was justified for two prominent reasons: (1) others indoctrinate, and (2) the eternal salvation of students depended upon it. Therefore, specifically in the area of eternal salvation, indoctrination was considered an acceptable practice.

Finally, the theme of student alienation was evident throughout the data. Realizing that coercive techniques might bring about a rejection by the students, teachers spoke regularly of their caution not to "push away" or "alienate" students, especially in matters dealing with types of entertainment and different denominational doctrines.

### **Conclusions**

The contemporary Christian school movement is still fairly young. Schools were established by churches and parent associations that agreed upon basic founding principles. The monolithic nature of Christian schools may be challenged in the future by political efforts such as Florida Governor Jeb Bush's Opportunity Scholarships program which went into effect for the 1999-2000 school



year. This voucher program pays tuition for students to attend private schools. Participating private schools are not permitted to reject Opportunity Scholarship students and are not permitted to teach religious dogma to those unwilling to submit themselves to it. If the program continues, it could change the type of moral education curriculum offered in the Christian schools. It could also change the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. What is now so confidently taught in what is self-described as an indoctrinative manner, may not be permitted in the future.

The spread of the parents' rights movement may also have an impact on the moral education of the Christian school. Presently, the parents' rights movement is a conservative effort active in the public schools to censor issues of a controversial nature out of the curriculum for their own students. It may, however, spread to the Christian school with parents claiming the right not to have their children proselytized or indoctrinated.

Considering society's shift to a postmodern worldview which devalues metanarratives of dogmatic absolutes, the Christian school community should evaluate how it can remain true to its mission as it faces a more skeptical constituency. In the new millennium, controversy will not be minimized but will increase as a multitude of voices are given freedom of expression via the technology of the internet. Christian school students will become more exposed to controversy, especially as Christian schools

advance in online technology. How will Christian schools respond to this new element? They may have no other option but to explore all aspects of the issues as it becomes more difficult to censor undesirable content.

Dialogue is encouraged among Christian school parents, teachers, and administrators about the manner in which controversy will be addressed. Inservice opportunities also may provide collaboration among teachers for them to gain new strategies to deal with controversial issues.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Recommendations for Christian School Moral Education Curriculum**

It is recommended that Christian school moral education curriculum elude all manner of manipulation, indoctrination, and other disingenuous techniques when addressing controversial issues. This does not require instructors to be neutral on every issue but to avoid attempts to influence students' values through means that may appear to involve trickery.

With its heavy reliance on Skinnerian behaviorism, the recent character education movement may not provide the best model for Christian schools. Behavioristic techniques are not commensurate with Christian principles that humankind is created in the image of God with the ability to reason, to choose, and to evaluate. Therefore, curriculum for the Christian school should, in an age-

appropriate manner, appeal to the students' ability to reason through conflicting values.

Upon describing their moral education curriculum and the controversial issues therein, participants in this study acknowledged individual moral issues to the neglect of social moral issues, such as poverty, violence, injustice, environmental abuse, and racism. While Christian schools may require students to participate in service projects relating to these issues, the participants in this study did not identify such issues as significant in their moral education. Jesus' own teachings frequently addressed these issues; therefore, they should be demarginalized in the Christian school curriculum.

#### **Recommendations for Further Research**

As the contemporary Christian school movement matures, it is imperative that research data be shared with the professional community. This particular study endeavors to develop an understanding of the role of controversial issues in the moral education curriculum as perceived by Christian school educators. Other studies are recommended for future exploration. Further studies are needed to observe Christian school teachers as they address controversial issues; do they implement what they claim to? How do students perceive the role of the teacher when controversial issues arise? Would parents of Christian school students agree that there are certain issues they desire their students to be indoctrinated in? What is the difference between the Christian school's intended moral

education curriculum and its enacted curriculum?

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OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

**DATE: 03-12-99**

**IRB #: ED-99-096**

**Proposal Title: THE ROLE OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN MORAL  
EDUCATION: APPROACHES AND ATTITUDES OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOL  
EDUCATORS**

**Principal Investigator(s): Wen-Song Hwu, Samuel J. Smith**

**Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt**

**Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved**

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Signature:



Date: March 15, 1999

Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance  
cc: Samuel J. Smith

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

Samuel J. Smith  
634 Cole Dr.  
Port Orange, FL 32127

November 1999

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for participating in my doctoral dissertation research regarding the role of controversial issues in the moral education curriculum. The primary intent of the study is to pursue the approaches and attitudes of Christian school educators, and your cooperation has assisted me greatly.

There is one final way that you can assist me with the project and that is (1) to read the attached transcript of your answers and (2) to write a reflective response of your reaction after seeing your spoken words in print. There is no length preference for your written response. It may be as short or as long as you wish. However, it would be helpful if it expressed completely your reflections of your own words and any clarifying thoughts.

If you have any questions, please call me at 904/767-5451. Enclosed is a self-addressed stamped envelope for your response.

Sincerely,

Samuel J. Smith

Enclosures: Interview Questions  
Participant's Interview Responses  
Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope

Interview #1  
School "A"  
Gender: Female  
Experience: 18 years  
Assignment: 7th and 8th Grade Math

Question #1: Actually, in math we don't get into that too much. Math is pretty much black and white, right or wrong. There's not a whole lot in there, in the curriculum per se.

With the ACSI, they do ask us to incorporate biblical principles. And so, occasionally, not as much as I should do, but occasionally, we - you know - we bring in biblical principles and tie them in or use them as an introduction - usually - because once you get into teaching algebra - you know - there's not a lot of morality involved in solving an algebraic equation.

Question #2: We do within our school have a ten-minute homeroom period where you take a couple of minutes to do attendance and lunch count and that sort of thing. And then you do devotional-type things when you can bring in quite a bit. But I think more as a curriculum-based type thing, it would be more through the Bible classes. And I will have a Bible class this year. So there'll be more opportunities this year than I've ever had in the past years.

Question #3: Well, I would say just a general sense of right and wrong in light of God's principles that are taught in scripture. That would be it, I guess - that there is a right or wrong, that it's not shades of gray. And that we're not, you know, the whole idea that the kids are thrust into everything now with the media and everything and being politically correct - sometimes isn't right or wrong.

Question #4: I can't think of anything that has ever come up that has really been controversial. The biggest issue, I think, is when the kids disagree. What I've had to deal with is just the issue of dress code - that sort of thing. And "Why do we have to dress a certain way? Why do we have to cut our hair a certain way?" That sort of thing. That's been the biggest controversy I've had to deal with - of the kids not wanting to dress a certain way.

During my first year here at [School "A"], I was senior sponsor. And, as a senior sponsor, you get involved in all the fundraising opportunities for their senior trip. We were doing concessions at the basketball game. One of the boys spoke up saying, "Well, Mrs. [Teacher #1], I don't understand. If it's okay..." Well, let me back up. We had started a one-day casual day. The rest of the days, the girls wore the skirts, but one day they could wear pants. And one of the boys spoke up who had been in another Christian school. And he said, "Mrs. [Teacher #1],

I don't understand it. If it is okay for the girls to wear pants -you know - one day, what's so wrong with it. Why can't they wear them five days? And before I could say anything - it was really interesting - because before I could say anything, one of the girls in the class - one of the senior girls was perched up on the counter of the concession stand - and she was sitting very casually because she had pants on, and she said, "M, look at me." She said, "If I were dressed in a skirt, would I be sitting this way?" And M said, "Well, I hope not." She said, "My point exactly." She said, "When I'm dressed casually, I act casually. When I'm dressed up, I act professionally, and I act business-like." And I'm sitting there thinking, "Woe, well said, G." I didn't do a thing. These were two separate sides of the issue with the kids. One's saying it's okay to wear pants all the time, while the other one is saying, "No. I want to dress up, and I want to act more grown up." I've used that as an example several times with the kids. I was just sitting back there scratching my head thinking, "Okay, I couldn't have done it better."

Question #5: I try to use real-life examples. My daughter works for [company name]. And you talk about a dress code. They've got a handbook that shows pictures of hair styles and what they can wear down to what kind of earrings girls can and cannot wear, to make-up, the whole bit. So the fact that kids think what they do about the dress code - which is maybe not a moral issue, but it is controversial and more so even into the public schools now that... you're never going to be allowed to wear anything you want to in a working situation. So I try to tie it in that way. All throughout the years, the kids have asked me, "Well, what's so immoral about wearing pants?" And I try to say, "It's not a matter of morality; it's a matter of - you know - the whole issue. It's not immoral; it's just what the code is and what's acceptable practice. And I try to tie it in to the working world and reality out there. They may get a job someday where they won't be able to go around with their baggy pants. Nobody's going to hire them with that.

Question #6: It does play a role. When you're surrounded by... When you're a child, all you hear is your parent's opinions or what's on the media, depending on what access the parents allow them to the media. And, unfortunately, many of our kids are allowed pretty unlimited access to what's out there. But I think the community at large and, in the case of middle school kids, you're school community, and their peers and parents who have similar belief systems and... surrounding their kids with those sorts of influences. Now, my kids are adults, and they never went anywhere but a Christian school their whole life. They never went to a public school at all. And of course, when they were in middle school, they thought, "Why can't we be in public school?" But they outgrew it. And I've lived long enough to have my daughter thank me, and she is now

looking for a Christian school for her four-year-old. But she has expressed to me how easily she could have been led astray because she was the social butterfly of my two. She was the one that wanted to fit in with the crowd. And if she had not been surrounded by people of similar beliefs within, not just the parent and teachers, but within her friends and her peer groups.

I think it's very important how you structure it, how you have the activities in developing some sense of morality.

Question #7: My immediate response would be to just pound them with what my belief is. But I realize with middle school kids, they're searching, and they're not going to be very receptive to an old fuddy duddy like me; I've been around so long. I'm not hip, I'm not with it, I don't know anything. And so, depending on what the issue is and what the circumstances are - cause I'm very, very conscious of time in my classroom. Within a math class, there is very little time to address any controversial issues. Because math is not controversial. But in a looser setting when we're in what we call T.A. group, or Teacher Advisory Group, - it meets once a month - we could go into things like this. So maybe at lunch time, you know, within activities, ball games, that sort of thing. It would be more of a one-on-one thing, because very seldom would I encounter it in a classroom situation.

But after I get over my initial "I'm-going-to-tell-them-what-to-do," would be to hopefully guide them and to help them to come around. And usually there is someone, like G. And I've been amazed through the years that generally always there is one who is strong enough to take what I would consider, well, my side of the issue. And I try to encourage that without coming down on them with a sledge hammer. Which I know they won't listen to.

Question #8: I'm getting old enough now that I've seen enough through the years that I realize how important it is to teach the truth. And I want the kids not to be swayed by every wind that comes along. And I don't want them to have to go through heartache and disappointment and things that come when you're on the wrong side of the fence. And that's my ultimate goal. But just knowing how kids are and knowing how hardheaded I was that age, you have to sometimes take a softer approach and come at it a different way.

Question #9: I can't think of any specifics right now and what the issues were, but sure I've not taken the right stance in the past. But really I've not dealt with many controversial issues. I really haven't. Even though I've been in Christian education 18 years. Not that much comes up in my classroom. There are times I've just walked away from issues in the class - not necessarily controversial

issues - when I've thought that I could have done better than that.

I have to watch it because I can tend to be pretty sharp. I have to watch how I say things, not necessarily what I say but the tone of voice. That sort of thing. And having been around as long as I have - the idea that I'm throwing my weight around like "Who are you, you little pipsqueak?" And I have to watch that attitude because we don't deal with very many belligerent kids here at [School "A"] - I'm grateful to say. Most of our kids are here because [the principal] and those powers that be do a pretty good job of weeding out those that don't want to be here. And so we don't deal with very many downright rebellious, belligerent kids. But things come up where they do buck you, but it's more disciplinary than it would be moral issues. That sort of thing.

It's more like I say, the tone of voice.

Question #10: I can't think of any right off the top of my head.

Question #11: I'm thinking of the Communists, the Cold War, and all that. That's the first thought that comes to mind when I hear the word "indoctrination." And yet, we want to indoctrinate our children in a sense of right or wrong. I definitely wanted to do that in my children. So that's what I think of. The idea of teaching what, or getting through, the idea of what you believe is right or wrong. Whatever the issue is. You want to get that into the heads of the kids. In math, we always indoctrinate. That's how we get the truths of math across. The principles that we use over and over. But I guess it's through repetition. When I think about comparing how we get the principles of math across. Maybe this is wrong and maybe it's not, but in math you teach a little something and then you pull back on a whole wealth of information that they've been taught the past eight or ten years and you apply the new one. And then you take another little step forward. And yet you still pull back from others. And I think we do the same thing in moral education in the issues we deal with.

We take prayer requests and we do... But you know the whole idea that God is there, God answers prayer. We do this over and over and over and over again, and it's still repetition - if you want to tie in the word "indoctrination." Over and over and over again the kids hear it because we open every class with prayer, and we throw in things about how God is faithful, God is there, who God is, what He does, what He will do for you. We do this in our classes whether it's a math class or whatever. We may not teach through the whole class, but it's there. And God is always there within the classroom of a Christian school. But then in a Bible class or a chapel service or a homeroom session, it's expanded on a little bit more. But you've always got that introduction and repetition over and

over.

Question #12: Yes, I do, to teach. Because it has to be repeated over and over again for the kids to get it.

Question #13: I guess I would have to say that I think it is imperative that we as Christians, in the Christian schools, take a firm role in trying to teach morals because they certainly aren't getting it in the media. And depending on the home situation, they may or may not be getting it there -unfortunately we've found. There are a lot of dichotomies within the families, split families. Every now and then we find that mom's living with her boyfriend and all kinds of things of this nature. We use the picture here at [Christian School "A"] that we're a triangle, that we're a team. With God, with the family, and with the school. And working in conjunction together, and working together for the majority of our families, the basis is firm at home. But I think that with my kids, if they get one thing at home and one thing at school, it's confusing to the kids. And so I think it's important that we work together with the church and the home to continue to instill the same type of moral principles. That the majority of the parents want in their kids because the world as a whole - the media, everything that you see. I'm not a TV watcher, I just don't like it. But being out there in [another state] with my family, and I don't have my home to take care of, I sit down and my mouth is hanging open. And I'm thinking, "What is on this thing?" And I'm thinking, "These are kids that come home after school, and they flip through this thing and they channel surf and they see all kinds of garbage out there." And so I think we need to take a firm stand.

Sure it's important that I teach my algebra. They're not going to be able to go on as far as college and that sort of thing. Parents expect that and demand that. But I think they would feel slighted if I let the other drop, too - at least the parents that we have here.

*Interview #2*

*School "A"*

*Gender: Female*

*Experience: 12 years*

*Assignment: 6th Grade Language Arts and Science*

Question #1: I would say it's generally integrated into the curriculum that we use. The language arts curriculum is a combination of Bob Jones and A Beka, and they are very good at integrating biblical concepts - and, especially the Bob Jones, the moral concepts into the discussion. And, since I use their 6th grade reading curriculum there's a lot of opportunity for discussion. There's not always the time in class, but the opportunity is there. The science curriculum I'm using this year is Bob Jones, and that is very good as far as the underpinnings of the moral

education as... giving them the basics as far as God's Word and what God says is always the basis for what you build on. This coming year, I'm using the Bob Jones 8th grade curriculum and adapting it down to 6th grade because the curriculum that the school bought two years ago, though it was published by a Christian organization, doesn't have a biblical... They're basically theistic evolutionists. There was just so much in the book that I... For a lot of things I just took the books away and guided the class discussion. I just didn't want to send the books home. There were too many things that I picked up on that the 6th graders would miss but a parent would get. Chapter nine was on the big bang theory and creation, and I flipped out.

