THE INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL IMPACT ON THE SPIRITUAL

FORMATION OF ITS GRADUATES: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Dawn Marie Monzon

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine how, if at all, attendance at an accredited international Christian school in South America impacted the spiritual formation of nine graduates. Fowler's Faith Theory guided this study, which posits that one's developmental processes and construction of human understanding determine one's faith. Thus, shared experiences were evaluated to determine whether they shared commonalities that might have had an impact on the phenomenon of spiritual formation. This study incorporated the use of journals and individual interviews that were analyzed through a constant comparison method of data in an analysis spiral and through horizontalization of data. I found that factors influencing spiritual formation included a perceived disconnect between school and life experiences, student ownership and spiritual identity, teachers, and an application of learning. Further research with more participants and different locations and over a longer span of time would be beneficial in determining the long-term impact of Christian education on the spiritual formation of graduates.

Keywords: Biblical worldview, Christian education, Fowler's Faith Theory, adolescent development, spiritual formation, discipleship, spiritual disciplines.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, my children, and my parents. My husband Juan was a continual encouragement, push, and support throughout these years! You sacrificed much as I focused on this endeavor. You have been a pillar of strength, and I doubt I would have completed this without you by side. I love you! To our children Wesley, Ashley, Jessica, and Alicia, thank you for your understanding and patience! I doubt you remember when I was not studying. I love each one of you! This degree belongs to all of us!

I want to thank my parents as well. Mom, you were the constant supporter and did all you could to give me the focus time I needed. Dad, you are the example of the lifelong learner and encouraged me even when you told me this pursuit would be long and difficult. I do not think either of us ever imagined how long! I love you both and am thankful for your love for God and for me!

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First and foremost, I give God all the glory for giving me the strength to complete this process! My spiritual formation has continued throughout this research. My prayer is that I will continue to be faithful and be an example of what God has personally done in my life.

I thank the participants of this study. Without your honesty, openness, and willingness to give of your time, this study would not have been possible.

I thank all my friends (both near and far) who have been my cheerleaders through these years. I especially thank Dr. Manning, Dr. Owens, Dr. Swindle, and Dr. and Dr. P for being a sounding board and bringing my stress level down more than once. Thank you for never giving up on me!

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Association of Americans Resident Overseas (AARO)

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter provides the foundation and purpose of this study, which concerns the spiritual formation of graduates from Christian schools located in South America and accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). In addition, I present the research background, my relationship with the topic, the problem and purpose statements, the significance of this study, the research questions and plan, and the definitions of terms pertinent to this study.

Background

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the impact that international Christian schools in South America, accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), have on the spiritual formation of their graduates. The mission of the ACSI is to "strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire students to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ" (ACSI, 2016, Mission section). According to ACSI (2012b), the spiritual formation of a student is the foundation for quality academic results, and, therefore, must remain the top priority for Christian schools all over the world. Information obtained through interviews with principals and graduates, as well as through journals, was collected and assessed to examine the impact of Christian schools on the spiritual formation of graduates.

In 2007, ACSI recognized the growth of its international schools and consequently changed the name of its International Ministries Office to ACSI-Global (D. A. Wilcox, personal communication, August 18, 2011). Currently, there are 85 accredited international Christian schools outside of the 50 United States, with 13 of them located in South America (T. Thompson, personal communication, March 17, 2017). The most recent Latin American school

surveys were completed in the 2013–2014 academic year. These surveys showed 36.8% schools maintained a stable enrollment while 31.6% saw an increase in enrollment and 31.6% saw a decrease (ACSI, 2014).

The Association of Americans Resident Overseas (AARO) estimated there are eight million Americans living and working abroad (AARO, 2016). According to the U.S. Department of State worldwide facts sheet for 2016–2017, while various groups established international schools, many of these schools are nonprofit, non-denominational, and independently run. Many international schools were started to meet the educational needs of expatriate children living internationally so they could be accepted into reputable universities in their passport countries (Dunne & Edwards, 2010; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Penland, 1996). However, many international schools accept students from the host country. According to the 2016–2017 school year enrollment statistics from the Office of Overseas Schools in the U.S. Department of State, there are nearly a quarter million school-age children of overseas American citizens that attend several types of international schools. According to the same statistics, just over a quarter of the students that attend the international schools directly supported by the U.S. Department of State are U.S. citizens. The multicultural student body is an example of the growth of a global society.

