



Faith and Learning

Integration as Implemented by Christian Elementary School Teachers

By You Jung Jang

What makes a Christian school Christian?

Christian educators have asked this question for decades. Frank Gaebelain argues that there are “some schools and colleges that, with a strong emphasis upon Bible courses, chapel services, and revivalism, have the name of being outstandingly Christian, though in reality there is too little difference between their teaching of most subjects and that of the teaching in a secular school or state university, except for the fact that in the Christian school classes may be opened by prayer” (1954, 42).

Richard Edlin observed that “there are a number of private schools, which erroneously lay claim to the title of Christian schools.” He uses the expression “icing on the cake” to describe a school environment in which the basic learning subjects are taught “as if God does not exist” and which “is still expounding the real world irrelevancy of the same Lord whom it proclaims in its chapel services” (1999, 35). He then makes a convincing statement:

Christian education must not be seen as a veneer to obscure an otherwise non-Christian core. *It is not*

just icing on an otherwise rotten cake. Obedience in one area doesn’t cancel disobedience in another. A little bit of Bible study on top of disobedient education doesn’t equal obedient education. (36, emphasis in original)

These authors’ observations on Christian schools help us reach an answer to the question “What makes Christian schools Christian?” The point can be summarized in this way: Christian schools should be developed on a Christian perspective or biblical worldview, which forms the basis for educational practices and undergirds every discipline touched in the classroom. These writers turn our attention to a popular concept among Christian educators—the *integration of faith and learning*.

Mel Wilhoit argues that “for approximately three decades, the Christian college’s strongest philosophical argument has been the Integration of Faith and Learning” (1987). In fact, the integration of faith and learning has been a common topic of discussion not only in Christian colleges but also in Christian schools at every

level. The problem, however, is not a matter of knowledge of the concept but a matter of its practical application in the daily classroom. Recognizing this problem, John Wesley Taylor asserts,

We are convinced that the integration of faith and learning must be vibrant and evident in the academic community. So what is missing? The crucial link is frequently the step from theory to practice, from belief to action, from perception to realization. How does a Christian teacher go about integrating faith in the teaching/learning experience? (n.d.)

In response to this practical problem, teachers in ACSI-affiliated elementary schools in the Southeast and Mid-America Regions (Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, North and South Carolina, North and South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin) were studied to delineate how proficiently the teachers integrate their faith into their daily teaching. The purposes of the study were to examine the teachers' self-reported proficiency level at integrating faith and learning across the academic curriculum and to analyze factors that influence them when they implement faith-learning integration. The study surveyed ACSI elementary-school teachers serving grades 1–5 or 1–6. The following five research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How proficient are elementary school teachers in ACSI-affiliated schools at integrating faith and learning?
2. Which academic subject do elementary school teachers in ACSI-affiliated schools feel is the most difficult to integrate faith and learning in?
3. What, if any, is the difference in the implementation of the integration of faith and learning between elementary school teachers in ACSI-affiliated schools who attended Christian schools and those who did not?
4. What, if any, is the difference in the implementation of the integration of faith and learning
5. What, if any, is the difference in the implementation of the integration of faith and learning by elementary school teachers in ACSI-affiliated schools according to demographic factors?

between elementary school teachers in ACSI-affiliated schools who attended seminars or training events on the implementation of faith and learning and those who did not?

5. What, if any, is the difference in the implementation of the integration of faith and learning by elementary school teachers in ACSI-affiliated schools according to demographic factors?

The integration of faith and learning has been a common topic of discussion.

Findings and Implications

The findings of this study can be applied in various ways to help Christian school teachers who are making an effort to integrate a biblical worldview into their daily teaching, school supervisors who are trying to encourage their teachers to undertake biblical integration, and Christian schools and universities and Christian school organizations that are trying to help teachers by providing classes, training, or seminars on faith-learning integration.

1. Teachers' Implementation Level of Faith-Learning Integration

To identify Christian elementary school teachers' proficiency level in implementing faith-learning integration, we adopted a model of teacher implementation developed by Raquel Bouvet de Korniejczuk in 1994. Our study found that about three-quarters of the teachers studied ranked at Korniejczuk's Level 3 or 4 in implementing faith-learning integration. According to Korniejczuk's ranking method, teachers on Level 3 (irregular or superficial use) integrate faith into their teaching deliberately, but the integration is superficial—they use “spiritual content for secular purposes without meaning” (Korniejczuk 1994, 139). Their integration is also unplanned and irregular.