The basic has to be the inerrancy and that God's Word underpins everything. You always have to go back to God's Word in the moral things because we have kids that come from so many different religious backgrounds. But there are some things that are standard and are fundamental, and you always have to put them back to that. And if there are little things that could be interpreted other ways, we send them back to their parents.

Question #2: When you deal with discipline problems. Dealing with things that students do to each other. And being right and wrong. Application, and not only application but trying to inoculate them from things that they are bombarded with on TV all the time, because I'm finding that for the majority of students, TV watching is not controlled. It's very... Some of the stuff I wouldn't even watch. And they just go see movies and things that... And they never... There seems to be a dichotomy which... "This is what the Bible says and this is what I see" and they never make the connection. And one of the things I try to get them to do is to make the connection.

I had a little boy last year in my class who was just fascinated with aliens - and I mean, to the extreme. He just knew everything about aliens, and he literally... I think he believes that there are aliens, really. And I try to, you know... How do you reconcile that with the Bible? How do you reconcile that with creation? And we talked about it in class all year. And they never saw that somehow these two things have to fit together, that maybe this alien stuff is just all made up. But most of the class never got that. They just were sure that, since they had been bombarded with it so much, that there has to be life on another planet somewhere, in another galaxy, somewhere. And they would give... Then on another part, they would say, "Yes, God created the earth. Yes, God said... God did this. God created the universe." And, finally, in April one little boy one day - we were having a discussion during free time - and this little boy just looked at me and said, "You guys, if there were aliens somewhere else, God would have had to send another Jesus." And I thought, "Finally, somebody got it." God sent Jesus to us, but... I think that has a lot to do with morals



because if you just think that there are other aliens, your ceding to the fact that things are just... there was no plan. You give into that. And that's a big underpinning in moral education because there is a plan, and there is a black and white. And there are some very specific principles you have to live by.

Question #3: To get kids to realize that they have to have a personal relationship with God, and they have to listen to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit gives them direction. They have to start taking some of the responsibility. Up until now, everybody's always told them what to do. But at this point... and they should have been getting that from home and from Sunday school and from previous teachers. As children of God, they have a responsibility to start listening to God and to start developing that personal relationship and building on what they've learned already -so it's not just so much rote learning what they've learned in Sunday school and what other people have told them, but that they have a personal relationship.

Question #4: I can think of several. In 6th grade - I mean, middle schoolers are famous for arguing. I'm glad I don't teach 7th and 8th graders because they get it all the time whether they want controversy or not. Sixth graders, the first half of the year, they're still just little elementary students, and they believe everything that comes out of your mouth, and they don't question it because that's their developmental... By the end of the year, they start questioning. Generally, they still will not take a stand on controversial issues; they'll say what their parents say. And you generally will get their parents' political beliefs. I don't believe that, when things come up about politicians, my personal opinion is and... in my home we don't talk about it, and we pray for our president, we pray for our congressman, we don't discuss their poor choices in their personal lives. We pray for them. And that's been a real hard one over the years because... I've been back in the classroom since '94 and there's always been plenty of political fodder in the last eight years. And some of them get very, very angry when I say, you know, "The Bible says..." and I go back to Romans where it says to pray for our leaders. God set our leaders in place for a reason, and they don't like that. And that's a very easy one to get into. That's also a very good one where, legally, you know -forget about the moral Bible issues - legally, I don't have any right to go there. Especially, since what they're saying I know they got from home. These are words that sixth graders don't use.

One time we got - and this was my first year - I had a bunch of... This group of kids had given everybody fits all the way through, and they're juniors in high school now. They were very controversial from day one. They didn't fit the mold of being compliant the first semester. But we got

into an argu... a discussion one day because something came... I don't know how we got into it. It was in reading, in this one particular section. "Is man..." We discussed something - it came up - and... we use these *God's World* newspapers. They're like weekly readers, just from a Christian perspective. And I honestly don't remember how the discussion came up, but it came up. "Is man a mammal?" And my position is "Man is not a mammal." He may have some physical characteristics. And, I mean, that just blew everybody away. I mean, you know, 'cause these kids - and I said, "Well, you know, explain to me - explain your logic. And I was kind of... I know how to direct the discussion. I had kids in my class that were crying for me because I was in the minority. Some of these little girls were just, tears were coming down their faces because "These children are arguing with Ms. [Teacher #2]!" But, you know, it was good because it got them to think because, again, it was that dichotomy they've been taught. Even if it's not... They don't realize how many things they see where it's just assumed that man is just a higher form of animal.

You know, in science curriculum, they're taught that man was created, but they don't... they don't catch it in the TV, and they don't catch it in the books they read, and they don't catch it in the advertisements that they hear.

And my kids are in public school, so I'm looking for it all the time. And my kids, my offspring children... I mean that's a big thing in our family... We have discussions all the time about "Well, how does that differ?" I think a lot of times these kids... because they have school and church and their other life, that they never make the cross-over.

But that was just a way where the controversial issue... Another we came up with... I tell you, that year was just... And those kids gave every one of us fits. I'm so glad I don't teach 7th and 8th grade. But, we got into abortion that year and "Is abortion murder?" Now that was my first year back after being off for a couple years to have a couple of babies, and so I probably would not let that discussion get going now. But God protected me that year, but we got into that... But the trouble with 6th graders is - half of them don't know what abortion is. They only know that it is something that a woman ought to have a choice about. They have no clue. To them it's no different than a medical procedure, like getting some stitches. They have no clue what it is! And so a lot of these things, they know the lingo, and they have no idea what they are talking about. They don't know what it is.

We showed a video on sex. We showed it to the whole school I think three years ago. And then we did it in 6th grade at the end of the year that year and two other years. And it was on saying "no," sexually transmitted diseases, the results of intercourse. And these kids... And then we broke up into groups. They had no clue. I mean, some of these kids, they could talk the talk, but when you'd say...

They basically knew nothing. They'd say, "When she talked about STDs, what's an STD?" None of them knew what it was. None of them knew, when they said things like... some physical changes that happen when you become pregnant, they didn't have a clue. But they knew the lingo. So half of the time, when they talk about these things, they have no clue what they are talking about. So when you have these controversial issues, you might be getting into the purview of what parents ought to be doing because the definitions should be coming from their home environment and from the context of their family values and what their church says.

And when you get into that middle... especially 6th grade, you're opening a can of worms. Because the problems that have come up, I've noticed... and especially with the 7th and 8th grade teachers, the problems that they have had with irate parents have been not in the discussion of the issue. It's been when the teacher's definition of the different... you know, when the kids say, "What is this?" And the teacher defines it. That's when the problem comes in. For example, I have a daughter going into 6th grade this year, and we were watching something on TV. There was a pro-choice rally and a pro-life, and I said, "S, do you understand what they're talking about when it's pro-choice and pro-life?" And I had... We watch the news very rarely as a family. And we watch... We get the newspaper, and usually you can find out better there anyhow as it's a little bit more unbiased. And she said, "Oh, Mom, they're talking about abortion. And they're talking about some people get the right to choose what they want to do, and that's good. And some people... I don't know what the pro-life was. But I think probably pro-choice is better." And this is my daughter. And I've been the... And I thought, "S, do you know what abortion is?" She said, "No."

Do you know... And it just, it floored me because she has older siblings, and we've been down this road. And I thought, "Woe, I just missed this one." And I said, "Abortion is when a mommy... when God gives a mommy a baby, and she decides it's inconvenient or she disagrees that God gave her a gift. And it's inconvenient, they can't afford it, and they don't trust God, and they decide that they don't want that baby. So they go to the doctor, and the doctor sticks a knife up inside that lady, and they cut the baby up, and they suck it out in pieces. Now, that's what they do." I would never say that in a classroom because there are parents who would chew me alive who don't believe that, who don't believe... We have parents who don't believe that life begins until birth. So I would never do that in a classroom. But, see, that's the kind of thing that has to be in the home.

Question #5: Well, generally, in the Bible... because you always have to go back to the Bible. That's where you've got to always send them. Especially since we are non-denominational and we have kids who are Catholics, we have Baptists, we have Episcopal, Lutheran. And usually, their

take is just a little different. So you always have to go back to the Bible and give them a reference. And usually, the Bible, it deals with principles rather than specifics. And explain why you believe this principle applies to this decision. Why... you know, abortion is pretty cut and dried. "Thou shalt not murder." And you go to Psalm 51 or Psalm 139. What does it really mean by, "I was knit together in the inner parts of my mother's womb"?

Some things, like with the political stuff. We have to go back to Romans 12. I mean there are some things that are very cut and dried; there are some things that aren't. And you just always have to go back to the Bible. And, even then, there are different interpretations. And that's really hard for a 6th grader to get.

I can usually tell within two weeks. And I don't... I have a personal habit that I don't read cumulative files on the kids that come in. I would rather... And some people disagree with me on this because they want to know what's coming so that they can tailor their education. I would rather everybody come in with a clean slate. I refuse to read the cumulative files.

I can tell within two weeks who are the Catholics, and who are the Baptists. I can tell within two weeks who are pre-trib, usually, and who have no teaching as far as last things - because of comments they make, because of interpretations. And they're usually off the cuff things. Like, we were talking one day about how Jesus grew up and he waxed strong in the four parts: physically... I'm trying to think what reference it is... physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. We got off on this rabbit trail, and rabbit trails tell you a lot sometimes. One student said, "Jesus couldn't have had any brothers because that would have meant that his mother would have had to have more kids." Well, that's Catholicism. And if you study Catholicism, they have a whole different interpretive framework that they put on Scripture that we don't. We have to be very careful because they still already sign that they have accepted Jesus as their Savior. And sometimes in Bible, we have to re-define what that means. And that's where it gets real dicy, especially in a class discussion. A lot of this stuff, when it's one on one, you can be very blunt and to the point. You can't in the class, especially because the kids have to save face. And they have to feel safe enough to participate. You have to use discretion.

I know I've gone off on a rabbit trail just as we do in class sometimes, but that's how you find out from these kids what they really believe. Because if you just ask a question, "Is it wrong to steal?" They will always say, "Absolutely, it's wrong." But when you listen, what they define as stealing... That's where the moral education is. Because that's when they're not giving you what they think you want to hear. Then you start seeing, "Ooooh, we've got a little bit of work to do here." Because they have defined stealing in a way that is not biblical. They have

defined lying in a way that is not biblical. They have defined purity in a way that's not biblical. They've defined dating and what you do and what's okay to do on a date - that's not just in high school. "Middle school? Are you out of your mind?" But these kids go on dates! And their definition gives them an out so they can sin.

And I think there has been a concerted effort in our society to redefine these things differently so that sin is not sin. And we're seeing it. Preachers used to preach on this 20 years ago, and I thought, "Boy, these guys are paranoid..." And, look at me. I'm a product of public school. Look at me; I came through the '60s. And I'm fine. But you know something, it's a battle we're fighting with my kids now. My kids didn't go through the '60s. My kids don't see, and these kids don't see the SDS blowing up buildings on the college campuses. They don't see college riots. Everything has been redefined since the '60s. And they don't see the sin that they should. And we don't see it either because we are blind to it because we just get so used to it.

Question #6: They absolutely play a role. In kids who have good Bible backgrounds - again, good stable homes whose parents truly want to honor the Lord, it strengthens them because they will... We can say what we want, but they will go back and will talk to their parents, and they will look in the Bible, and they will be strengthened.

There's a certain amount of these kids who will use discussion of controversial issues to try to separate and divide the authority figures in their lives. They will try to play their parents off against their teachers. And a lot of parents will fall into the trap and so will a lot of teachers and let themselves be used and... I can think of kids through the years who have done that. I can think of times when I have been stupid enough and not have enough discernment to realize what was going on. And afterwards, the Lord just said, "You know, you really blew that. You let yourself get away from your goal and get off on this rabbit trail and you have alienated parents, and you have shown their kids that they could set two authority figures against each other. And that's wrong, that is just as dangerous. Controversial issues get the kids... And I think... But the majority of the kids, it gets them to think. Because on this end you've got your children who are very... they want to do what the Lord wants them to do. They would go through the firing squad. On the other end, you've got those kids who are just the rebels and who will use anything to play off their authority figures in their lives. But the vast majority in the middle are just your average kids who - yes, they do love the Lord, but they're not the leaders. But they want some direction. And they're the kids you want to get mature enough so that they are not tossed about by every wind of doctrine and every different idea so that they can get some backbone, just some spiritual backbone. And the controversial issues are



the ones that get them to think. And sometimes that's the kick in the pants that they need to realize, "Wow, this spiritual battle stuff is... this is... We are in a battle."

Another one that just came to my mind is divorce. Because it just breaks my heart every year. The first year I was here, every boy in my class - either his dad had walked out during the past two years or walked out during that year. Every boy, every 6th grade boy in my homeroom. And you look at the majority of the kids we get, that's - I would say -half. It might be 51%, but half. That's just a bunch of kids are from divorce.

That's one where you've got to really be careful because of the teaching because you can really get into church doctrines. I've been in churches where... and this was a former pastor of mine, who... that section that says an elder must be the husband of one wife... He taught from the pulpit that it was one wife at a time. We went to him and he said, "Listen, if I didn't do it this way I couldn't have anybody who could be deacons because everybody's divorced."

It comes down to definition.

That is one that I will probably never cross the line on because, really, you don't cross the line on it with the kids because they are victims. They have no choice in the matter.

Question #7: I always respond with Scripture. You have to. Scripture is what we base our Christian life on.

The problem comes when you get into defining those things that I discussed earlier. That's when you get into hot water.

Question #8: (This question was skipped.)

Question #9: I feel like I've got my finger in the dam, and I know they're going to go home and watch six hours of MTV at night and watch Johnny Carson or whoever the heck is on that now. I have kids who can't stay awake in class, but they're giving me routines from Konan. Konan O'Brien is on at midnight.

I just feel like sometimes what I have done is just a waste.

It comes back to... If the discussion causes them to doubt something that their parents have taught them and gives Satan a wedge to use against... Their parents are ultimately responsible for them, and even the best intentions... If it causes them and gives them some iota of rationalization to disobey or disrespect their parents, I have been wrong. I may not always know that.

Sometimes what may be good for 90% of the class may, in turn, be bad for one kid. But God can always turn ashes into gold. So, I've just had to repent and say, "Lord, I messed up."

I see this in all teachers: sometimes we feel we know

what's best for this child, but the fact of the matter is that the parents know what's best for this child. They know this kid much better than I do. They have much more invested than I do. And I may disagree, but I better keep my mouth shut. Because in some things, I have no business.

Question #10: No, I don't remain neutral on issues. Part of that is because of the grade level that I'm teaching.

There is one time I did. It was about things that people do differently in churches. We were getting into, well, why do people raise their hands, and that kind of stuff. That really isn't moral... But church politics stuff, I don't touch that with a ten foot pole. My standard answer there is, "You need to talk to your parents about that."

But as far as the moral stuff, no I don't remain neutral. And part of that is that 6th graders need directed discussion. Developmentally, most of them can't handle free-for-all discussions anyhow. You can direct them and get them to thinking. They are very easily directed in discussions. And they don't handle the free-for-alls well.

Question #11: Not thinking. Giving an answer that you have... just not thinking. Spitting out rote... And there are some things we need to be indoctrinated in. That has a very negative connotation, especially for people who came up in the '60s and early '70s. But there are some things we need to be indoctrinated in.

We need to be indoctrinated about the infallibility of the Scriptures and the attributes of God and the blood atonement of Jesus. Those are things that we don't argue about. We don't discuss. They just... They are there. And the doctrinal fundamentals... I don't think that's bad. But it's the application where indoctrination gets the bad... The application and in your daily life...

*Interviewer: "Is it indoctrination when your 6th graders parrot their parents' words as you mentioned earlier?"*

No, it's not indoctrination, it's training.