I concurred with past years' findings that world events along with the expansion and ability of technology to spread information around the globe almost instantly contribute to the growth of a global society in which cultures interact daily (Penland, 1996). Changes are found to influence education around the world (Johnson-Dunn, 2009; Thomas, 2010). Although international schools have existed for many years, recent decades have seen a growth in their numbers (Bunnell, Fertig, & James 2016; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Hill, 2015; King, 2012;

Silova & Hobson, 2014). Others also recognized the growth of international schools as educational research focused on them more, due partly to the current mindset of globalization (Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Hayden & Thompson, 2008). Cambridge (2015) further noted "that the nature of the international school has changed in radical ways and that the study of the field requires a general reconceptualization" (p. 75). New forms of international schools have contributed to the increase in number of international schools (Bunnell et al., 2016). The growth seen in these schools and in the discussions about globalization promoted the need for more research.

Prominent universities took an active interest in international education by the 1930s (Sylvester, 2002). But, the growth of global awareness contributed to an increase in the research focused on international education, with an emphasis in European and Pacific Rim areas (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). According to Jules (2014), "deliberations about globalization and its effects upon education have penetrated the national and international arenas, and have spun fresh research ideas" (p. 249). Some research on international schools located in Latin America existed; however, King (2012) noted that little research occurred in those international Christian schools tied to specific mission agencies because data were often not collected. ACSI also noted this lack of data collection. Thus, ACSI research became more deliberate. However, the research focused more on issues related to teachers in ACSI international schools (King, 2012; Renicks, 2003; Wilcox, 1994). I noted a gap in research of international Christian schools worldwide, in addition to those in Latin America, and more specifically, in relation to students and graduates from ACSI international Christian schools.

Spiritual formation is a widely-used term with various but similar definitions. Sink, Cleveland, and Stern (2007) defined spiritual formation as private and public process "whereby a

person moves from an immature faith to a deeper, more richly textured spirituality" (p. 39). In his dissertation, Marrah (2009) defined spiritual formation as "the process used of the Spirit of God to form the inner human character into a likeness of the being of Jesus" (p. iii). Egeler (2005) stated that "true Christian spiritual formation is biblically based" (p. 4). Dallas Willard, in an interview with Agnieszka Tennant, stressed that spiritual formation "is the process of establishing the character of Christ in a person" that is "under the direction of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God" (Tennant, 2005, p. 42). Willard further explained that this process is not modifying behavior, but is "developing a heart that is one with God" (Tennant, 2005, p. 44).

In 2007, the term spiritual formation became even more controversial. That year, Moody Bible Institute responded to Lighthouse Trails Research Project to clarify its definition of spiritual formation as it differed from the definition by Lighthouse. In a Lighthouse article (May 2007), Roger Oakland defined spiritual formation:

> Spiritual formation is based upon experiences promoted by desert monks and Roman Catholic mystics; these mystics encourage the use of rituals and practices that if performed will bring the practitioner closer to God (or enable him to enter God's presence). The premise is that if one goes into the silence or sacred space, then the mind is emptied of distractions, and the voice of God can be heard and personal transformation will take place. In truth, these hypnotic, mantric style practices bring one into altered states of consciousness, and rather than the believer being changed by the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of the person of Jesus Christ, he is supposedly changed (transformed) by entering this altered realm. (para. 3)

In contrast, the Moody Bible Institute (2007) defined spiritual formation as:

An academic synonym for spiritual growth toward godly maturity, or the process of Christian discipleship and sanctification (Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2; 2 Peter 1: 5-8). The focus of spiritual formation is a life yielded to the Holy Spirit, open to conviction, based upon a regenerated life in Christ and anchored in the Word of God. Spiritual formation at Moody is not to be confused with, or associated with, mystic or New Age practices. Rather, spiritual formation is rooted in the spiritual disciplines practiced by believers of all times, including Christ Himself, such as prayer, fasting, reading God's Word, and fellowship.