The integration implemented by teachers on Level 4 (conventional) is more stabilized. They implement biblical integration coherently, but they do not make changes in its ongoing use. They also consider their own opinions more than they do students' responses when integrating faith and learning (139). (See Table 1 for more information about Korniejczuk's model.)

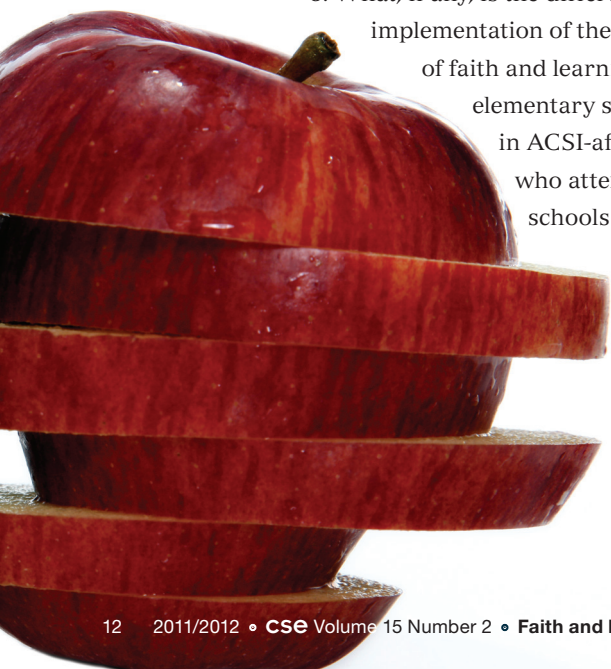


Table 1: Integration of Faith and Learning Empirical Model

Level of Implementation	Characteristics	Examples
<p>Level 0: No knowledge No interest</p>	<p>Teacher has little or no knowledge of the integration of faith and learning (IFL). Teacher is doing nothing to be involved in IFL. Teacher is not convinced that IFL can be carried out in the subject. Teacher thinks that the subject he/she teaches is not related to faith.</p>	<p>“IFL is only extracurricular; cannot be implemented in the curriculum.” “I do not know how to implement IFL.” “I have other priorities in mind.” “I cannot do it in my subject.” “I know how to do it, but I do not have institutional support.”</p>
<p>Level 1: Interest</p>	<p>Teacher has acquired or is acquiring information on IFL. Teacher is aware that IFL should be incorporated in his/her classes. Teacher is looking for ways to deliberately implement IFL. Teacher thinks that it may be worthwhile to include IFL in future planning.</p>	<p>“I know very little about IFL.” “I do not like superficial integration, thus I am looking for appropriate ways.” “I am looking for information on how to implement IFL.”</p>
<p>Level 2: Readiness</p>	<p>Teacher knows how to implement IFL in at least some themes. Teacher is preparing to deliberately implement IFL at a definite future time.</p>	<p>“I am going to incorporate some integration I have tried in my course plan.” “I have decided to systematically introduce some things I know.”</p>
<p>Level 3: Irregular or superficial use</p>	<p>Deliberately integrated, but generally unplanned. There is no coherent Christian worldview. Irregular use. Only some themes are integrated throughout the general context of the subject. Superficial use. Use of spiritual content for secular purposes without meaning. Management concerns disturb IFL.</p>	<p>“I know that what I am doing is not the best, but this is a Christian school and I have to do something.” “I do not know how to plan IFL.” “I only feel confident with two themes: Creation and Evolution.” “I do not like planning IFL. I do it consciously but spontaneously.”</p>
<p>Level 4: Conventional</p>	<p>There is a stabilized use of IFL, but no changes are made in ongoing use. Syllabus and objectives show IFL in at least some themes. IFL is based on teacher’s talking rather than student response. Teacher knows how to implement IFL. IFL shows coherent implementation.</p>	<p>“I include IFL in my unit planning so I can remember to do it.” “It is not often that I change what I have planned.”</p>
<p>Level 5: Dynamic</p>	<p>Teacher varies the implementation of IFL to increase impact on students. Teacher can describe changes that he/she had made in the last months and what is planned in a short term. Change of strategies and themes according to student needs or interests. Students draw conclusions of IFL.</p>	<p>“I just look at their [students’] faces and know what they are thinking. I encourage them to draw conclusions.” “I vary my IFL strategies according to the needs of my students.”</p>
<p>Level 6: Comprehensive</p>	<p>Teacher cooperates with colleagues on ways to improve IFL. Regular collaboration between two or more teachers increases impact on students. The whole school (or at least a group of teachers) provides a coherent Christian worldview and emphasizes student response.</p>	

(Korniejczuk 1994, 138–39)

2. The Most Difficult Academic Subject to Integrate

The findings imply that the most difficult academic subject for teachers to integrate their faith into is mathematics, and they also feel it is difficult to integrate their faith into arts classes. Religion is considered to be the easiest discipline for biblical integration, and science, social studies, health, and language arts are also deemed easy subjects for integration.