Question #12: With my own kids, yes. With my students I teach, I wish I could; it would make my life a lot easier. But the little stinkers have minds of their own.

Question #13: Moral education is no more than defining biblical principles. And if we don't have the Bible basis, it's just as worthless as building your house on the sand.

What's really funny is because my kids don't go here... We do, especially in the elementary, they have their character trait of the month and the public school has their character trait of the month, but they have nothing to base it on. They have these neat little stories and they discuss it. And my little children come home, and they can parrot what integrity is and what honesty is - but

they have nothing to base it on. It makes my job... You know, I've got to get in there and say, "Now, let's go back to the Bible, and this is why, and all of a sudden the lights come on. "We do this because God wants us to, not because it's going to make our lives easier because it won't." And moral education without the Bible is nothing. And all this controversial stuff... Once as a teacher you get off in the mire and it's your opinion, you deserve what you get.

*Interview #3*

*School "A"*

*Gender: Male*

*Experience: 9 years*

*Assignment: 7th and 8th Grade History*

Question #1: When we ask a child "What is the moral of the story?" To me that is the root of history. What is the lesson here, what was right or wrong for a country or a person's life, or a business, or whatever the case may be? So that's one element of it.

At times you find that you have to address direct biblical truths. There are certain... War, how do you justify killing people? So then you have to turn directly to Scripture. To me the bottom line for any moral education curriculum is that it's got to come from a biblical basis -not my opinion, not your opinion, not whatever the school's curriculum says it is or what a professor's basis is. If it doesn't line up with Scripture, then it's useless. So that really is the bottom line.

So as that applies or comes up in a history classroom setting, that's what I would use. There's not a packaged moral curriculum for that. Obviously, we use a Christian textbook, so it's already got that basis to it. And that's the way that works.

Question #2: Obviously, discussion, in recall, in application of the facts. They won't just be able to regurgitate what occurred, but "Why was it important? What have I learned from this?" So that when I'm an adult and I'm voting or I have a family or I'm operating a business or I decide to go into public office, how do I make the right decisions and avoid making wrong ones? So application is really the most important, not just recall, let's say for a test or a quiz or something. Although, it does come up there too.

Question #3: To the best of my ability to ensure that every person in my room, if they are not a Christian, at least the seed has been planted. That's the bottom line. And then of course, built right into that is making sure that they are given the best history education because the world is certainly giving their version of historical events rather than what actually happened, and I think



that's a tragedy. So, planting the seeds of Christianity and providing the best, most accurate historical education possible.

Question #4: We always discuss slavery. How did the people of the time justify owning slaves? And every year, with every class that course takes one direction or another. And when you talk about the Civil War and people fighting, not over slavery itself, but over states rights, but slavery was sort of the last straw to bring them to that conflict. And I always try to bring a modern parallel. Slavery is kind of a distant, you know, owning another person is very foreign to most of us, so I try to bring a modern parallel, and I always use abortion. Slavery was motivated by making money. Many people just ignored the moral side because "Hey, I've got laborers doing my work, and it's cheaper for me to house and feed them than it is for me to pay them. I don't have to treat them well as long as they're in some sort of semblance of health. And I'm making all the money." So that was the big fear of the southern states that if we get rid of slavery, our economy is going to collapse. If our economy collapses, the Union doesn't realize that they are going to have problems, too. So, slavery paralleled to abortion - abortion, from what I can see is about making money. Abortion doctors make lots, and so they throw out the moral side of it because "Hey, I'm living well. I'm living well." And it has become our modern Civil War. We're not picking up arms and dividing the country, but we are divided on that issue for a lot of different reasons. So, trying to make a modern parallel to a historical event - so that the students can relate is important. And they are both very controversial, slavery and certainly abortion are very controversial.

Question #5: Well, I always try to structure discussion. Especially at this age level, otherwise you're going to end up with an argument. So a lot of times, we'll chart on the board "Why are you for this? Why are you against this?" - and literally exhaust their thoughts. That's one thing I do to structure it. And then to try to put them on some sort of scale. Weighing your reasons for supporting this against your reasons for not supporting it. And then of course summing it up with what the Bible may say. We have to deal with absolutes, and God's word is an absolute. And that's a big thing with middle school in general and with our society today is trying to get people to accept absolutes. Everybody wants to base things on an opinion, blame somebody else. "I'll sue you." "It's the manufacturer's fault." "It's the lobbyists fault." It's never just my fault. So, trying to accept responsibility and dealing in absolutes are really important.

Some will open up to the biblical perspective. Some won't say anything at all. Some will still say, "I disagree." But that's okay. God did create us with that

choice. And sometimes we're guilty of excluding one verse. "Well, I don't like that particular chapter, so I'm going to throw it out." But, you know, that's their choice and their decision. They are still at an age where they are still developing their thought processes and their moral base, and they're coming from many, many different church backgrounds and family backgrounds. We had students last year from over a hundred different churches. So, you can imagine, there are over a hundred different perspectives on the same relationship that we are supposed to have with Jesus Christ. That can be pretty difficult. And a lot of times, I just lay out the absolutes and just leave it at that. I don't force them into making some sort of decision. I don't believe the classroom is always the place to have something like an altar call or a church service. It's just - plant those seeds; make sure it's productive and go from there.

Question #6: They are inescapable: drugs, smoking, sex before marriage, "What kind of music should I listen to?" "What kind of TV shows should I listen to?" "How short can my skirt be and get away with it?" "How much of my midriff should I show?" "How many earrings should I wear?" Is it okay for a guy to wear an earring? The list goes on and on. And when you are a middle schooler, you are thirteen, that is a big deal. That's a big deal. And it can be very controversial. And so they are there every day, so you have to find ways... History class is not always the place to talk about that. Although, when you can make an applicable parallel - "This relates to our topic," I'll do it. If it doesn't relate, we'll save it for Bible or lunch or some other appropriate time. Because, again, if it is not applying to our particular lesson, we can't take a lot of time to deal with it. Then again, if there is a parallel to be drawn, then absolutely. Because a lot of times I do deal with them.

Question #7: The bottom line is that it's got to be a biblically supported point - a godly, Christian worldview.

Question #8: Because I'm a Christian. I mean, I have been since I was eleven. And so, the proof is in the pudding. It works. It works.

Question #9: You can't put a middle schooler in a box and force the lid on and think that they are going to stay in that box - whether the box is right or not. They need room to reach the decision themselves. They need the room and the space and the trust as it's earned to reach conclusions and decisions on their own. God did not force me to accept Christ; He left that up to me. If I want to live to be 100 years old and die and go to hell, that's my choice. God does not earn anyone's salvation by beating them about the head. And I think sometimes, as a teacher, because you're trying to provide classroom discipline - you expect kids to

behave themselves - it's easy to carry that over and say, "I expect you to accept exactly what I am saying all the time." And that's wrong. That's wrong.

One of the things I try to do throughout the year is that I tell them, "You check me out. You go crack your Bible, you go crack your history book or a reference book, or go on the internet and see if I am correct or not. And come to a conclusion yourself." Sometimes you can try to force it down their throat just because you care so much, righteous indignation, whatever you want to call it. And what you've done then is they throw up their wall, and then you lose the battle. And sometimes you do more damage than good. So, it's difficult.

Question #10: A lot of times, it's something that is very specific. You know, we just went through the whole Bill and Hillary Clinton, Monica, Ken Starr mess. And you learn to bite your tongue until it bleeds. I just do. They'll say, "What do you think?" Well, I think a lot of things but it doesn't mean I should say them.

You try to teach students to judge the fruit. Judge the fruit. What did he say? What did he do? Is that what Jesus would do? Yes or no. Then they don't have to worry about your opinion so much. It's a good cast-off. So, you try to find ways to direct it.

With the Monica Lewinski situation, I chose to remain neutral because they are 12 and 13, and I'm 30. Some of them absolutely would understand what I said and not have a problem with it; some of them wouldn't have a clue what I was talking about. And some of them would giggle and laugh and go home and tell mommy that I said something different, and then I'd have a phone call.

Age appropriateness really comes into play.

Question #11: It conjures up an image of trying to force all the people in my presence to be exactly like me or do exactly what I do; lock-step, blindly follow - I guess generally negative.

If you're going to be indoctrinated into something, that you arrive at, that you want to accept - not because somebody made you, not because you were just lazy and didn't check it out to see if it's the right thing to do.

I had a student several years ago who would just flat tell me in a high school classroom, "I'm not interested in this. I don't care about this. I'm never going to use this." And I said, "You're exactly the kid of person that would wake up and follow Hitler right down the road." And, you know, her jaw fell on the floor. And I kind of like, "Well, maybe I shouldn't have said it." Well, you've got to wake them up.

Question #12: No, (1) again, it's got to be their choice; (2) it's a history class. It's not Bible class. It's not church. It's supposed to be history from a biblical

perspective which means it's going to be conservative.

We are going to teach you the truth; we are going, to best of our ability, to live it out. But if you don't accept it, you don't accept it. We will provide opportunities for you to accept it. But if I force you or coerce you, then you didn't decide to do it. You kind of caved, gave in, you see what I'm saying? You don't see Jesus doing that.

Question #13: They are inescapable. But you have to know when to address them and when not to. There's got to be a proper time and place. Or we direct them, "See your pastor, see your dad, see your mom, see the Bible teacher." Controversial issues can be used by the students to get you off track.

*Interview #4*

*School "A"*

*Gender: Female*

*Experience: 27 years*

*Assignment: 7th and 8th Grade P.E. and Pre-Algebra*

Question #1: Well, everything is based from Scripture. I have a group of Scriptures that I go through that I can pertain to what I am studying not necessarily, specifically of a moral nature. But because it's Scripture, it has basis... And I try and tie it specifically to my pre-algebra. Then I also am in physical education; we have a devotional time, usually at least two or three times a week. I don't always get it in every day. But I try and work with teamwork, how you get along with other people, how you... I'm really big on integrity. I really... I try and foster that in my students, that above all else - and it isn't to please me, it is to please God. And one of the key things is that you have to be honest in all that you do and say. And, so, those are the issues that I deal with a lot in my classroom. I don't feel like I have as much time to deal with them in pre-algebra as I do in physical education because we have a dressing time before and after. And I just think that the interaction we have is a little closer because we are not tied to a textbook. And I feel like I am able to deal with issues with my students a little easier in that than I do in pre-algebra.

I developed this list of Scriptures by going through and pulling them from ACSI, and I have a list of Character traits that I got from someone, and I've taken those character traits... And that's something that I do at the very beginning of the year. I pick out a character trait, and we pick a Christian athlete who I feel like portrays that. In the past we've done Michelle Acres. We've done David Robinson - two good ones to do again. And just trying to find people who are good Christian role models, and then I'll pick a Scripture, and then I'll do a bulletin board out in the main hallway. That little one that is by the water fountain is mine.

Then we talk about those during the month. Then I try to get students interested in doing it, so it's not mine. After that, it's theirs. And I give them the material and say, "What would you like to do? Let's find someone we feel would be a good person to do that." I just came across two good ones just within the last week because I heard the testimonies of Taj Makhoitan and Carla McGee that played here for the Miracle. There are some good ones to use there plus what Michelle Acres has gone through, and the fact that David Robinson and Avery Johnson both contributed to the NBA. So, I'm trying to be very careful about the people that I pick. And I use *Sports Spectrum* a lot of times; it's a magazine, Christian Magazine about athletes and I draw from that as to possible people that I could work with. And I try from there to develop it.

Question #2: Well, I feel like that I most definitely must try to be a role model for my students - just by the things that I do, the things that I say. There's a few words... I'm a melancholy personality and for many years I felt like that I was too negative, and still at times I think I lapse back into that. But I have tried to develop a more positive attitude and try and then encourage my kids to be positive about themselves and about their interactions with other people, their interactions with faculty, interactions with their parents. And, so, I feel like kind of that's an avenue that I really, really have worked on. Like, I don't allow the words "shut up" to be said in the classroom, and it's something that comes out of their mouth often. They know that when they do that, I just hold up five fingers and they do five push-ups for me. And if they can't do push-ups, they do sit-ups for me, but they do ten sit-ups. So, those are things that I just feel like... that's one area that I've really worked on in my life, and that in turn, I've tried to develop. And I think that people don't see me so much as a melancholy anymore as to that's what I was when I first came into Christian education, because I've been in public education also.

Question #3: For them to live godly lives; that that will somehow carry over into what they implement into their lives daily and that it will have life-long implications for them as they go through life.

Question #4: When the Columbine incident came up, that was something that the students very much wanted to talk about. And of course... Well, I have, I think, a very close relationship with my students, particularly my girls. In my physical education class I don't have any guys. I think most of them had a strong sense of "That's really a serious issue; could that happen here?" And I have to honestly say that it's not beyond the realm of possibility because we deal with all kinds of students. We don't... And as best as Mr. [Principal] tries to gage the parents' feelings and that sort of thing, I still think we have non-believers

here. And so, I just really feel like that was a great concern for them. And, not so much that there are opposing viewpoints. I think I talked a little bit with some guys about, and, of course, then there's the gun issue. Well, you know, "We have guns. You know, we like guns. But we never think about using them in the classroom." And yet I can see how through 27 years of education that the possibility is there. And it was just like one student's name came to mind when that happened as someone who I felt like had a real fascination with guns.

I want kids to do the right thing because it's the right thing to do, not because someone tells them to do it, but because that's something that they see is of value. And a lot of times with middle schoolers, that's what they are trying to figure out in their minds. They don't have everything formulated and set, not that high schoolers do either because, you know, I have a high school daughter who is going to be a senior, and we still deal with issues. But I still see that as something that is of moral value because they want to do things because it's the right thing to do, not because they were told to do it.

Question #5: I try to let them talk about it. And then let's go to Scripture and see what we can find in the Bible that speaks about this issue. And sometimes that may take a day or two, and I encourage them to try and seek out passages of Scripture that will speak to that issue. It's not something that I want to push aside because if it is a concern to them, then I think it has value. And I don't tell kids that they can't speak about something like that if I don't agree with them. That's something that we need to talk about. So, I encourage kids to talk whether I have the same opinion or not.

Question #6: I think it helps them if they are guided through the situation, that helps them formulate and solidify where they are with moral issues.

We have some students that come and they have parents who have really dealt with them, and they have a strong sense of what is right and wrong. We have some students who come in, and they're still formulating those. And I think we still have a few students that parents have allowed, or want the school to take that issue, to take that role - which is not where I want to be. I want us to be working as a team, and we just reinforce. That's where I would like it to be, where we're just reinforcing what the parents teach at home.

The boys like to talk to me about sports because I like that so much. I keep up with things, and I can talk with them about it. Well, let's take the issue of when Dennis Rodman was talked about here in Orlando, that Dennis Rodman might come to the Orlando Magic. And students said, "Well, how do you feel about that Mrs. [Teacher #4]?" And I said, "Well, I mean, I'm really opposed to it." And they said, "Well, why?" I said, "These are the reasons: I don't

like the way he talks. I don't like the cross-dressing, and this type of thing that leaves you to question his sexuality." And so, those are things that we've been able to talk back and forth about. And I said, "I don't question his ability to play a certain role in a basketball game, but as far as his being a role model, which in my opinion every athlete is, whether they like to be or not. Charles Barkley says, "I don't want to be a role model." I mean, you are! And so that gives me an opportunity to talk with them.

Question #7: Kids will ask you, "Well, what is your opinion of this?" And I say, "Do you want my honest opinion?" And they say, "Yes." And I say, "Okay, this is how I feel." And so, you know, I've told them about those things. And Dennis Rodman just comes to mind for some reason because that is something that just came up here in the last year.