Spiritual formation involves the transformation of a person that begins when one asks Christ to be his Lord and Savior. Instead of using the concept of a whole person as the heart, soul, and mind, Willard supported the idea that true spiritual transformation should notably influence six dimensions: thought, feeling, will, body, social context, and soul (Looker, 2010). Moon (2010) described spiritual formation as a process whereby all aspects of a person are "effectively organized around God" (p. 276). All elements of a person should integrate and function together in a way that allows one to strive to know God "at such a deep, relational level that one's spirit is progressively aligned to Divine Will" (Moon, 2010, p. 276). As one effectively becomes more like Christ inwardly, his outward actions follow the examples and instructions of Christ (Looker, 2010); thus, outer actions result from what God is changing on the inside of a person.

The Biblical community understands spiritual formation as a growth process that continues throughout life. Fowler's Faith Theory sought to address the process and extended the works of Piaget and Kohlberg (Avery, 1990; Fowler, 2004). His theory contained stages through which one's developmental processes and construction of human understanding determined

one's faith (Avery, 1990; Fowler, 2004). These seven stages continue through adulthood (Parker, 2006), and the amount of time spent in each stage varies for each individual (Camp, 2009). Fowler's theory concentrated on the content of faith, belief, and values (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992). In his review of implications gleaned from his theory, Fowler (2004) noted the need for religious educators to nurture children by "introducing them to the narratives and the practices that provided experiences of God's love," to attend "to the capacities of the child in each of the stages and phases of growth," and to engage them in spiritual practices in such a manner that those practices "become meaningful and sustaining resources in their imaginations, will, knowledge, and moral development" (p. 413).

While ACSI used the term spiritual formation when referring to assessing effective Christian education, its ninth accreditation standard in its Reaching for Excellence through Accreditation and Continuous Improvement for Higher Achievement (REACH) manual utilized the terminology *spiritual development* (ACSI, 2008). The aim of authentic Christian education should be that students are taught to live a life based on God's Word. The expected student outcomes for the spiritual development of students "include strong character, evidence of values consistent with a person of faith, and a God-centered pattern of life" (ACSI, 2008, p. 39). In his book *Renovation of the Heart,* Willard (2002) stated:

> A major part of understanding spiritual formation in the Christian traditions is to follow closely the way the biblical writings repeatedly and emphatically focus on the various essential dimensions of the human being and their role in life as a whole. (p. 31).

For the purposes of this study, I defined spiritual formation as the process—under the direction of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God—whereby a person develops a deep,

personal, authentic relationship with Jesus Christ in which all aspects of a person are organized around God (Moon, 2010).

Christ instructed Christians how to live. He also stated that to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27, New International Version). Christ commanded this type of love several times throughout His Word (Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 11:13, 13:3, & 30:6; Joshua 22:5; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30). Matthew 5:13-14 stated that we are the salt and light; thus, we are to live as such. These types of love and way of living are fundamental to the spiritual formation of students. For true spiritual formation to occur, Christ must be at the center of all aspects of a Christian school, or as more aptly stated by ACSI (2008), "the educational process is holistic in that it teaches for the development of mind, body, and spirit" where "spiritual principles . . . become embedded in the daily routines and activities" (p. 39). According to Egeler (2005), "an effective Christian school makes an effort to integrate faith and academic learning by permeating all school activity with a biblical worldview with the goal of achieving a true biblically based Christ-centered education" (p. 3).

Christian research groups became interested in and focused on the spiritual developmental outcomes of Christian education along with the areas of academics and cultural engagement. Cardus Educational Survey (2012), a Canadian Christian research group, carried out a longitudinal study to better understand the alignment between the intended and the actual outcomes of Catholic and Protestant education in the United States and Canada. Results of this study showed that the actual outcomes largely coincide with the desired outcomes for graduates (Cardus Educational Survey, 2012), and therefore provided a premise as noted by Wilcox that Christian schools are a significant factor in specific practices of students (Wilcox, personal

communication, 2014). According to ACSI (2012a), the Cardus Education Survey focused on the broader picture of spiritual development in Protestant education and its impact on the political arena and long-term views of graduates from K-12 Christian schools. However, an important aspect of Christian education focused on the immediate and short-term views Christian school graduates had about influencing family and being "integrated members of their communities" (ACSI, 2012a, p. 12). The ability to have a long-term impact on family and community requires more than an academic preparation; it requires a spiritual formation that defines who one is as a person.