3. Differences in Teachers' Implementation Level by Educational Background

The study reveals a significant difference in teachers' implementation level according to their learning experiences. Teachers who took classes in theology, Bible, or religion and who attended training on biblical integration reached a higher level than those who did not. The findings also infer that teachers who took classes in theology or participated in biblical integration training have more knowledge of integration and are better prepared for it, and they are more interested in students' opinions and reflections in the process of integration. Furthermore, they also may be more willing to change their teaching methods or techniques and cooperate with other teachers

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to better implement faith-learning integration.

Our study findings reveal an interesting implication. Even though taking theology classes made a difference in teachers' proficiency of faith-learning integration, there was no significant difference between the proficiency level of teachers who obtained a degree in theology and those who did not. Various explanations for this phenomenon are possible, but finding the right reason seems to be unnecessary as well as impossible. One thing that is certain—and more important—is that the time and energy spent to get a theology or religion degree that has no connection with teaching might not help teachers implement biblical integration.

This study also showed that a Christian-school education did not significantly influence teachers' implementation, although this finding is directly opposed to the results of Mark Eckel's recent dissertation (2009).

After analyzing the difference between Christian- and secular-university graduates in their classroom practice of faith-learning integration, Eckel concluded that Christian-university graduates understood the concept of faith-learning integration better than secular-university graduates did (138) and were better equipped to integrate their faith in the classroom (141). This difference could be explained in several ways. One possible explanation might be the different sample—Eckel's sample consisted of 6th- to 12th-grade teachers in ACSI schools in the Mid-America Region (105).

Whatever the reason for the contrasting findings, our study's statistical indications could offer a more hopeful implication for teachers by helping them move on to improve their proficiency in faith-learning integration by taking theology classes and attending training on the issue rather than regretting their past educational choices.

4. Differences in Teachers' Implementation Level by Demographics

According to the study, there is no significant difference in teachers' implementation level according to their age and teaching experience. Male teachers were on a higher average level than female teachers, but this finding was not statistically strong. The only demographic factor that caused significant difference in teachers' level was the time they spent preparing to integrate faith into their daily lessons. In other words, the teachers who spend more time implement faith and learning better. This result validates the need for supervisors and administrators to secure enough time for teachers to prepare.

5. Influential Factors on Teachers' Implementation Level

One purpose of this study was to learn which factors—among gender, age, teaching experience, preparation time, attending Christian school, taking theology classes, earning a theology degree, and participating in training—influenced teachers' implementation level of biblical integration. Participation in in-service training or seminars on biblical integration was one significant factor that influenced implementation level. Teachers' preparation time for integrating their faith into their daily teaching was also a significant factor in increasing their implementation level. Teachers' teaching experience or whether they attended a Christian or secular school, however, did not serve as influential factors, and other

demographic factors, such as teachers' gender and age, also did not appear influential.

Taking classes in theology was the factor having the strongest influence on teachers' ability to integrate faith and learning. This finding is not unexpected.

An emphasis on establishing a theological foundation for Christian school education has been an ongoing theme among Christian educators. George Knight asserts, "What is needed by Christian institutions is a thorough and ongoing examination, evaluation, and correction of their educational practices in the light of their basic philosophic beliefs" (1998, 154).

Mel Wilhoit also argues that "the development of a biblical worldview based on scriptural presuppositions" is central to Christian education, and that this biblical worldview should be "a filter or interpreter for all information which passes through it" and should be the essence of the integration of faith and learning (1987). Our research data suggests that, to improve the proficiency of biblical integration, it is necessary and helpful to provide teachers continuing education in theology and to encourage them to take time to develop an educational philosophy based on this theology.

Conclusion

This study tried to provide a practical picture of faith-learning integration by determining to what degree ACSI elementary school teachers were practicing biblical integration in their classroom teaching. The average teachers in this study reached a high level of integration, but they were still unwilling to change their teaching methods, to involve students' opinions, or to work together with colleagues in their biblical integration. Classes in theology, training on the integration of faith and learning, and preparation time for biblical integration were identified as the most influential factors on the teachers' implementation level.

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Based on this practical picture, Christian schools may want to provide training and administrative support to increase teachers' implementation level. Also, teachers may improve their ability to integrate a biblical worldview into their daily teaching by taking continuing education classes in theology and by gathering together with colleagues.

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