I think that I am more a person that... I'm not really outspoken in that I just don't just throw my opinions at them. But if they approach me and ask me or I'll speak about a certain devotion I had today or a piece of Scripture. And they say, "That kind of applies to what we're talking about." Like the issue with Monica Lewinsky and President Clinton. And so that provides me with an opportunity. But I'm not a person that just, "Well, this is how I feel." I, more or less, allow them to open the issue. I think I am more like that.

Question #8: I feel like that... For one thing, I don't want to be legalistic with them, that especially middle schoolers don't like to have things thrown in their face. They like to talk to you about them, and they like to get your reasoning defined. And they've got to find that you have some basis for that. And that's where I think the Bible comes in. So that's just... And I feel like I'm not one that seeks controversy. But if that's something they want to talk about, I certainly don't duck issues either. I'm quite willing to talk, "Well, let's talk about it," because I feel that that gives me a platform, but it also says that I am open to what you have to say to me. But we can discuss it.

Question #9: I'm sure that there are issues that I may not have dealt with just right. But those are not issues that immediately come to mind. But I am constantly an evaluator. I am constantly evaluating why I do and say in the classroom, in what I teach - if I'm hitting a brick wall with something that I'm teaching I'm back saying, "Well, what can I do to try and change that?" So I think I am a person who is constantly evaluating. And I am sure that there are things that have come up where I have said, "Well, I didn't handle that very well." But asking me for specifics at this point in time, I can't think of any.

Question #10: Several years ago, I had a class of girls. There were approximately five or six of them. It was a small class. The dynamics of the class meant that, for whatever reason, they were constantly taking sides against one another. And the dynamics would change from time to time. It wasn't always the same group against the others. The dynamics of the groups would change, and then one group would be against the other one. Well, I purposely would try to take a neutral position in that because I felt like that that was the role that I could play best, as an intermediary - in trying to solve it. Certainly, there were times when I thought one group was wrong and the other group was right, but I didn't think that that was my role. I wanted them to talk and to try and solve it within their group. Now, there were times when I took more than one class period to try to deal with these groups. Several times, Mr. [Principal] had to talk to these girls about the fact that they just seemed to be at odds with one another, frequently. A lot of it, I believe there were moral issues in there. It was more or less getting along with one another. But I still think they were all coming from different backgrounds, and there were some who were very strong Christians, others weren't, others I questioned whether they... I talked to them about it -about where they were in their relationship with God and Jesus. I guess that was a situation where I purposely tried to stay neutral because I felt like that would best serve their needs because they didn't need to think that I was taking sides with any particular group - because I didn't think that would serve a purpose.

Question #11: To me, indoctrination means I am trying to get them to think the way I think in a way that is probably very spoken on my part, that what I do and say is law. And to me, that's kind of indoctrination. And I prefer a more subtle approach.

Sure, I may get them to my way of thinking, but not in a judgmental way or not saying, "Well, this is the way it is." Not that I haven't done that before. I am certain that I have done that before, but that is not my goal in the classroom. I'm a facilitator. Yes, I want them to know that God is good and that He is there for them at all times. And that's where I try to make myself available to them, to talk to them. Now, I wouldn't say that I'm the first person they'd come to. But I've developed some relationships with some kids over the years. I just had one whose 25, 26 years old, who every time he comes into town he calls me. And there was a moral issue that came up in his high school years that was particularly devastating. And I am sure there was wrong on both sides. There was wrong on the side of the teacher that was directly involved, and I felt like there was definitely some wrong on this young man's part. I tried not to be judgmental, and he's thanked me a number of times for doing that. He feels like it just made him stronger.



Question #12: Well, if it comes through subtly in the things that I say, I'm sure that I can change opinions through the talking that I do to students. Here again, like I say, I don't try to do it... I mean I don't set out to say, "Okay, this is the way you have to think. This is the way you have to do it." I try not to do that. But I try to, through the things that I do and the things that I say in talking with them, hopefully they'll see that what I had to say is of value. And not that I haven't made mistakes. I'm not one that feels that they can never apologize. I've gone to kids and said, "I'm sorry. Whatever I did wasn't right." I'm not above saying I'm sorry.

I can think of one situation a few years ago. I had a student who I honestly felt cheated on a test. It was one of the last papers I had graded, and I honestly felt that this young lady had not been honest, that she had changed something. So I called her parents, and they said, "Well, that's just not like her." And so, I had conversations with the parents. I had conversations with the student. And she said, "No, no, I did not cheat." And in talking with the mother, I said, "I am willing to give her the benefit of the doubt, and let's move on from here." I know at the end of the year, her parents really thanked me for my willingness to move on. They felt like it wasn't an issue anymore.

Question #13: Well, I think they'll come up. And I think that you do not duck them, that it's something that if it's of interest to kids, then it's something that is there for them. Now, by the same measure, you have to weigh what they will say because they will try to get you off onto rabbit trails. So you may have to say, "Well, let's not talk about that right now." Because that will come up in pre-algebra. They'll say, "How do you feel about this?" "Well, if you'd like to discuss that with me, I'd be happy to discuss it with you after class." So, you kind of have to kind of weigh the balance, and middle schoolers are really good at trying to skirt you off on another path if a particular assignment in pre-algebra is particularly difficult or whatever.

But it's something that I think is of value. They are going to come up, and anything that I can do or say, through my experiences or through taking them through Scripture and say, "This is what the Bible says about this." Then that's of value. And hopefully then they'll take that for what it's worth and my sincerity in giving it to them, and it will have an impact. It may not have an impact immediately, but you plant seeds. You constantly plant seeds. And some of them develop very quickly, others of them take years.

*Interview #5*  
*School "A"*  
*Gender: Male*

*Experience: 4 years*

*Assignment: 9th and 12th Grade (1) Bible - Family, Dating, and Marriage; (2) Personal Fitness; and (3) Team Sports*

Question #1: Well, first, everything starts with the Scriptures. Any basis, anything that we derive from a moral standpoint - it's got to come from the Scriptures as we go about to do that. That is the stand-alone truth that we live our lives by, and, therefore, we hold that out to the kids as being the moral measure of our lives. So that's... Every principle, and anything that we build the curriculum around has to be around biblical principles - not necessarily how we interpret them, but what the Scripture actually says. And, while there's a lot of diversity of opinion there, basically, that's where we start - Scripture.

Question #2: Specifically, there are three realms we discuss - dating, marriage, and family. In the dating realm, we talk about the responsibility of the believer as it relates to relationships and how they interact with one another. Purity - we talk about the motives of the heart. As the Scripture says in Hebrews, it talks about Scripture being a two-edged sword, dividing the bone and the marrow as well as the thoughts and the intents of the heart. And that's really what we get down to with the kids in the dating realm. It's not just the "do's" and "don'ts," what you can and can't do from a legalistic standpoint, but more specifically, "Why are we doing what we're doing, and why is that playing a role?" In marriage, the responsibility of the husband, the role of the wife. The issue of roles and responsibilities is a very muddled one today, so we get into biblical roles. We talk about leadership, talk about submission - on both sides of the issue. And that always brings great discussion.

We talk about things related to developing a family - family life - and the responsibility of the father to provide vision, a framework of discipline, the goals of the family. That type of thing. To position himself as the head of the home, and, as the father of that home, to take responsibility, initiative of making decisions on behalf of the family - really taking up his role that was intended for him at the beginning so that the woman can sense that she is valued, honored, appreciated, certainly not put down... a lot of the issues of two-career families, that type of thing. We talk about those types of issues, too.

So, all of that is done in the biblical context. We bring out what the Scripture says and then discuss it from there with practical application.

Question #3: There is definitely an agenda, as there is in almost every education... in context. I believe that each teacher would be foolish... His intent is to educate the students to a particular thought process, whether history

or math or whatever. They are attempting to create a thought process in the student that they rely upon. Our goal in the moral education is to create an ownership of the convictions that the Scripture teaches that we should have. It's not enough just to say, "Here's the standard; you've got to live it." Because we can't on our own. Without the cross, we have no hope. So the power by which we live our lives is in the cross. To get a kid to own the convictions we're talking about, would be the ultimate goal. Without conviction, based upon a dependence on grace, we don't have a chance. If these kids go out being legalistic, failing at every turn, they'd realize there's no reality to what they're doing - so why do it? So we challenge them to not only own their conviction but to realize that their own strength is foolish. So it's really two goals: (1) to understand and own the standard and the conviction in their heart and (2) to recognize that apart from God's grace, it's all foolishness. So, they have to have both sides of the issue to understand their state of sin, their struggle with sin, and recognize that the cross is good enough to take care of that. So there's a couple of doctrines we try to get across to the kids that, if they can take with them the basics at the heart level, I feel like they can be successful at their attempts to apply what they've learned in the class.

Question #4: Specifically, as far as moral controversies such as "Is homosexuality hereditary, or is it something that is a choice on the part of the individual?" "Is divorce something that... Can you divorce and re-marry?" "Is premarital sex ever okay?" Those would be controversial issues... Headship verses submission, and the role of the wife in the family. "Should she work outside the home? Should she not? Is she under the thumb of the husband?" "Is there equality in the home from a biblical perspective, or does God just see it all being about the man?" Those are the four major issues that I would typically come up with. Masturbation, various forms of sexual expression - are they okay? Those would be pretty heavy ones that would come up in discussions regarding various forms of sexual expression. "Are they okay in marriage, outside of marriage?" You know, technical virginity - "I don't have intercourse; is that okay?" Those are all things that definitely come up in the classroom. And "AIDS, is it a judgment issue, or is it a result of homosexuality, or is it something that is just a horrible tragedy." "Why do bad things happen to good people?" So, things like that. Whether a Christian should date a non-believer - that would be another one.

*Interviewer: "Are these issues built into the curriculum? Do you intentionally address these issues?"*

It's going to come up because we are talking about things that relate to those issues. I will address them

either on the surface from a biblical perspective - we'll pull the scriptures out that relate to those issues - or it will be asked of me where I stand on a particular issue. While I am not about giving my opinion, I will draw them out on what they understand them to be. My opinion is useless if it isn't theirs. So I actually will try to open up discussion and sometimes play the other side of it in order to get the kids to think about what they're saying rather than just saying, "It's wrong." They need to think through what they're saying. And I will play, "Well, what about this?" And sometimes I'll confuse them, and intentionally so, because I want them to really think about what they believe and not just say it. And I think what we've done is a lot of kids have checked their intellects at the door as it relates to Christianity, and they think simply because It says it, then that's enough. And I believe that's true, but when you're dealing with the world, I believe that we need to be as cunning as serpents, as the Scripture says. We need to be as aware mentally and intellectually - to be able to reason out why the Scripture is right. And that's the process we go through. We try to reason out, "Why is this biblical? Why would God say this? What is important about it? What are the benefits and downfalls of it?"

The curriculum is geared to try to attempt to address as many of these issues as possible in a tasteful manner.

Question #6: Kids are faced with controversial decisions every day. Because of the insatiable need for teenagers to be identified by something different from Mom and Dad's generation, they want something unique to identify them. Usually, it involves some controversial issue that they want to take a stand on. And the foolishness of it is that they haven't thought through what they believe - most of them. They would say one thing... That's because they have either heard somebody else say it, or because they never really have actually thought through it, or because it sounds right. And to challenge that thought process really is critical because we are talking about critical thinking skills. The child needs to be able to break down what they believe and why they believe it in order to develop conviction. If they can't develop a conviction out of that breakdown, then we're really not equipping them to live in the real world because the real world has nothing but controversy in it. It's almost 50% split liberal-conservative out there, at least in the media anyway, and you're going to have to come down on one side or the other. And I'm not saying this is a political issue, but Christianity is even becoming more and more thought of as a third and outside entity, which means in time - in a very short period of time - we'll be confronted with... The entire arena is going to be anti-Christian, and it almost is that. And, as a result, they are going to have to be able to articulate with reasoning why they believe what they believe. I think it is critical to put them in an



environment where they are not going to be rejected, but yet they are going to have an opportunity to try out their positions, their feelings, what they think, in that context without being rejected - so they can see if what they believe will really hold water. And I think that is so important in Christian education. We can't raise kids who are unequipped to handle the accusations and the arguments that will be thrown up against them. I think that is one of the chief responsibilities we have, to educate them that way.

We're to assist the parents in educating them that way. I want to make that clear. We aren't doing the parents' job here. We're trying to help them prepare the kids.

Question #7: That's a hard one because sometimes your first reaction as a young teacher would be to jump at the side of that which is right automatically. And that's the easy way to go, but as a teacher there is a responsibility we have to maintain an objectivity at least for as long a period as possible to get the kids to be able to share, because I think if you side one way or the other quickly - I know I'm speaking from a teacher's standpoint here - then you're forcing the kids either to an adversarial position or the position where they just agree with you and nothing gets discussed. So I will eventually share with them what I think. But initially, I'm trying to get them to come to me with "Well, what do you think about that? What is your position on that? Why do you think it's wrong? And what about these issues? Have you considered these things in relation to what you are saying?" Teachers who can do that not only create lively discussion but I think also position a kid to be equipped to make those hard calls.

Questions #8: Again, they have to be equipped. If the student, even coming in... We're assuming a couple of things: that the parents have already positioned them on the issue in some way, and so what I can represent to them is a litmus test, if you will, of how well what they will say will stand up in the market. Now, the challenge to me is that I don't position myself to make the child think that I am antithetical to him, that I disagree with him. I've got to be able to bring it back and to understand. And many times I've had to clarify. "Let me clarify what I am NOT saying I'm FOR this. I just want you to think through what you are saying and realize that if your going to say this, this is what this means, and you're prepared to take whatever abuse is going to come as a result of taking that biblical position, because you will be confronted on these issues. And I agree with you, but just understand this is the choice we've made." And I think that helps the child make a more informed conviction rather than just saying, "I believe this," and then all of a sudden getting slammed amongst his peers when he tries to defend his position and realizes he wasn't ready for the rejection for the position that he took amongst - quote

unquote - his Christian peers who don't necessarily take that position either. Because not everything that is called Christian today is biblical.

And I'm not talking about a legalistic type of approach. I'm talking about simple biblical issues that are clearly stated in Scripture. There are many liberal views out there that are being called Christian and therapeutic that have nothing to do with what the Scripture says. And that's where we have to help these kids and challenge them. That's why I take that position. If I'm effective at it, then I feel like I'm doing a really good job. But sometimes... I'm still learning.

Question #9: Not always. I always tell them ahead of time, "Guys, what we are trying to do here is to work with some pretty deep and intense issues. And some of these issues, I'm not sure where I come down on them. Because there are times when the Scripture doesn't specifically say, "You can't do this." I can articulate all the reasons why I think it might not be a good idea. But It doesn't necessarily say you can't. Now, what's good and what's best are two different things, and sometimes our good is the enemy of God's best. So, whenever I'm trying to push what's best, at times I alienate the children. And I have to go back quickly - and I always do - I always take the first five minutes - I call it my clarification period - to clarify something I said yesterday. "You heard me say this. Now, understand I'm not saying this." I often times run what I said by my wife, by other men that I respect, other people - because in the heat of discussion, your making comments... And I would be arrogant to believe there isn't going to come a time when what I say couldn't be misunderstood. Any time you deal with teenagers, they take you at literal value; what you say is face value. And that isn't necessarily what you meant, it's just how they heard it. So, I'm regularly going back not necessarily changing but merely clarifying my position as being not quite as maybe all the way out to the spectrum here. "No dating. You can't ever date." That's not what I'm saying. There's a heart attitude there where a lot of kids will come away in the first few weeks feeling like, "Well, he's saying we can't ever date." I'm constantly saying, "I'm not saying that. You're missing the whole point. If you think you're hearing that, that's not what I'm saying. Let's go back..." They want to throw you to an extreme. They want to categorize you. Most kids are in that mindset. They want to put you in a category as being old fashioned and strict. And when you're trying to move them back down the line, if you will, where they've gone, you can't come across as extremist because they won't go with you. They want to be extreme in their own right. They want to find their own identity. So, getting them to own it without being extremist, yet I am in some ways. I just can't let them see that. Therein lies that struggle, that tension for me to not come across that way to them, but yet

try to get them to come back down the spectrum as far as they'd be willing by God's grace to be committed fresh.