Cardus (2014) carried out another study that explored data from 1,500 American high school graduates that are now between the ages of 24 and 39. The research included several variables- but the variables were also contained to isolate the school's effect. Differences between public, Catholic, and Evangelical schools appeared "to have more to do with a family effect than a direct school effect" as "once family background, family religiosity, and other controls were included, the school effect among Evangelicals was similar to other sectors" (p. 28). The Cardus 2014 study also noted that the most prominent effect of Evangelical school was within the area of religious practices. These practices included reading the Bible and praying. The study concluded by stating "that Evangelical schools institutionalize the importance and practice of religiosity appears to have a longer-term impact on graduates" (Cardus, 2014, p. 28).

Evaluating a school's academic success can be done in several ways, but evaluating a school's success and impact on the spiritual formation of students creates more of a challenge. As the world continues to decay and turn away from God, the making of disciples grows more problematic. According to LeBlanc and Slaughter (2012), various studies have shown that students struggled to maintain their Christian faith at private colleges that have turned away from

their religious roots. They also stated that "increased faith and spiritual growth are not apparent in many college-age young people whether or not they have been educated in Christian schools" (p. 63).

Situation to Self

The topic of spiritual formation is values based—not only on the topic itself but also in the emphasis placed on this aspect within Christian education. I have been involved in a variety of roles within Christian education for many years. Most of those years were as a teacher and as an administrator in an ACSI international school in South America. Additionally, I was involved on ACSI accreditation teams for some of the ACSI international schools in South America. During those years, I observed graduates who influenced those around them for Christ as well as others who negatively influenced the graduates. As a result, biases were present in both the myself and the participants. Therefore, this study had axiological philosophical assumptions (Creswell, 2013).

Christ is what gives purpose and meaning to life. A life founded on Him alters all areas of one's life. Christians need to disciple younger Christians to develop a strong biblical worldview to raise up a generation with a strong spiritual foundation that truly loves God and places Him at the center of one's life. Spending several years in Christian education and continuing to grow in my personal relationship with Christ created a desire in me for other Christian school graduates to do the same. I was interested in learning if there were factors within Christian schools that influenced those decisions. Therefore, I approached this research with the desire to seek understanding based on the participants' views of their experiences.

Problem Statement

Recently, new research ideas have surfaced due to a cultural shift toward globalization and its effect upon both national and international education (Jules, 2014). According to LeBlanc and Slaughter (2012), various studies have shown that spiritual faith and growth are not evident in college-age students, regardless of the type of high school they attended. Findings by Cardus (2012) slightly differ from data from the other studies, as its Canada- and U.S.-based quantitative research posited Christian education is having an effect on the preparations for areas within spiritual practices. However, further quantitative research by Cardus (2014) focused on the United States and postulated that the outcomes observed in spiritual practices "appear to have more to do with a family effect than a direct school effect. Once family background, family religiosity, and other controls were included, the school effect among Evangelicals was similar to other sectors" (p. 28). The spiritual formation of students is a key to Christian education, with the goal being lifelong growth. Yount (2016) aptly stated this goal as "the best outcome for Christian education is the systematic, consistent, and long-term development of missions-minded believers (from pagan converts) who will carry what they learned across time and space 'to all nations'" (p. 331).

The problem and motivation of this study is the influence that Christian schools have on the long-term spiritual formation of their graduates. Religion influences adolescents in several ways at various stages of their lives (Regenerus, Smith, & Fritsch 2003); thus, methods and structures of Christian education that address the spiritual formation of students must take into account adolescent development and the possible impact of its influences, especially those that are long term. Despite the challenge, this area must be given more attention to enable all

Christian schools to identify the best methods to provide a strong spiritual foundation for their students that will continue long after graduation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine how, if at all, attendance at ACSI-accredited international schools in South America impacted the spiritual formation of graduates from those schools. For this study, spiritual formation was generally defined as the process, under the direction of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, by which a person develops a deep, personal, authentic relationship with Jesus Christ in which all aspects of a person are organized around God (Moon, 2010). The theory guiding this study is Fowler's Faith Theory (2004), as it postulates that one's developmental processes and construction of human understanding determines one's faith.

