

Commitment and Qualification – What Teachers Do We Need at Christian Schools?

**Keynote at the IV General Assembly of
the International Association for Christian Education
Dublin, 2 Dec 2017**

Professor Dr. Manfred L. Pirner

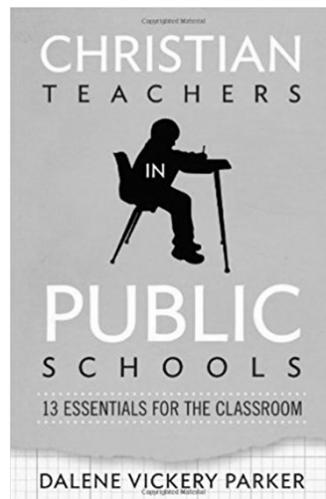
Friedrich Alexander University
Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany

Commitment and Qualification – What Teachers Do We Need at Christian Schools?

A straightforward answer

Teachers who

- *pray for and with their kids*
- *fight in the spirit of the Lord*
- *believe that God 's possibilities are
always greater than their own*
- *love their kids with patient and
enduring heavenly love*
- *share their burdens with other
Christian teachers*
- ...



2012

Commitment and Qualification – What Teachers Do We Need at Christian Schools?

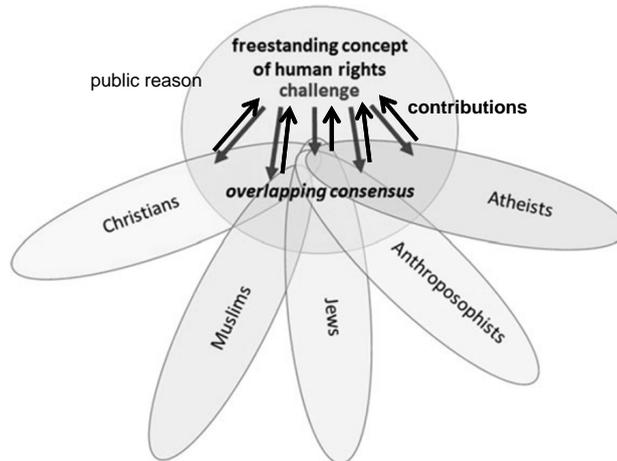
Less straightforward answers (and new questions)

1. A vision for Christian schools in a pluralistic society
2. Are Christian teachers better teachers? Theoretical deliberations
3. Are Christian teachers better teachers? Empirical findings
4. Commitment and qualification – an intricate relationship
5. Conclusion: What teachers do we need at Christian schools?

1. A vision for Christian schools in a pluralistic society

*Christian schools provide for their pupils
a value-based community of learning that
connects Christian values
with general liberal and democratic values.
In the spirit of public theology
Christian schools provide public education
as a Christian service to the pupils
and to the common good of society.*

1. A vision for Christian schools in a pluralistic society

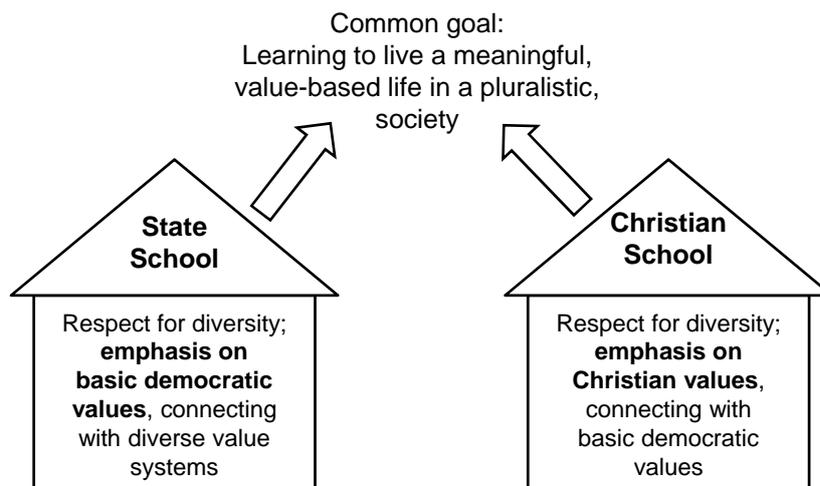


Public reason and overlapping consensus according to John Rawls (1993) – own graph; see Pinner, 2016; 2015a

What Teachers Do We Need at Christian Schools?

manfred.pirner@fau.de

1. A vision for Christian schools in a pluralistic society



What Teachers Do We Need at Christian Schools?

manfred.pirner@fau.de

2. Are Christian teachers better teachers? Theoretical deliberations

Are Christian butchers better butchers?

Are Christian car mechanics better car mechanics?