Question #10: We're talking about divorce and re-marriage issues, marital unfaithfulness, restored virginity - would be one that would be an issue of whether or not to stay neutral on. And women working outside the home, I feel a responsibility to remain neutral there simply because there are differing goals amongst the students in the classroom. Not everyone's goal is to be married immediately. Nor is it their goal to not have a career and a family. And as a teacher, I think it's important to put forth the biblical standard, the principle of the Scripture that does refer to the importance of the woman's role in the child's development - that there is no way to underestimate or to understate the critical role that the mother plays in the development of the child. To tell them they can't do it, or to say that the Bible explicitly states, "You must be there," I think would be non-productive simply because I believe it has to be a conviction they have in their own heart. I think it's one of those good versus best things. I think that the Bible does say that the woman should be busy at home, but while I may hold a position that way, in front of the kids I will attempt to say or to come across as being very neutral on that particular issue simply because while I hold out that it's important the woman take a... I've seen it done both ways... and would probably have to state that you've got to make your own call before God. And on many of these issues where I have to stay neutral, it would simply be because the individual, I believe, is required to make a call of his own before the Lord. Their own individual accountability supersedes my opinion. And when that happens... And in any situation it's true. Should they date? Should they not? Is it sinning to date versus should they not? Should they go out one-on-one with an individual? Is that good? Best? And so, it's on these good and best issues that I have to remain somewhat neutral - of giving both sides of it, the side that would not be a big deal and the side that would be. And then allow the children based on hopefully what's out there to come to terms with their own position on that. While I may share an opinion, largely what I'm hoping to come away with is a neutral stance.

Question #11: To indoctrinate is to take doctrine and to infuse it into someone, to position it into an individual. I'm a firm believer in the value of doctrine from a biblical standpoint - not a legalism, but doctrine, doctrine as being the study of who God is and what His requirements are, and what the basic doctrines of my faith are as it relates to the doctrine of sin, the doctrine of the cross, the doctrine of redemption, salvation, baptism, all those doctrines that play a critical role in my salvation as a believer. That would be a form of indoctrination, as you begin to understand those doctrines

before God.

I think that some would take it to be any principle that you are trying to bury into the mind of a kid as your intent is to try to manipulate them. And I think that indoctrination on a larger scale, defined in a larger arena, would be the attempt to try to pigeonhole kids into one thought process and that that is the only one that works. And while people might say that of us, the world does no different. I believe that there is no difference between what the world is trying to do and indoctrinating children into a self-absorbed, self-motivated, feelings-oriented, entertainment/pleasure-based experience... is no less indoctrination than, say, some of the values we're trying to get across to our children. It's all about what the understanding these kids have of what is valuable in life. And things that have been valuable for thousands of years as the Scriptures have taught us they are is full of indoctrination just as is teaching kids to be selfish is a form of indoctrination.

The attempt by a parent or the attempt by a teacher to try to assist a child into thinking a certain way is no different than a peer out in the hood trying to get a kid to think a certain way. It's all indoctrination. It's all about... Another words, "Are you going to tell your kids what to believe?" Well, if I don't, somebody's going to. You know what I'm saying? And they are going to believe what they want to believe, but I do have the opportunity and the privilege and the responsibility to the parent to assist them in understanding what the right doctrines are of life, what I call the doctrines of life - and those would include biblical doctrines, the things of how life works, how the world works. That's my privilege. And anyone who comes in and supersedes that or isn't working with me towards that end is attempting to indoctrinate my child with a pursuit that I feel wouldn't be consistent with what I believe my responsibilities are. So, in that sense, as a teacher, am I indoctrinating? I believe that I'm assisting the parents who invested their children in us in helping them continue to put the doctrines in place that would hold them for life. And those are decision-making doctrines. I don't see those as just accepted as the way it is, and that's just it. I would see that as equipping them with tools for decision-making based on biblical principles. And if you want to call that indoctrination, go ahead. But I believe it's more than just here's what we believe, and here's what you're supposed to believe - that that's just the way it is. I think it's more than that. I think you give them the reasoning ability by virtue of all the options that are out there, all the things that are there and the relationship and the love that goes with it. You do a whole lot more than just rote indoctrination. I think what you have would be the kids coming away equipped to make decisions that are right, then becoming viable members of society, being able to make quality decisions as men and women in the next generation. But am I



indoctrinating just for the sake of indoctrinating? No, I wouldn't say that I am. But I am attempting to put forward for the children what are the truths that we hold to be by themselves stand alone and self-evident, as I've heard once so aptly put. But at the same time it's being so critical that the kids understand that it's not about what we tell them.

I don't think any kid is going to allow himself... They're going to believe who they respect. A case could be made that we're trying to indoctrinate, but everybody is trying to do that. But in the end, what the child believes ultimately is going to come out of their own perceptions influenced by people they respect, people in their lives, that kind of thing. I don't think it's possible... by virtue of pounding it into a kids head, to brainwash them. I don't think that's what we are doing here. I think what we are doing is holding out truths that the world as a whole doesn't embrace, and because of that, they would have a measure of frustration with us. So I think there is a lot of finger-pointing going on. But for all intents and purposes, I'm guilty if that's what you call indoctrinating. I would call it investing more than anything else.

Question #12: I would call it investing more than indoctrinating. I'm investing an understanding about life and how it works, the principles in life that are laid out in Scripture as being those things that are true. And some of those would be doctrinally based, those would be things that are not optional, things that would be true simply because the Person who is the Declarer of all truth has stated them. Now, someone would say, "Well, what is truth? It's relative." That's an impossible situation, truth can never be relative. It either is or is not. It can only be absolute. It's all in that basis, that doctrine is based on the truth. So be it. I do indoctrinate if it's based on that definition. But I would love to believe that it's more than just pounding ideas into kids' heads, that it's by example, by the way I live my life, by being a role model, by holding myself to the same things that I'm preaching, holding myself to the same standards, and not allowing myself the freedom to do just any old thing that I want.

Question #13: The intent of any teacher, I believe, is to equip a child for life, not just for that study but to equip them with the principles of that particular discipline is putting forth so that the child can implement them into their life. The discussion of controversial moral issues is inevitable because we are moral beings. God has created us to be decision-making beings. Animals decide whether they are going to eat or not. We're not animals; we're the only creation with a moral code. Lions don't consider whether it's morally right to eat what they are about to eat. But because we are moral in the way

we've been made, I think that it's foolish as a teacher that you are not going to be involved in the moral arena. And I think what's most important is that, whatever moral position we take, that it be a position that's fair, that is based in truth, that the person who is giving the moral education himself is accountable, personally responsible for the way he lives his life. And I think that sets it to a different level because now we're talking about each man's individual responsibility to the moral ethics, to the moral code of life whether you believe it's been handed down or whether you believe it's of biblical origin, either way, all of us in some way is held accountable. You reap what you sow. And getting that across to kids, yes, that would be our responsibility in being... not shying away from controversial issues but being equipped to equip them in being able to stand strong in the arena of life with a strong moral code and a reason to be able to say no in a way that would make sense. It may not be the most popular position, but it makes sense. And this is where it gets tough because I don't believe that every teacher has really thought through themselves what they believe enough to stand up and take a position on an issue.

I know there are things that I have taken a stand that if I had to sit down with somebody who could really drill me on, I may not be able to give a 100% defense of what I believe. Some of it's just pure faith based on my understanding of what the Scripture says. I have to trust my Father in heaven who said whatever. But the ability to relate to a teenager is in itself something you have to learn because you're dealing with a young mind. And to get across moral concepts to a young person is something that... I don't know if a lot of teachers have gone the extra mile to educate themselves on how to do that; therefore, it does become rote indoctrination, not investing. It just becomes something they do and say, rather than something they are. There's a lack of reality in that. And there comes the hypocrisy in the minds of the kids. They look and they say, "He doesn't live it. It isn't a part of his life. I don't respect him. Therefore, he's a hypocrite." And what it leads to is a gross arrogance with which some of these people live their lives. And at times, I find myself being in that group - of being so arrogant that I'm not even allowing the Lord to have access. And I think that's the challenge that will face every teacher. It's not, "How well do you know your subject?" But "How well do you know your audience? How well do you understand how to communicate the things that really matter in the lives of these teenagers?" And while math is critical to their understanding of life, getting it across to them is something entirely different - the moral aspects of that. Whether you're talking about athletics or dating or marriage or family or science or whatever, there are moral issues in all of them. And how we get that across is a reflection upon our lives of how committed we are to getting across biblical truths to the next

generation. So this isn't just a one generation thing. We're in big trouble if we can't get it across - what we believe and why we believe it and why our God is Who He is to the next generation.

*Interview #6*

*School "B"*

*Gender: Female*

*Experience: 7 years*

*Assignment: 2nd Grade*

Question #1: Well, basically I have a combination of two things that I try to do. We have our standard Bible curriculum which is A Beka's Bible curriculum. I cover... Let's see, we start with the Salvation Series, then we cover... This is only my second year in second grade, so I have to think. Let's see, we do Moses - everything completely with Moses; it takes three series of lessons to get through Moses. And we cover the Tabernacle. We do Joshua and Judges and Ruth and Jonah. And we do Christmas lessons and Easter lessons as far as the life of Christ goes.

With that, I add in my own character development curriculum. I have a system in my room where the kids are in the Lord's army, and they earn points by learning verses and learning definitions of character qualities and then the opposite of that character quality. And so, I might take "love" for example, and the opposite of that would be "hatred." Each one, I have an opposite, too, that they would know if you aren't exhibiting that quality that this might take its place. So they learn definitions of each one of those. And they learn a Bible verse that goes with it. And they have opportunity during the week to earn points by good behavior, and they lose points for disobeying. At the end of the week, if they have earned at least fifty points, then they can go up in their rank in God's army. So they start out in boot camp and hopefully get to be a four star general by the end of the year.

And I have a lot of books of my own that I use that are books that go along with the character qualities that we talk about. And I try to bring those qualities out in the A Beka curriculum, too. You know, like a character we are studying shows this quality or that quality. I try to bring that out. We don't just limit it to Bible time. Through something that happens, we might say, "Oh, she really showed kindness by doing that." We'll do something like that to make those qualities part of everything that we do.

Question #2: In addition to what I already mentioned, I do give them... I have a treasure chest, too, that... They get rewards. They earn army money. With their points they get the money, and then they can get a tangible reward as well as just getting moved up a notch.

Question #3: I think they need to know how to apply what they learn to their daily life. We can have stories about Joshua, but if we don't ever apply it to what it means and how you act right now - and especially with little kids, they don't always make the connection unless you help them. So I try to help them to see why God put that story in the Bible, so what it can teach us now, so they can see how to apply what they are learning to their lives.

Question #4: They have come up a couple of times. One time, I had a little boy... We were looking at a book... I think that... I'm trying to remember how it all came about, but I think it was that we were looking at a book with rocks and things. And there was a crystal in it. And one of the little boys said that his aunt had told him that the crystal had special powers. I said, "Well, no." I did say, "No." I said, "God made that rock just like he made every other rock, and it doesn't have any more power than any other thing God made." And, "No." He was dead set. No, his aunt told him. And he started to get upset about it. And I said, "That's okay. You know what, everything God made is really special. Each thing He made can do special things." I tried to make it so that I stayed firm that crystals didn't have any supernatural, extra powers. But I tried to make it so that maybe what she meant was that God put power in everything that He made. The boy did calm down after a little bit, and he was okay. But it was kind of touchy.

I had a little girl who was from a Greek Orthodox background, and she said something with the... with priests one day. And we were talking about when Jesus was crucified how the priests were against him and wanted to crucify him. And I said something about these priests were not good. Oh, she got very upset because she thought I was saying that all priests were terrible and bad. I just quickly said, "No, these were the priests in Old Testament times. I'm not saying that all priests are bad." That's not really a controversial issue, I guess - just a misunderstanding.

Pretty much... Their pretty little for abortion or anything like that, but I think one time a little bit came up, and the kids were talking about how it was really bad. And we never really even talked about what it was or anything because I thought that they were a little too young for any of that.

Question #5: I try to just stay firm to what the Bible says.

I always tell them, if anything does come up, that, "Well, the Bible says this, and I believe what the Bible says is right." And then I'll say... I'll try to understand what they're saying and say, "Well, maybe they were thinking about it this way." But, because I don't want, at that tender of an age, I don't want them to lose respect for whoever... I want them to still respect their adults, like

provided all the jars of oil, and she didn't have to sell the child. But the little kid went home so upset that his parents might sell him if they didn't have enough money or something. She was upset that maybe I had let the child get this impression or something. We tried to clear that up right away. But I haven't really had any moral issues that anybody's ever come back and been upset about or questioned or anything. Thank goodness.

Question #10: The biggest one that I can think of is Santa Claus or Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy, all the imaginary things that come up in second grade. It's one of those ages where many have already discovered and are willing to tell everyone else that there is no such thing as Santa Claus. And they'll ask me point blank, "Is there..." And I'll just say, "That's something you need to discuss at home." Every family handles it differently.

So that's probably not a big moral issue. But it is, kind of, because some people think it's wrong to even believe in Santa Claus in the first place. On things like that that are definitely opinions.

Halloween I am a little iffy about. I'm a little more... I try to stay neutral, but I do let them know that I personally don't celebrate Halloween and that the Devil definitely does have a connection with Halloween. But I don't tell them they're wrong if they go out and trick-or-treat or anything like that.

Question #11: That's a tough one because it can kind of go two ways. I guess, indoctrination, I would kind of have a negative feeling towards it because it's like you're forcing your opinion on someone else and not really wanting them to think for themselves. Now, that's not necessarily always true, though. That's tough because in a way you do kind of indoctrinate them when they're little to what they believe. And I don't consider that negative. So I don't know; it's kind of a hard one.

I guess that indoctrination would be letting them know what you believe. Teaching them what you believe. And whether you turn it negative or not, I guess is up to you. How's that for wishy-washy?

Question #12: I do. Yes, I'm sure I do. To be honest, I'm sure I probably do. Because I believe that what I believe is right, and I want the kids - my own, especially, and the kids that I teach at school, too, though - I want them to know what's right. So I try to teach them that, yes, this is the absolute truth. And I guess that would be indoctrination.

Question #13: To sum it all up, I think that moral education is extremely important, that it is the duty of a teacher in a Christian school to indoctrinate the children and make... because that's the purpose of the school is to... you know, deliver the truth. And so, that's what we

the boy with his aunt. I didn't want him to get the idea that his aunt was... that I was saying... because with a little kid, if you say what they're thinking is wrong, they just think that the person then is bad or wrong. So I try very hard to let them know that maybe what they were thinking wasn't quite the same as what we think, but... that they're not a bad person.

Question #6: Now, you mean just things like the New Age things, abortion, or anything?

*Interview: "Anything that would be considered controversial in a group setting. Anything where students would have differing opinions or you may have a differing opinion."*

I think you have to talk about it. I don't think that you should try to pretend that their aren't controversies because even as young as second grade, they know that people have different opinions on things. They hear it on TV; they hear parents talking. Kids listen very well, and they hear parents and other adults talking. So I do think you have to be willing to talk about it. But I do think you have to be careful to let them know that you can disagree, but it doesn't mean that you think that they're bad.

They need to understand why others believe what they believe. They need to learn to think about it. I think it's very important.

Question #7: I just try to say, "The Bible says this." I stick to what it says.