Significance of the Study

Research within the area of spiritual formation of students has been focused at the level of higher education (Bird, 2016; Fisler et al., 2009; Hartley, 2004; Jones, 2008; McLaughlin, 2015; Rockenbach, Walker, & Luzader, 2012; Shuster & Mongetta, 2009; Stella, 2003), on comparing students from Christian schools to those from public schools (Cardus, 2012; Cardus, 2014), on biblical worldviews of current students (Bryant, 2008; Burton, 2003; Eckelbarger, 2009; Fyock, 2008; Marrah, 2009; Meyers, 2003), and on the spiritual formation of youth in general (Denton, Pearce, & Smith, 2008; LeBlanc & Slaughter, 2012; Lickona, 1991). ACSI has recognized the need to more formally evaluate the area of spiritual formation (D. Wells, personal communication, October 2012). ACSI's website contains a resource page that provides information on three different external assessments that schools can elect to use to help get a general measurement of their current spiritual climate. One of those assessments involves three

skilled consultants who carry out a comprehensive qualitative/quantitative evaluation. To date, six PK-12 schools, five located in the United States and one located in South America, have undergone a qualitative/quantitative process using the Christian Character Index to assess the current spiritual formation climate (D. Egeler, personal communication, November, 2012). The results of these studies from both national and international Christian schools can be utilized and applied to other Christian schools worldwide.

However, research completed at the university level within the area of spiritual formation has not been utilized to evaluate the part that Christian education at the high school level played on university students. Additionally, the research being done at the Christian high school level focused on current students. A quantitative dissertation by Camp (2009) investigated the long-term effect of Christian schooling on both the educational and spiritual aspects of graduates of one school. Regardless, the need still existed for qualitative research focused on the spiritual aspect.

Research to evaluate the long-term impact of the spiritual formation climate within Christian schools is almost non-existent, yet it is a crucial area because of its lasting impact. A qualitative approach was utilized to obtain rich information directly from graduates. Creswell (2013) suggested that one should "conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored" (p. 47). Within the qualitative realm, Moustakas (1994) encouraged an empirical phenomenological approach when the aim was to gain "the essence of the experiences" of individuals from comprehensive details in order to derive general meanings (p. 13). This study was a step toward closing the gap between research done on the spiritual formation of current high school and college students by looking at the essence of long-term impact that Christian schools have on their graduates. By investigating the long-term impact of the spiritual formation

of graduates, the foundational goals of Christian education can be better evaluated. This study

offered valuable insight for both Christian schools and universities, as well as provided a

platform for future research. Theoretically, input from this study provided information on

aspects of a school that affect students' long-term spiritual formation that may aide

administrators, teachers, and ACSI. Additionally, the results of the study may influence a

school's self-evaluation regarding a continuous school improvement plan for this aspect of a

school's mission.

Research Questions

Given that the purpose of this study was to examine how, if at all, attendance at ACSI-

accredited international schools in South America impact the spiritual formation of their

graduates, the following research questions guided this study.

RQ1: How do alumni perceive their attendance at an ACSI international school

influences their ability to live a life after graduation that demonstrates spiritual formation?

The goal of this study was to identify characteristics of an international Christian school

that aid, or possibly hinder, one's process of spiritual formation. The purpose of this question

was to address those characteristics that may have had an impact on that process on a long-term

basis.

RQ2: How do alumni perceive their attendance at an ACSI international school affects

their personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

Asking Christ to be one's Lord and Savior is the beginning point of the process of

spiritual formation and one's personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Willard (2002) stated that

the goal of spiritual formation "is an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner

transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ" (p.

22). This process is never completed and, ideally, the relationship should deepen as one continues to be spiritually formed.

RQ3: Based upon their time at an ACSI international school, how do alumni describe the impact of spiritual formation on their attitudes and actions toward living a life for Christ that is visible to others?