- British philosopher Paul Hirst (1972; 1974): ‚Christian education‘ is a contradiction in terms
- German PISA researchers and educationists Jürgen Baumert and Mareike Kunter (2009): Teaching is a professional task that requires professional competencies (and not primarily a certain kind of personality).

2. Are Christian teachers better teachers? Theoretical deliberations

The difference between a butcher and a teacher:

School education is not possible without ideological premises and ethical goals.

But:

- Are Christians in general morally better people?
Theologically (and empirically): no !
- Even if they were – are morally good people necessarily good teachers?

3. Are Christian teachers better teachers? Empirical findings

Several studies from the U.S. point to correlations between teachers' religious beliefs and professional beliefs, e.g.

- Quantitative survey among 40,670 college professors: High spirituality is linked with "focus on students' personal development", "student-centered pedagogy", "civic-minded practice", and "civic-minded values", "positive outlook in work and life" (HERI, 2006)
- Several qualitative interview studies: Religious teachers are motivated by their faith to be caring and sensitive towards their students and helpful against their colleagues.
- Some religious teachers report about stressful tensions between their faith values and school reality.

(for more details see Pirner, 2012)

3. Are Christian teachers better teachers? Empirical findings

Hardly any European studies on correlations between teachers' religiosity and professionalism

Own pilot study among 203 teachers at state schools in Bavaria shows 'bath-tub correlation':

Both non-religious and highly religious teachers show a student-centered pedagogy

>> different sources of motivation for a caring and supportive way of teaching

3. Are Christian teachers better teachers? Empirical findings

- The difference between (personal) morality and (professional) teacher ethos

Fritz Oser (EARLI conference 2017):

„To be moral is not enough to be a good teacher.“

„A person can be immoral, but caring about his or her students.“

Morality may be more domain-specific than assumed.

- Teachers often act contrary to their moral convictions and teaching ideals (e.g. Blömeke, 2010)

3. Are Christian teachers better teachers? Empirical findings

Similarities regarding religiosity?

Contention:

What counts is **linking** Christian faith and values with the practice of education and teaching

4. Commitment and qualification – an intricate relationship

Even non-religious teachers in Christian schools can positively relate to Christian values and concepts of Christian education

(empirical survey among educators of a big Christian youth work in Germany, the Christliche Jugenddorfwerk, CJD; N = 936; N school teachers = 210; see Pirner, 2013; 2008; Pirner, Scheunpflug & Holl, 2010).

Quotations of respondents:

“You don’t have to be a Christian to practice Christian education.”

“Living Christian values does not necessarily demand believing in God.”

4. Commitment and qualification – an intricate relationship

Teachers at religious schools are often not able to link their professional views with Christian views; many of them do not seem to be able to reflect and talk about such links, even if they are believing Christians.

(Holl, 2011; Pirner, Scheunpflug & Holl, 2010).

Possible reasons:

- widely secular professional education
- missing theological education
- misleading, solely deductive concepts of “Christian education”, often assuming missionary tendencies

4. Commitment and qualification – an intricate relationship

Teachers' competence to
Relate their **P**rofession to (their) **R**eligiosity =
RPR competence (“bildungstheologische Kompetenz”)

(Pirner & Wamser, 2017)

- epistemological (relating religion to education, theology to educational science / educational philosophy)
- institutional/societal (relating religious schools to the general task of schools in a pluralistic society)
- personal (relating one's personal religiosity to one's professional thinking and practice)

4. Commitment and qualification – an intricate relationship

Example of one facet of RPR competence:

Managing the grace-achievement-tension

(the tension between Christian justification norms [“by grace alone”] and school norms [assessing achievement, using punishment])

Level 0	No awareness of any tension or relationship.
Level 1	Fragmentary awareness, but no professional reflection.
Level 2	Awareness of tension with one-sided solutions (e.g. „all my students get good marks“).
Level 3	Attempts at reflectively linking the norms, but in an incomplete and not really convincing way.
Level 4	Reflectively linking the norms in an equitable way
Level 5	Reflectively linking the norms by contextualizing them in a framework relating theology and education

5. Conclusion: What teachers do we need at Christian schools?

- We need teachers who are committed to the school's Christian concept (which is not restricted to believing Christians).
- We need *good*, well-educated, professional teachers.
- We need teachers who are able to relate Christian religiosity/values and teacher professionalism in reflection, communication and practice (RPR competence)

5. Conclusion: What teachers do we need at Christian schools?

How do we get the teachers we need?

Most important:

Advanced training courses to promote PRP competence
addressing

- teachers' professional biography (religious aspects?)
- teachers' personal (religious / worldview) biography
- teachers' perspectives on the Christian school concept
- relationships between Christian values and school / teaching practice (lesson lab / learning lab !)
- theological and philosophical deepening