Question #8: Because I believe the Bible is true. I do believe there is a definite right and wrong. I don't think it's just opinion. I think there really is a standard that has been set, and that certain things really are right and that certain things really aren't.

I do think that there are some areas that are not as clear as others... Where opinions get into that... For example, animals in heaven. In second grade, that's controversial. Then I will just say, "God doesn't really tell us that exactly. I know that He says that everything will be happy there, and whatever that would mean for us that we'll be happy." And if it's something where I definitely have an opinion, I might say, "I think this, but there's no definite statement in the Bible." I try to let them know on that subject that I have an opinion, but that it might not necessarily be right.

Question #9: The only times we've really had problems is when they misunderstood what I said, and then I... One time a parent called because she was upset - the child thought... We had this story where the mother had to sell the child because she didn't have the money, and then God

do. And I do think you need to be careful, though, of kids' feelings. And when controversial things come up, try to handle them gently, not blast someone for having a different opinion. The Bible says to do it with gentleness and soft words so that you try very hard to let the kids know that there is a standard and that you believe that this is right or wrong, but if you disagree with me, it doesn't make you bad.

*Interview #7*

*School "B"*

*Gender: Female*

*Experience: 5 years*

*Assignment: 5th Grade*

Question #1: In my classroom, I stress a lot of the beatitudes from the Bible, and also the Golden Rule is big in my classroom. I take the whole year, and I try... In 5th grade they start having problems with each other. Things that they had accepted about each other all throughout the other years is no longer always acceptable. And so we deal with problem solving. And I take the beatitudes from the Bible and many of the stories of Christ and how He handled many situations. We deal with them in that way. Any time there is a problem, once we address the problem, we've got to deal with it quickly, whatever it might be. But after that, we talk about it, and we try to figure out different ways we could have handled it and that sort of thing.

I teach old world history and that deals a lot with how older civilizations... who they worshipped or what they worshipped and that sort of thing. In every subject, I take those specific things and just incorporate it into that, teaching them how to act and react in every day life.

Question #2: A lot of it is how they react to each other. Even... They start to not like each other at this age level, and I try to teach them that you're not going to necessarily like and be best friends with everyone. But there is a certain amount of behavior that is socially acceptable, morally acceptable. So we try to deal socially... would be the better way to describe it - that they be socially and morally acceptable to each other.

Question #3: For my classroom, it's that they be Christ-like, which is how we're supposed to model our life. I see it, at this age, some of them don't listen just to Christian music or whatnot, and it's a huge influence on them. My class this past year, I only had four boys in that class -three of them were very much into the professional wrestling, and it had a huge impact on them. That is not how we live our life. That is not Christ-like. That is not a morally acceptable way of living, not according to the Bible. And so, throughout Bible lessons - I do a Bible story every day -and first we do the Bible

story for 15 minutes, the next 15 minutes is today, right now. What can I do with that right now? And it's not even hard, just, it can be done. So that, for me, it's how they live their lives right now can often be how they are going to live when they are an adult. They're being cruel to each other and things like that; that's not in the Bible. I strive to find the characteristics in the Bible and have them put those into practice.

Question #4: We dealt a lot this year and talked a lot about President Clinton. And they were old enough to understand. We didn't go into grave detail, but what we did deal with was the fact that he had a girlfriend - which is how we handled it. We talked about it. Well, the other side to it is they have to do a current event each week. The current events had to be about government. Well, after a few weeks, it could not be about that subject. For a long time, that was all they could find. But why was it wrong for him to have a girlfriend? Forget the fact that he was the president. That really had nothing to do with it. It just so happened that he had reporters in his face. And, consequently, they were all able to come up with, "Well, my next door neighbor... Maybe my mom and my dad..." That type of thing. And we took that angle to it. And we did read in the Bible, and we did find out what is right and what is wrong. Then we took it to our history class, and we talked about what is impeachment and what is the impeachment process. And they did learn about that process because the last time it happened I was just a little girl, and I really don't remember much about that, or the process, or watching it. It's different to watch it than to read about it in a book. That was a big issue for us.

Very often - some of these music groups that are out there, a student will say, "Well, why don't you like them? We like this group or we like that one." "Well I don't like them because I feel they don't coincide with the Bible in this way or that way." We'll talk about it in that way.

Question #5: Head on. There's no holds barred. I try to watch my terminology. With President Clinton, we did not talk in detail about what he did. It was just, he had a girlfriend. The children know that they can come and ask me any questions really. And it would be answered, not with too much information that they wouldn't need at their age level, but head on.

Question #6: I think that what they see and then what is accepted ends up being okay with them. Especially, in this day and age, what goes on in the public with movie stars, singers, in the government - it does affect them because they see it (1) being done and (2) being accepted. And those people's lives just go on. They're rich; they're famous. The students see all the good side; they don't see that down side. And it does affect them



We talk a lot about, in our classroom... Now this past year was the first time I did it, but I plan to do it every year now - I had the music minister of our church here, whose daughter was in the class, and he came in and talked to the class about music and what music was originally made for, which in the Bible was to glorify God. The main reason was to glorify Him and for us to have a way to worship Him. And this particular class was very into rock music. He talked to them about it, and that influenced them. A lot of them really... It had an impact on what they listened to. So all of them came back and would say, "I heard of this in this song; I heard of that in that song." "Would you want to be listening to that song if Jesus walked through the door?" "No, oh no."

The children, they're going to do what they are allowed to do, and do what they are taught. So, I think it's a big struggle in the classroom because often what I view to be morally wrong is not considered morally wrong by the parent. So, you have to be careful. You can't really say, "That's wrong." So I get the Bible out and "What does the Bible say about having a girlfriend when a man's married?" "What does the Bible say about music? What is it for?" Then I try to let them make up their own minds about things that way.

Question #7: Sometimes, probably most of the time, if they ask, "How do you believe?" I usually will tell them, but I always take the Bible out. And I'll tell them why I believe that. And then try to... well, not try to, but prove it in that way. For instance, I had one child this year who... Their family hated President Clinton, not because of any moral issues - they just hated Clinton. So he was real good on dishing out some pretty hateful comments until I said, "We're not going to talk that way. The Bible tells us that we need to pray for those in leadership." We looked up those verses; we read those verses. So we prayed for President Clinton. And we talked about if you're constantly praying for someone, it's hard to have hate in your heart for them. And we talked about love. The Bible says not to hate anybody. We're to hate sin - God hates sin - but not to hate anybody. We're to love each other; that's the greatest commandment.

I may not always have agreed with this one little boy, but he got to talk and say what he thought.

Question #8: Probably if I had a younger grade, it might not be as strong, but they are at the age where they are making decisions. They watch so much TV. They see so much. I think they need to know how to make a decision, a good decision. They need to know what is right and what is wrong - but not just what I think, they need to know why, and that's because of the Bible. I think that they need to start making their decisions based on the Bible because they are fixing to face big things. They need to know how to make a right decision based not on what you say or I say

because I might not be right. You might not be right. Mom and Dad might not be right. They need to learn to go to the Bible and to see exactly what is right. And there is no subject in the Bible that's not there; it doesn't miss anything. So I feel that if they can do that with anything, then as life goes on they are going to be able to make good decisions.

That's why I don't believe in side-stepping issues.

With our own children... See, I'm the fourth of five. The oldest one has been married 25 years, and he just left his wife and has a girlfriend. And we are going to be with them this weekend and see him, and the girlfriend was coming over. Do I agree with it all? No. Do I feel he's wrong? Yes. I sat down with my two children and said, "Okay, this is the deal." We looked in the Bible, and we read what the Bible says. Does this mean that every time we see E that we spit in her face? No. No. And she turned out to be a really great girl, and we really liked her. But that doesn't make it right. So my children know what he's doing is wrong. But they also did not go to her with hate. I tried to explain to them that acceptance of her or being nice to her does not mean that we agree. See, they confuse that. They confuse niceness with agreement. And so, that same situation, I try to do in the classroom.

Praying for President Clinton doesn't mean that we agree with him. But they can get confused, and if you don't... If you keep these things in a little box, I don't think it helps them at all.

Question #9: Every time these things come up, I use the Bible. We always go to the Bible. I try not to ever say, "This is right and this is wrong because this is what I believe." I don't do that. I use the Bible. So that doesn't ever really make you doubt what you've done.

When all that stuff came up with President Clinton, I didn't walk in that next day and say, "Hey, let's talk about it." Usually, I'll try to give it a chance to come up. And, believe me, it's going to come up. In that sense, I don't look for these issues or these troubles to come up, but with my age group, they do.

Question #10: I can't really think of anything.

Question #11: What you are taught about the Bible, the belief that others have about it that you end up believing - not always necessarily what is right.

Our pastor was teaching a couple of years ago on music. And he said, "So many Christians think that country music is okay. I won't give you my opinion or anything." He had studied music and found that it was to worship God. And he gave a challenge. He said... It was about many different things. But he used that as an example, and he used baptism as an example. He said, "Why do you believe that people should be dunked under the water? And if you don't - if you believe that you should be sprinkled - why?"

Most people would come back with, "That's what I was taught." So, he challenged you to take anything that you believed in - if it was country music, just sit down and listen to the words. Do they match up with what's in the Bible? If you believe in being dunked, dipped, sprinkled - why? Go find it in the Bible. Prove yourself right or wrong.

I had a couple of things where I was wrong. What I believed was wrong because what I was taught was wrong - and I had just believed what I had been told.

To me, that is what that word means. It's other people's beliefs or thoughts that you get taught as fact.

We did a fun thing in our classroom this year on the Christmas story, and we had a lot of fun with it. "How many wise men were there?" "There were just three." There weren't three. We went through the whole Christmas story, and we did that. The kids learned a lot about a story that they had been told and told and told.

Question #12: By that definition, no. By using the Bible, yes. What I teach, I prove.

Question #13: I guess if all teachers felt the way I did, I think that these issues should be taught in all. Otherwise, they're not being morally taught. You can see it in the way they dress and the way they act and the way they speak. They are not taught the ways of Christ.

I have a very good friend who is a teacher in the public school system. She's a Christian, and she's not living the Christian life right now, but she is a good person and she's a good friend. But she and I have some very different beliefs - one of which is abortion. And... Her influence in her classroom... She teaches in a little school, a public school... But, "That's okay. That is a way out. That is a solution."

But that is kind of a double-sided fence there. There are two sides to it.

I had about eight years where I didn't teach. I had a second child, and he was born really sick. I stayed home and took care of him for a long time. So there was about eight to nine years in between. The way children had changed in that time span - I had taught two year with that space off, then I taught two more - it was incredible to me. Even just as far as "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am." They don't say it; they don't know it; they hadn't heard it." And that is showing respect for your parents, for your elders. That is in the Bible; to specifically say, "Yes, ma'am" or "No, ma'am"? No.

But I do think that these issues should be taught. More than from me, they need to be taught from the parents. I shouldn't be teaching that actually. But, unfortunately, they are not learning it at home. They are learning movies and television and... In my classroom, we don't discuss movies. A lot of times they'll bring up a movie in the classroom and say, "Did you see this?" "Oh, Mrs.

[Interview #7] doesn't go to movies a lot." "Why not?" "I just really don't like the language they have in the movies. If I couldn't take Jesus to see the movie, then I'd rather not go." And it makes them think; it does make them think.

Do I think moral issues and all that should be handled? Yes. My way? Yes. My friend, C... I cringe at her teaching... Is she wrong? Not to today's society, she's not wrong. To the Bible, yes, she's really wrong. And she's loved as a teacher, and her students think she is right on the money. And so, I know that we are right, but you can't stand up and say, "You can't do that." I guess that's kind of two answers, a public school answer and a Christian school answer... And really they all are... But I think even how you live your life... Let me tell you, those kids know you inside and out. They know somebody that knows you from here or from there. You can't fool them.

*Interview #8*

*School "B"*

*Gender: Male*

*Experience: 21 years*

*Assignment: High School Math and Computers*

Question #1: Since I teach high school - specific subjects of math and computer, there's really not a moral curriculum we're given. I would say that my biggest thing in the moral teaching would be just my life. I share a lot with the kids about what I do, whether it be going to church, what I learned in church, what I learned... Whether I watched something on TV. Just decisions and choices that I've made that I think are good moral examples. So it's not anything specific, but I would say more by my life.

Question #2: Again, since there's nothing set, with me personally, there's probably something that will jostle my memory. Maybe I hear some students talking about partying on the weekend or doing something inappropriate, then I may try to relay an incident that may be before I was saved that I could relate to in saying "No, this is wrong." But it's more dependent upon the situation. I don't come in today and say, "This is what I'm going to do." Sometimes I'll have a particularly good devotion and want to come in and share with the students what I learned that morning for three to five minutes maybe. But it's more just reacting to what the students have said or done.

Question #3: I want them to see what good choices can do for their lives. I think a lot of times students... If they don't think ahead about particular situations - like they're at a party with a friend and some pot comes up or something, I think students have to think about things before they're faced with the temptation because then they will have thought it through and know how to react. If they wait for the spur of the moment, they generally fail,

unfortunately. But the goal of course is to help them see... encourage them through good and bad choices I've made as well as giving them strength to make good choices in the future.

Question #4: Oh, sure. That's happened. I think probably the biggest area that is a very grey area, and - depending on what you want to call it - is the area of music, depending upon lifestyle choices of musicians, or the words. I say music; I'm thinking videos and movies - trying to make a decision... If you come out and make a blanket statement, "You should only go to G-rated movies," you've isolated a lot of the kids in the class. I guess, if a question like that comes up in my class, I don't side-step it. I shouldn't say I don't side-step it. A lot of it depends on what led it up. If the students were trying to get out of class, I probably don't go there. The best discussions are those when you know they are honestly seeking an answer; it's not the one where they try to get you side-tracked. But when it comes to issues like that, I prefer to be a mediator, offering opinions. And I don't try to personalize it, like, "This is what I believe. I don't go to R-rated movies; therefore, you shouldn't." I don't want to come down and be like a mom or dad and say, "No, you can't do this." But I want them to think through why they go to the movies, why do they listen to this type of music, why do they make these choices. And then, if maybe at the end of it, they generally want to know what I believe; I will tell them. But that is not the focus of the issue. I guess I'm wanting them to think. Because if I tell them "don't, don't, don't," then they're going to do it. So I try to make them think it through and think of reasons why they believe what they do. And sometimes they see your point. And, like the typical teenager - having worked with them, you can say, "Black," and they'll say, "White" when there is no argument.

But I don't skirt away from them. I might skirt away from theological issues because of the touchiness within the church not to promote our particular denomination. But when it comes to moral issues, I can't think of any where I've skirted the issue with them.

Question #5: Again, it's usually done on the spur of the moment and not planned. A pretty good catalyst is often after a chapel. If a speaker has brought up something which is... he's made some good points, I'll want to re-emphasize, make sure the kids understood or got the point because sometimes they pick up on weird stuff. The other thing would be... They'll come in and they're huffing, and they can't believe that so-and-so has done this... And depending on how personal it gets... I always try to make sure that it never gets to a personal level. I try to talk in a third person, never in a... this person and that person, rather than Tom and Mary. Because if it gets personalized, hurt feelings happen and emotion gets

involved and then you're not getting any good out of it.

Question #6: Dealing with teenagers as I have - and that's what I love working with is teenagers, they're in a position where they are... and this is why I'm praying for my own daughter because she's 15 now; she's... they're not living by mom and dad's faith and morals. They are trying to get a hold of their own values and morals. And because of that, they have to think through these things, they have to live them. Unfortunately, they have to make mistakes. It's just a fact of life. But as far as the controversial issues, the things that make them controversial are probably us adults. To a lot of kids, it's not an issue to go to an R-rated movie. "What's the big deal? Now they say we have to be 17. I don't know. What are we going to do? Well, we can still get in." I think it's the adults that make them controversial.