Visible actions and attitudes should be a natural outpouring of one's inner relationship with Christ. However, when external manifestations of Christlikeness become the focus, a barrier of legalism is created, which hinders the process of genuine spiritual formation (Willard, 2002). This question addressed how a school can have an impact on the relationship one's beliefs and attitudes has with one's actions, and essentially, the testimony one's life can have.

Definitions

Terms pertinent to this study are listed and defined below.

1. *Cultivating* - Cultivating is to nurture and encourage one to bear fruit, which is visible evidence of personal relationship with Christ (Myers, 2010).

2. *Kingdom education* - Kingdom education is a Bible-based and Christ-centered lifelong process of leading one to Christ, building one up in Christ, and then equipping one to serve Christ (Schultz, 2002).

3. *Spiritual disciplines* - We pursue intimacy with and conformity to Jesus Christ through the practices of spiritual disciplines (Whitney, 2003).

Summary

This chapter introduced this study on spiritual formation of graduates from ACSI schools in Latin America. Problem and purpose statements, my relationship to the topic, the guiding questions, the research plan, and the significance of this study were also stated in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework, the background of ACSI, spiritual disciplines, Christian schools and their role in the spiritual formation of adolescents, Fowler's theory of faith development, adolescent development, the current spiritual health of teens, character and kingdom education, discipleship, cultivating character, biblical worldview, and various factors that influence spiritual formation.

Theoretical Framework

Christ is who gives purpose and meaning to life. A life founded on Him affects all areas of one's life. Barna (2003) stated, "Every dimension of a person's experience hinges on his or her moral and spiritual condition" (p. 28). Unfortunately, "many Christians lack a biblical worldview" (Barna, 2003, p. xix). Fowler's Faith Theory (2004) posited that one's developmental processes and construction of human understanding determines one's faith. Christians need to assist younger Christians in developing a strong biblical worldview. A generation of Christians who truly love God and place Him at the center of their lives, thus able to be salt and light in today's world, is imperative. Litfin (2004 addressed the idea that "genuine Christian thought is more than a mere add-on . . . to engage in distinctive Christian thinking is to go beyond" (Litfin, 2004, p. 62). Specifically, "The more prepared the Christian school graduate is to face the challenges of the world, the more effective that graduate will be in representing the Lord Jesus Christ and addressing the philosophical issues of the culture that by nature is anti-Christian" (Bryant, 2008, p. 140).

This training requires preparation and can never begin too early. Research hypothesized that "once a child entered his teenage years the probability of his worldview changing was very

low" (Wood, 2008, p. 70). Therefore, teaching and nurturing a culture and belief system aligned with spiritual truths that include the purpose and meaning of life should be addressed in the early years of a child's life (Barna, 2003). However, teaching and training should continue during adolescence.

Adolescence is acknowledged as a time of transition from childhood to adulthood during which individuals try to decide who they are as their own person. If Christian schools can create an environment in which critical and independent thinking are encouraged, it "is likely to promote both integrated internalization of values and more autonomous moral judgement" (Weinstock, Assor, & Broide, 2009, p. 147). Moreover, both Long (2001) and Van Hoof (1999) acknowledged that if adolescents are given opportunities to explore their social and physical environments, while adults and peers support them, the process can culminate in an identity that remains coherent over time and across social contexts. Therefore, when students take ownership and form a foundation for their lives from what they have observed and been taught regarding a belief system, values, and morals, they fulfill the goal of the type of transition that Christian schools aim to facilitate.

Related Literature

Review of previous research on this topic revealed efforts focused on current high school students, on current college students, and on various aspects related to the topic of spiritual formation. Further examination also revealed a lack of focus on the long-term impact of spiritual formation of Christian school students from a qualitative aspect. Research related to and supportive of this qualitative research topic is discussed in this section.

History of the Association of Christian Schools International

The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) was founded in 1978 with the merger of three Christian school associations. When several other regional Christian school associations were added to ACSI, the headquarters was moved to Colorado Springs in 1994. A 30-member executive board governs this nonprofit organization (D. A. Wilcox, personal communication, 2011).

The focus of ACSI is to offer services and products that aid schools in becoming more effective, which supports its mission of enabling Christian educators and schools worldwide (D. A. Wilcox, personal communication, 2011). School improvement is one service offered through an internationally recognized school accreditation process (D. A. Wilcox, personal communication, 2011). With the growth of member schools outside of the United States, the need to offer closer support was realized, and the first international regional office was opened in Guatemala in 1990. Currently, 25 regional offices are located throughout the world, with all but 10 located outside of the United States.

In 2010, the International Ministries ACSI office was renamed ACSI-Global, and today it partners with over sixty staff members worldwide (D. A. Wilcox, personal communication, 2011). The global needs of the Christian school movement have been addressed in several ways, including the creation of a quantitative/qualitative spiritual formation assessment for Christian schools around the world to respond to the need for instrumentation to evaluate current students' and the school's progress in achieving the spiritual aspect of their mission and vision.

Spiritual Disciplines

Outward actions, or practices, should be viewed as opportunities to put oneself before God to allow Him to change us as we pursue godliness. Spiritual disciplines involve various practices that Whitney (2004) defined as the purpose by which one pursues "intimacy with Jesus

Christ and conformity to Jesus Christ" (p. 110). These disciplines, both personal and interpersonal, are God-ordained and found in Scripture. Any other practices introduced by society that are not found in God's Word are not needed for godliness (Whitney, 2003). Foster (1988) also referred to these actions as disciplines and asserted the following:

> The Disciplines are God's way of getting us into the ground; they put us where he can work within us and transform us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. God has ordained the disciplines of the spiritual life as the means by which we place ourselves where he can bless us (p. 7).

However, outward actions must be built on a solid identity of who one is in Christ. Smith (1994) suggested that if one's identity is not established, the "right motives for practicing spiritual disciplines" will be lacking, and one "may easily slip into a deadly legalism" (p. 3865). Beard (2015) noted struggles within the church setting regarding identity and the consequential identity struggles within individuals and stated, "In the midst of this identity crisis, the focus of spiritual formation has become information and behavior; expectations have often been reduced to attending church-produced Bible classes and behaving in a moral fashion by community standards" (p. 179). Therefore, disciplines should be outward actions based on an inner desire to develop a deeper intimacy with God, not an end goal for others to notice.

The Pharisees lived the disciplines outwardly but had no intimacy with God. They conformed to a routine and a responsibility without the right motivation and without having their hearts involved. The outward practices do not in themselves equate to godliness, but are a God-given means of experiencing God that result in right attitudes, fruits of the spirit, and character

qualities (Whitney, 2003). Thus, "Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, Christians can experience God everywhere and in all circumstances. But there are certain means God has revealed in scripture . . . that he has ordained especially for the purpose of seeking and savoring Him" (Whitney, 2004, p. 112). The Pharisees did not set an example of genuinely experiencing God, but others such as Jonathan Edwards have.

The life of Jonathan Edwards sets an example as one who had a passion for and intimacy with God. He spoke the Word of God and lived his life accordingly (Whitney, 2003). Whitney (2004) also noted the following statement made by Jonathan Edwards in the spring of 1721:

Never any words of scripture seem to me as these words did (I Tim. 1:17). I thought with myself how excellence a Being that was, and how happy I should be if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven; and be as it were swallowed up in him forever! I kept saying, as it were singing, over and over these words of scripture to myself; and went to pray to God that I might enjoy him; and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do, with a new sort of affection (p. 112).

These words easily allow one to hear Edwards's passion for and genuine relationship with God.

Edwards enjoyed God and grew in personal relationship with Him. He did this by practicing the biblical disciplines (Marsden, 2003; Whitney, 2003). First, the discipline of meditation on God's Word was significant in Edwards's life (Whitney, 2003). Reading God's Word is not enough. One must think deeply so as to absorb what is being read. Meditation should be a regular, refreshing encounter that changes one's life daily (Whitney, 2003). Jonathan Edwards was absorbed with his meditation on scripture and stated, "The sweetest joys and delights I have experienced have not been those that have arisen from a hope of my own good estate, but in a direct view of the glorious things of the gospel" (Whitney, 2004, p. 113).

Prayer was a discipline about which Edwards felt so strongly that he referred to those who did not spend time praying as hypocrites (Whitney, 2003).