Now as far as what we would call controversial, I think they're important because they make the students think, to work through their values, and - not only in a moral... as you're talking about here but also in their faith in the Lord because a lot of kids up until about 13 live on mom and dad's faith. And if they haven't developed it by the time they graduate, they fall away. And so, I think that goes hand in hand with them. Controversial issues are great, and I think anybody who skirts one is doing a student a disservice because... then they're saying to the kid, "This isn't important, or I'm afraid to tackle it because it's..." But at the end of the discussion, we may not have come up with a conclusion, but that's fine. As long as the kids are thinking, I have no trouble with that.

Question #7: The first thing is I try to remain neutral, seeing whatever side they are presenting to bring in the other side. And most of the times, the kids want to know what I believe, so I will comment at the end. But I very seldom will come into it... I should say on some things. When it comes to grey areas - whether it be music, movies, and things like that, I try to stay out of it. If it's something like premarital sex, I definitely will come down and say that this is wrong and take a very hard line. But I'm talking about the grey areas. I try to remain neutral, and at the end, they will know what I believe. But I don't want them to say, "Because Mr. [Interview #8] said this, we have to do this."

Question #8: So the kids will think. Because if I come in very dogmatic and say, "This is wrong; this is right," then the kids are just going to believe the opposite. It's the very nature of being a teenager.

Question #9: I've never felt bad after any of these times of discussion. I feel that what I presented was good, was important. I would say, looking over my 21 years of

teaching, I approach things differently now through experience. And I probably have become more conservative. Some stances that I maybe took twenty years ago... I think I've become more conservative, and I would deal with them differently now. But at the time, I felt that I did what was proper. And not that I was a big heathen or anything, but I have become... Like, we'll see some videos now of movies that we saw fifteen years ago, and we'll say, "Boy, we thought that was a good movie." But now I wouldn't think it was a good movie.

But I generally have not felt bad about... I mean that's why I believe what I believe. And I think the kids want that. It also helps me to realize... You know Paul said that he wished everybody was like him. And I always thought that was pretty cocky and egotistical, and yet I can truthfully say that if people had my beliefs and morals, that I would have no trouble with that. It's not a cockiness, but I believe that what I believe is right, and I hope the kids will see that. Because they don't want wishy-washy like what we have in the world today.

Question #10: Again, in the grey areas: music, movies, what I consider grey. Again, when you get into things - drugs, smoking, premarital sex, alcohol, I'll take a strong "You know, it's wrong; you don't do it." So I only remain neutral on those areas that... will potentially lead the student... It's a fine line, and I think it really makes them go from a weaker character to a stronger character. Because if you get into the hard line issues of alcohol and stuff, it's... that's more of a will; it's not a decision on their part. They just want to be rebellious.

Question #11: My immediate reaction is to think of somebody joining the military, and the first they do is sit you down, and you're probably going to listen to an hour lecture. You stand in line... Indoctrination, I guess, is... I would think of... You're told what the rules are. You're told how you should behave. To me, it's a very strong term meaning that there's no grey area. There's no room for you to question. You do it, and you do it with no questions. So indoctrination would be "Here are the rules. Don't ask questions. Do it."

Question #12: No, I don't believe that I indoctrinate. I believe that... I love the word "disciple." The word is stronger than what I do here in school because to disciple, I think you need to give time personally. But I think as a discipler, you're also being the one who is the example. So, in that way, I would like to think that I am discipling the kids to live a lifestyle that I personally live. That's why when a student sees me outside of class - whether at a game or at the mall, what they see is what they see in class. There's none of this two-faced stuff where I say one thing in class and I go out on the weekends and do this or that. And so, if I disciple the kids...

That would be my goal.

Question #13: I believe that the classroom teacher - it doesn't have to be a Christian school, public school, any teacher - is very... He's responsible for what he teaches. I'm sure you've seen it with your kids; our daughters did it. They come home from school... "The teacher said this." And that was law. I think the teachers have a very important role in the student's life, not only academically but - as you say - in the moral, and in the faith with theological issues. So we have to be careful. I think that our lives have to practice what we preach. Our lives have to display, be an example. And I think that's one of the main reasons why I teach in the private Christian school. I have that freedom to do it. I just read in the paper today that the starting teachers in Orlando make \$27,000. But there I couldn't be as bold and as open as I am here. And that's why I switched. I did one year in public school when I first started teaching and said, "This is crazy. I can't handle it." And I went back to Christian education because I think it's important and vital. I don't know how anybody could teach without doing it.

*Interview #9*

*School "C"*

*Gender: Female*

*Experience: 17 years*

*Assignment: Middle and High School History and Bible*

Question #1: Most of that will come through the Bible classes. And I can only speak for the sixth grade Bible class. Morally, I was using a curriculum which was Bible characters, parables, and Old Testament books. And I would just bring out the issues as we studied them by books. Then we had the life of Christ and the life of Paul. This year, we are doing the ACSI workbook which I combine with the other things. The morals there for the sixth graders are more applicable for the age group - like getting along with each other, making a stand for the Lord, peer pressure, learning to judge right and wrong. We learn to judge things maybe for the Lord... in themselves they might not be particularly wrong, but if they still divert them away from the Lord, then it cannot be right for them. That kind of thing.

Question #2: Mostly through the Bible class. Of course, teaching history is also very open for teaching morality, especially world history. Also, in geography when we get into teaching ancient world cultures, and we see good and bad points about them. They might have been advanced technically, but without Christ there is a problem. I try to integrate it into all the different things that I do. I try to point out that with Christ or without Christ, a lot of times you see these things happening because of



their lack of knowledge or the fact that they've turned away from their knowledge of God or corrupted their knowledge of God. And we do the different civilizations.

Question #3: We are hoping to instill in them a godliness that will develop their character in a way that will help them find their purpose in God's plans, but most of all just to learn to love the Lord and love His Word. And basically to develop a Christian character within them according to God's Word. And to do this by example by studying historical characters or biblical characters, to see the consequences of obeying or not obeying God and how that would affect their life and those around them, and the importance that they are in God's plan.

Question #4: I'm not sure I quite understand what you want there. I don't know if it's controversial... The most difficult point I have is in world history class when we discuss in the middle ages the role of the Catholic church. It's difficult with the saints and with Mary and a lot of things that were done... to present that in a way that would help the Catholic children in my class. And I do have quite a few - to feel that they're not being intimidated, to help them realize that it was a political situation more than... Even now it is difficult, that's one of the things.

Most of the other kinds of things that come up like homosexuality or something like that, most of the kids in my class are geared to realizing that that is not in God's character.

Getting into non-Christian music might be a thing, too. There are kids who listen to some pretty heavy secular stuff. Trying to help them see that it's not going to improve their relationship with the Lord; it's not going to improve their Christian godliness. It can be detrimental to them even. I think those are the two things that I encounter most in middle school.

Question #5: Very prayerfully and very carefully. In the view of like say the non-Christian music, if I hear them say that "We listen to this or that," a lot of times I will say, "Do you know what the words say and do you understand what they are saying?" And I sometimes try to ask them a question, "Do you feel this is going to help you serve the Lord? Is this a good witness? Is this improving your spirituality? Is it making you a better person?" They say, "Well, I just like to listen to the beat." Then I ask, "Do you know how the beat affects you?" And I bring some examples in.

As far as the other issue, concerning the Catholic church, I'm very careful to show that the true church continued on, but for a while we had a political situation because of a state government church, which is basically what the Roman church was at that time... allowing the creeping in of secular things under the guise of a

religious situation. And that there were many ungodly people holding positions. And we get into a lot of problems like the lay investiture where people could seemingly just buy their positions. Obviously, these are not Christian people. And if they are in a high position, they can do things which will be to their benefit but which aren't according to Scripture. I try to be very tactful, and try to make them realize that it was a problem but that it wasn't necessarily a problem that would affect them today.

I always bring up the whole point that "you need to know what God's Word says. Anything... if you disagree with me, you check God's Word." I always try to get back to the authority of God's Word. If you can find it there, I will be corrected even.

Question #6: Absolutely, they have to. They have to make decisions. I give them examples about myself and tell them that I was lucky in that I was raised in a church that I believed taught the Word of God, but I got to the point where I thought, "Is that the only reason why I believe it?"

They are going to face these issues. They are going to see it in the media. They're going to run into people. They're going to run into homosexuals. And they have to be able to deal with that in an intelligent way, in a way that's going to honor God. And they are going to have to make decisions themselves; they have to know where they stand on these issues. I'm hoping that by presenting it through the Word of God that they can make their decisions based on God's Word and not just on hearsay or so-and-so says or this or that. Again, that's got to be the most important criteria for how they make their decisions.

Question #7: I try really hard not to come down on anybody, to try to say, "Well, let's talk about it" or try to get their attention, or sometimes ask a question. I try really hard to - I don't always accomplish it because sometimes if it's a shocking thing, I go "Aaaaaaagh!" You don't do that. I do try to make them see, according to what God wants them to do as a Christian, as someone who is following the Lord. If they are not a Christian, then I say, "According to what you've signed, according to what our school is going by-even if you don't have a problem with that, it's a bad testimony; it's going to be a bad witness for someone else. It might mislead someone else who is not as strong. Maybe you can go see this particular film and it's not going to bother you, but someone else will go and they'll go because they saw you. You know... the appearance of evil, absence from the appearance of evil."

I try to pull out... Again, basically my stance has got to be on the Scriptures. "What does God want in your life? How are you going to find God in that situation?" I try not to come down and be critical, but sometimes it's

kind of hard. They might realize that I disagree with that. A lot of times I'll let them have their right to disagree, but they'll know that I feel that it is incorrect. I always let them know that I feel that it is incorrect either because it is harmful for them or it's not improving their relationship with the Lord, it's not according to God's Word. I try to make sure that that is my reasoning for disagreeing with them.

Question #8: Well, you have to be very careful not to alienate someone right off the bat by being overly critical. Sometimes you might even misunderstand what they are doing. First, you have to make sure that you understand the situation that's come up, what they have said, how it applies, and where they are coming from. If you put them off farther away with a critical attitude, then you are never going to be able to win them around for the Lord. It's got to be handled in love and tact. Otherwise, it's not going to have any effect on them.

Question #9: It's getting better. I think that when I first started, probably not. I think the Lord has helped me to grow with how I deal with the situations. He's given me more wisdom as I go along, as I stay in His Word, and as I pray for the kids. But not always, no. There have been times when I've been very opinionated and maybe not been as tactful with students, I'm sure - or parents.

Question #10: In certain denominational things. I have said, "If you want to know my opinion, I will tell you and I'll show you why. But you are at an age where you need to be under the authority of your parents. I will give you verses if you want to look them up and question them. But right now, you need to sort of... You can ask the Lord. You can pray about it. I'll show you things in the Scriptures concerning this, and I'll be glad to tell you why I believe what I believe. But I'm not going to do that unless you want to come to me."

It's hard. Sometimes it's not wrong. It may just be a different way of doing something, like baptism - pouring or dunking or so on and so forth. And I'll just say, "Look, that's not going to keep you out of heaven." We've got to find the most important issues to go with. Some things are just a matter of preference. "If you want to know my reasoning, I'll give you my scriptures. Then you can think about it, pray about it, and when you come to the age where you are not under the authority of your parents, then you can make up your own mind. But make sure you base your decisions on truthful ideas.

Question #11: Indoctrination itself means to instill within someone ideas so that they become almost like a habit. Obviously, the connotation - especially since the Cold War - is going to be - or if you're studying medieval history and the Jesuits and stuff - you're going to have the idea of instilling ideas at an age to manipulate

someone to a certain viewpoint, particularly your viewpoint regardless of whether it is the truth or not.

Question #12: To a point, when it comes to the Scriptures because the Lord isn't tolerant about how you get to heaven. And if there's only one way to heaven, then you've got to say... to the point where I'm not going to say, "I'm going to force you to do this."

But as far as... yeah, when it comes to salvation, I will be trying to indoctrinate. But, again, I base my indoctrination strictly on the Word of God and I don't force anything. But I make it obvious that this is the only way. Now, you don't have to believe what God says; you don't even have to believe that there is a God. You can reject the indoctrination. There are absolutes. God is the only one who has absolutes. They need to see these absolutes and know that they have to be dealt with. You don't have to be forced to go along with them, but you will be forced to go along with the consequences.

When you have sixth graders, it's very hard to let them make their own decisions. But sometimes you can word things to help them realize, to try and push them the right direction when you know it's the right thing. Absolutely.

I wouldn't do that on personal things. I would only do that with Scriptural things when it comes to salvation. Other lesser things I would be very careful not to do that. Obviously, you want to see people go to heaven. I'm not pushy-pushy, but I don't back down. I don't waiver. I'm not tolerant of other ideas. This is what God says, and this is the way it has got to be in this particular instance. It's black and white. And I say, "If you've got a problem with me, then go to the Lord because He is the one who said it. I'm just passing the message on."

Question #13: In teaching morals to children, there are going to be instances where you are going to have conflicts. And some of these conflicts will be absolutes, and you will need to make a stand. But many of these conflicts can be tactfully dealt with in a way that can bring about a critical decision by a child if they have the right information to draw upon.

In presenting moral issues to children, you need to be careful that anything you present has got to be based on the Word of God. And you need to make sure that they understand why the Word of God is important and why they can trust the Word of God. Obviously, doctrines are important, but it needs to be presented... because for all you know they might have a brother who is gay. So you've got to be very careful. It's got to be presented in love, in the way God wants it. They've got to be able to realize that there are absolutes, but it's still going to be their choice to make. They need to have good information to make those choices so that they can critically understand responsibilities, consequences, what God really wants of them and why. Why is it important to have good character?

Why is it important to have a godly behavior? Why is that important?

And it's beneficial to them spiritually and in other ways. There are material reasons too.

*Interview #10*

*School "C"*

*Gender: Female*

*Experience: 9 years*

*Assignment: Second*

Question #1: I teach the ACSI Bible curriculum. We study character traits. This is the first year that I've taught it. I've taught A Beka curriculum in Bible up until this point. But our kindergarten, first, and second grade Bible curriculum has all been basically the same thing. And we study Bible characters. And we study the character traits of those characters, but the ACSI is a different approach. I don't know if I'll continue using it or not, but it's a fresh approach, and it keeps me from having burnout.

I teach what the Bible says about how we should treat our fellow man. Whenever my children have a disagreement between them on the playground, I say, "If you can settle it among yourselves to your satisfaction, a third party doesn't need to get involved. But the Bible says if you can't, then you need to get a third party involved. Come and tell me. I'll listen to both sides. Then I will make a judgment, but it will not be in favor of one or the other. It's much better if you settle it yourselves."

Question #2: We talk about today's morals. And more than half of my class comes from separated families where there is either one parent or stepparents or aunts or grandparents helping to raise the children. And the children see the moral issues are a struggle for them in today's world. And I say, "It's not your fault that someone else made poor choices, but it's your decision to make choices that affect other people's lives." I try to teach them how important their decisions are for future generations.

Question #3: My main intent is to help the children understand that we are all created differently. God has a purpose for every life no matter what situations they've been through, no matter what's ahead of them. It's all in God's plan.

Question #4: In the nine years I've been teaching, I cannot think of a single time when it has really become an issue. The children talk about it, but they don't get really upset over anything. And as a teacher, I can't allow myself to set the pattern of allowing myself to get really upset over things. There again, I try to teach them, "You can't do anything about decisions other people have made, but you can make decisions knowing what you know

for the future."

I can't think of any time that any real heated discussion has come up.

Question #5: They're only second graders so they really don't have that problem yet.

I let the children talk about problems that they are having. I put a prayer request list on the board every day. As the children come into the classroom, they can go up and write their prayer requests on the board, and we will talk about them. I find that when something is bothering a child, if they can air it, it doesn't mean anything to anyone else, but it gets it off their shoulders. And when you give the burden to the Lord, it's no longer in your hands; it's in His hands. He takes care of it all. He works out all the situations that you're not able to do.

Question #6: Yes, I think so because I believe that children need to learn that each individual is entitled to his own opinion. We shouldn't condemn another person because he has an opinion that's different from ours. But we do need at least to let them air their concerns.

Question #7: When controversy arises, I talk to the children about if they can settle it among themselves. For example, if someone hurt someone, I say, "Tell that person that they have hurt you and give them an opportunity to say, 'Oh, I'm sorry; I didn't mean to' - sincerely. Then you say, 'You're forgiven.' Then you shake hands and you're friends again." But if they cannot resolve it themselves, they come, and I hear both sides. And try to help them learn how to resolve their own conflicts.

Question #8: Because I think children need to learn that the legal system that's set up in the Bible teaches that two people should be able to talk over their differences and that if they cannot arrive at a workable solution, the Bible teaches that a third party should be brought in.

Question #9: Yes, I think so because I think they see it in action and how effective it is. And they learn to forgive each other. And shake hands and give each other a hug, and then they're friends again. And they like that. They like being friends; they don't like controversy.

Seven and eight year olds like to be friends. They love the world. They love everything in it.

Question #10: When I don't know the facts and there is a difference of opinion, then I have to give each child an opportunity to air their frustration, let them tell what's happened, let the other person hear how they feel. And that works both ways. If they can air their feelings, then it's no longer a burden to them. And the other person finds out how they felt - not actually what happened but

how they felt about what happened. And usually, I don't have to get involved. I like to remain neutral. I don't like to have to be the one who has to judge. I try to teach the children to take care of those things themselves in a satisfactory manner without having to bring in a third party.

Question #11: Teaching philosophy. In our case, we teach a biblical indoctrination.

Question #12: Yes, I do because I know the Bible says to train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old - it doesn't say anything about teenage - but when he is old, he will not depart from it. He will test and try, and he will learn that what he learned as a little child really, in fact, works.

Question #13: I think it's important that teachers be aware of problems that are in today's society. We can't solve the problems, but we can teach children how to confront problems and not run away from them. Children cannot blame their parents for their frustrations because of parents' decisions, but neither do the children need to feel like they are to blame for someone else's decision. And I think teachers in today's world need to know the problems that our children have to deal with. They need to be aware of those things. We can't solve them for the children, but we need to help the children understand that everybody has problems. I don't care who you are - teacher, student, administrator, parents - we all have problems. But these are the fiery furnaces that God lets us go through to temper us to be ready for what he has ahead of us.

*Interview #11, #12, and #13  
School "D"*

*Gender: All three teachers are male.*

*Experience: #11 - 10 years*

*#12 - 4 years*

*#13 - 3 years*

*Assignment: #11 - High School English*

*#12 - High School Science*

*#13 - High School History*

Question #1:

#11 - I start every session every year with telling them why I do not allow euphemisms to be spoken in class. That's golly, gosh, gee, geez, gee whiz, and all of that. I open the dictionary to show they're euphemisms for God. And I've discovered that if I work on their euphemisms, then profanity's not an issue because they're watching each other's euphemisms. I also do it positively where I'm not writing them up for the use of them, but rather... euphemism... you mean, "Oh, my, my, my, my..." or "Oh, my

goodness." But see then, that's how I start their speech patterns.

#12 - To try to help with moral issues in the classroom... Let's see, there are just so many different moralities. Obviously, in my conduct sheet that I hand out that everyone has to sign, it goes through and depicts exactly what I expect from those students. And in that, it lays out that there's no cheating, no lying, and so on. I want not only the students to sign it but also the parents, and I sign it. It becomes kind of an agreement among the three of us where we're able to get together and talk about different things. I also send home at that time another letter with my name, phone number, as well as school, to try to keep contact so that we can keep high moral standards.

#13 - I'm not really organized in that way, but I just address it as it comes along - inappropriate language, explain it to them, why it was inappropriate and all.

Question #2:

#11 - I take it beyond the classroom. I eat with the students as well, not with the teachers, but it does not matter where I hear them use a euphemism I point it out to them. Or also, they get into the habit and they point it out to each other, especially if I'm around. They like to do it that way.

#12 - Mine's much more effective inside the classroom because if I can see a random pattern, I'll get out the agreement form that I have in their file, and I'll ask them to read certain clauses. And once they read the clause, if they still continue, I'll write them up, and we'll have further incidents.

#13 - Again, like [#11] said, if I'm passing outside the classroom and I overhear something, I'll address it at that time.

#11 - I also think it's very important to be available before class. I don't start the class on the bell. I always allow two or three minutes of talking as they settle themselves in because in those situations you find moral issues that need to be addressed. That's when I find a lot of opportunity for moral input.

Question #3:

#11 - Christian character.

#12 - To try to produce students who have a Christian-like mind or who will be able to keep themselves in check.



#13 - Behavior or speech or anything that's inappropriate, I point out to them what God's Word has to say about it and correct it from that end.

#11 - I try to be before my kids an example of Christ in speech and behavior and mood and temperament and all. And I try to instruct by example as well as by directive to my students in all aspects to be developing the attributes of Christ.

#13 - If it's an area of speech or behavior or ridiculing someone or something of that nature, I will give them a Scripture verse and address why it is wrong.

Question #4:

#11 - Yes, frequently. The other week - she's no longer at our school - a girl approached me... I mean, I took a girl outside to talk to her because she was upset about something, and she told me about her mom dying that day several years ago. Then she said, "I also get to find out if I'm pregnant." So I said, "Oooo, this is a first" because I'm a new teacher here at this school. So I asked her, "What about abortion?" She said, "No, I'm not going to do that." And I said, "Very good." Then I said, "What about your school enrollment?" "Well, if I'm pregnant, I'll be kicked out." I said, "Then what are you going to do?" So, we got to address that issue. She seemed to have everything in order, but of course, it did not matter because she was not pregnant as the test revealed. But that is one surprising recent development that I had with a girl.

Guys have recently asked me - though it's a Christian school, there are a lot of non-Christian guys there... And a few of the guys were asking me, "Well, how far is okay?" That became a whole moral issue, too.

Those were not in the classroom, but they're involving the kids. Those are very touchy subjects.

#13 - We do have students that I guess come from non-Christian families, and the subject of abortion has come up in class. I can see some of those students surprised that I would say it's wrong. Prior to myself becoming a Christian, I was apathetic to the whole issue.

Also, religious doctrinal issues - some of those things have come up, too. I have to try to be sensitive to every student in that class and try to get a feel of where they are coming from because I don't want to come on too strong. Being former Roman Catholic myself, I don't want to necessarily have someone run home to their parents and say that I was putting it down too much. If I find out that maybe there are no Roman Catholics in the class, then maybe I'll go on to say some of the doctrines that are anti-biblical.

#12 - In Bible class, we've been doing a lot of dealing with Isaiah as well as the Kings. And in studying the different Kings, we've studied what Baal worship is. It was really surprising to me that the kids who are the non-Christians even thought Baal worship was as bad as it was once I described it. Then you try to relay that back to their life and show that "Well, how does your life compare to Baalism?" Because it was very similar in a lot of ways. And it opened up some of their eyes; I'm not sure how far. But you can see that there are obvious things in their lives that they may or may not want to share, and they don't want to share. It's just there; they just don't want to give it up.

#11 - The other thing, too, is that at lunch time they talk a lot about music and the movies and their activities at parties and where they go and all this other stuff. To me, I never would have been caught dead there.

Then the juniors are reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, about slavery and the Civil War. And they do not understand the lingo that they read, but it's also brought up a lot of questions of their thoughts about prejudice and where they stand with interracial marriages. And they've addressed those, as opposed to me suggesting each topic.

Question #5:

#11 - We try quoting the Word of God though they won't necessarily receive it since many of them are not Christians.

#12 - By focusing through the Lord's picture of Christ not just... Obviously, through individual scriptures, but you also have to look at the wide picture and see what Christ actually did and what the Word Christian actually stands for, and why some of the characteristics which the world would consider good would not fit.

#13 - I would just echo what [#12] said about pointing at the Word of God. I know the subject of homosexuality has come up, the occult, all these things. I just tell them what the Bible has to say about it.

Question #6:

#12 - I think they can. If you were teaching a cult class, you would obviously teach the cult in every aspect, and you would expose that cult in every aspect. Obviously, to show the kid that there is a lot of potential harm in that. By exposing the fallacy, you would obviously be showing that this is not correct and that you need to look elsewhere for the correct. And once you get done, point them back to Christ as the only way. As you're teaching the cults, they should have a basic strong indoctrination of Christ. They are able to understand that what they are

being taught in a cult class or cult subject is way off base.

#11 - I'm not aware of all the controversies until the kids point them out. At that point, then I see them as potentially being at a question point in their lives, open to perhaps a different perspective or just wanting to find out so that they can be more steadfast in their own position.

But I use evolution because with evolution, if you accept it, you accept no God, no responsibility, no moral standard. And so I, through all sorts of curriculum and different classes, refute evolution and its aspects.

#13 - That's what was on my mind, creation versus evolution. I think this issue is of paramount importance because that leads to humanism. It leads to atheism. It leads to communism and all sorts of things we have today. I think it's a root cause of many of the problems we have today. And it's such an easy thing to refute.

Every time I teach, I can honestly say this, there is never a kid that comes out believing that evolution is possible. All the evidence points toward creation. That is at the root of many, if not all, of the moral issues we are facing now.

#11 - In a lot of their movies and stuff, they address... It's amazing what morals come out of that as they promote it, but they don't understand what the message behind the movie is. And so I am able to point those out.

Question #7:

#11 - Controversial issues would imply that there is something that is clearly a directive to follow, morally. That's how I interpret controversial issues.

If it's a controversial issue, then there is a moral standard to follow. Otherwise, it's not controversial. That's how I see it; and therefore, all controversial issues... I will definitely give them a standard, a moral background, a foundation to it.

Controversial issues that I won't take a stand on would be student-teacher, teacher-administration, or student-administration interaction - situational problems that... "What that teacher gave me for a grade" or whatever. That would be non-involvement.

#13 - If according to God's Word I can see where I can become dogmatic on something, I will be dogmatic on it.

#12 - Just pull out the good old Bible concordance and look up or have the child look up whatever moral standard that I believe was being broken, and then look up several different verses to show them particularly how that is not honoring to Christ.

## Question #8:

#12 - That's the whole purpose of a Christian school teacher, to direct the students to a Christ-like behavior. And Christ-like behavior is not the world's behavior. You can't be stepping on the fence expecting to have both worlds.

#13 - He brings up the fence... I think a line has been drawn, and you have to be on either side of it. There is no straddling of the line any longer. "Let your yea be yea and your nay be nay."

#11 - There's one other controversial topic that I thought of and that was this: "But you said..." So when I realize that I'm the one guilty of a violation to what I said. When I realize that I am guilty, then I will backpedal and say, "According to your word as to what I have said..." I cannot afford to have my word brought into disarray with the kids because I have to be forthright. If they do not see me apologize and make it right, how can I expect them to do the same?

Also, controversial issues need to be void of emotions. That only blurs them.

## Question #9:

#11 - Yes, because I keep doing it.

#12 - Yeah, if... As a first year teacher, I made a lot of stupid mistakes, as does every first year teacher. I probably did not follow through as much as possible or as needed; however, as you learn with age, you learn to be more consistent. As you learn to be more consistent, the children learn more of a pattern of what you expect. And as they learn that pattern, they know what to expect in your class and around you.

#13 - Yeah. Anything I do is with their best interest at heart. And I can't offhand think of an example where I may have done something that wasn't for their best.

## Question #10:

#12 - We're a non-denominational school, so to bring up any type of denominational opinion would be extremely... probably bad. You're going to end up hurting somebody's feelings. And that's going to end up hurting somebody in the long run. So, you have to be very careful of what you say and how you say it as far as denominational stuff goes.

#13 - Yeah, something came to my mind. One of my eighth graders, she attends another Christian church which has some different beliefs than I ascribe to. She cited a

specific incident of an occurrence in her church where there was gold dust being found on the floor, and I have my reservations about that personally. She could see that I wasn't buying it, but I chose to pretty much remain neutral on it and not... And she did comment to me later. She said, "I know you don't believe what I said, but at least you didn't put me down like Mrs. So-and-so did." So I remain neutral in that way.

I didn't feel at the time that I should be... sort of... bumping heads with an eighth grader over an issue such as that although I did express my own skepticism.

#11 - When I was in seventh grade at a Christian school, I was told that I was a wolf in sheep's clothing because I held to a certain opinion that did not hold to the school's denominational viewpoint, and I've never forgotten that. Because that left a lasting impression on me about how critical one can be in their dogma, I never could be that way as a teacher.

Question #11:

#12 - In my opinion, the word indoctrination means to bring into your own philosophy of life. If you are to be indoctrinated into a lifestyle, you would be learning that lifestyle and adding it to your life. And at that point, it becomes part of your doctrine... Whether it be intentional, whether you chose to, or whether it was forced on you, it's now part of you because you've allowed it to be part of you. And that's where I think a lot of the cults are real good at just constant bombardment of what sounds good... To the point where the person says, "Sure, I'll take that in." And they take the whole thing, not necessarily knowing all the pieces.

#13 - Steering someone into a certain way of thinking and believing. They're going to be steered some way by someone, so why not it be in the way of truth? I know as a Christian maybe I've been accused of maybe brainwashing people. Well, somebody is going to do it one way or the other. Let's go in the right direction.

#11 - The best way to explain indoctrination is with a simple little parable. Each student is a basket. When you put them into the river, if you pull them out of the river, they're not holding any water, but down in the river they're full of water. They are in an indoctrination process in the Christian school receiving all about the lordship of Jesus Christ. We are submersing them in that indoctrinating process. When they walk out the doors, they are out of the river, and how they take it into themselves is their choosing. I do not see it as a brainwashing but as a preparation for them. The Word will not return void, it's just the idea of leaving them in the hands of God to do with as He can do with them. I see indoctrination as

only toward the Word of God.

#12 - Again, I would say I think brainwashing is probably a wrong term. I've always thought of brainwashing as having a negative connotation. Meaning that you are taking someone's belief system that would be wholesome and corrupting them to think in such a way as you want them to think. Christianity is not a process of making someone think the way you want them to think. It's a lifestyle. And it's not just a thought pattern. It's not just "Okay, do it on command like a dog." It's every single moment of your whole life. Upon accepting Christ, life changes. And it's not because I told you to do it or I brainwashed you.

As far as the basket illustration, they're going to take in a great deal of that information, and they're going to be able to keep it.

Question #12:

#12 - I think you don't have a choice. Every single time you teach, you are indoctrinating. You're either going to be teaching toward the good or teaching toward the bad, and that's based on the lifestyle you lead because people are going to watch your actions much more than your words.

#11 - Indoctrination may sound like a negative term, but it's a neutral term. How we use it in our context is positively since we are using the principles of Christianity to influence the students towards a moral betterment. Yes, I definitely practice indoctrination in a Christian perspective. I try to indoctrinate myself more and more into Christ that those who follow me might themselves be indoctrinated because I see it as the sanctifying process of being separated unto the Lord. As Jesus was separated unto the Father for the disciples to follow Him, so we are to be unto those who follow us.

#13 - Yeah, we do indoctrinate. Everybody is going to be indoctrinated by someone. If you just look at the secular media, they are indoctrinating. We need to indoctrinate in what is right so that they can discern what is wrong.

VITA

**Samuel James Smith**

Candidate for the Degree of  
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**Thesis:** THE ROLE OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN MORAL  
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