A third discipline, as noted by Whitney (2003), that Edwards practiced was private worship, which included reading, praying, and singing. Whitney (2003) observed another practiced discipline as solitude. Edwards stated that a true Christian "delights at times to retire from all mankind to converse with God in solitude" (Whitney, 2004, p. 118). Fasting, journal-keeping, stewardship of time, and Godly learning were four other practiced disciplines noted by Whitney (2003). Jonathan Edwards (1723), in his sermon entitled "Nothing Upon Earth Can Represent the Glories of Heaven," focused on the doctrine that "the Godly are designed for unknown and inconceivable happiness" (p. 152). Reflecting on this doctrine and sermon by Edwards, Whitney (2003) concluded that man has been created to long for and experience a fullness of joy beyond comprehension and stated:

> All the spiritual pleasure they enjoy in this life does but inflame their desire and thirst for more enjoyment of God. And if they knew there was no future life, it would but increase their misery. To consider that after this life was ended they were never to enjoy God anymore at all, how good is God, that He has created man for this very end to make him happy in the enjoyment of Himself, the almighty! (0:37.23)

God "created within you desires that He intended to satisfy" (Whitney, 2003, 00:35:24). God's Word never changes—and His promises He always keeps.

Therefore, these biblical disciplines can change lives today as well. In Edwards's (1734–1735) sermon "Pressing into the Kingdom of God," given during the Awakenings in North Hampton, five descriptions were given of those who are actively pursue the kingdom of God: they have a strong desire for the kingdom of God, they are earnest and resolute in pursing God's

kingdom with all their being, they endeavor through both knowledge and heart together, they are directly engaged and earnest about kingdom business, and they are persevering through struggles and discouragements. One cannot imitate Jonathan Edwards' gifts, but one can imitate his use, development, and discipline of the practices (Whitney, 2003).

One can learn several lessons from the life of Jonathan Edwards and his example of practicing biblical disciplines. First, Christians should pursue a passion for God through all of the biblical spiritual disciplines (Whitney, 2003). Whitney (2003) also noted that the spiritual disciplines themselves do not provide satisfaction; instead, they are only an avenue to pursue a passion for God. In another one of Edwards's sermons, "The Christian Pilgrim," Edwards stressed that:

> The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives or children, or a company of earthly friends are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the ocean. (Whitney, 2004, p. 126)

The second lesson that can be learned from the life of Jonathan Edwards is the importance of pursuing one's passion for God through the spiritual disciplines regardless of one's intellectual capabilities and our circumstances. One's spiritual formation does not depend on how educated one is. God works through His Holy Spirit to teach and instruct (John 14:26). Furthermore, one should not use life's circumstances or age as an excuse to become stagnate and stop the process of spiritual formation. Whitney (2003) pointed out that Christians cannot rely on education, gifts, or talents, but must be intentional in all seasons of life to be disciplined regardless of any circumstances.

The third lesson that can be learned is that through the spiritual disciplines, Christians need to pursue a passion for God with their heads and their hearts. There needs to be a balance in the process of pursuing God. Specifically, only gaining knowledge about God will not compensate for having a passion for God, nor will the opposite compensate (Whitney, 2004). Whitney (2004) noted that "Edwards models the fact that a real understanding of the truth of God will set the heart on fire, and that the heart set on fire by God will burn with a love for learning his truth" (p.128). One's entire being must be involved in deepening a relationship with God for genuine spiritual formation to occur that begins on the inside and becomes visible on the outside through the spiritual disciplines. These biblical spiritual disciplines are crucial for true spiritual formation. In fact, what in all the world should "delight our minds and ignite our hearts more than the things of God" (Whitney, 2004, p. 128)? Christians have removed God from playing a central role in their lives (Ortberg, 2012). As a result, they have become complacent with our spiritual life and no longer see the need to move forward in developing a deeper relationship with Christ. In fact, many today do not truly trust God when actually in order to experience true spiritual formation, one needs to understand the Gospel and realize that believers "can experience the reality of his kingdom before [they] die" (Willard & Zander, 2005, p. 22). In other words, Christians should mature as they spiritually develop. Ma (1999) found that a person who is mature is well-grounded in the present but looks to the future as he is guided by broader set of values. Additionally, Willard and Zander (2005) stated that Christians must view ourselves as God's apprentices and believe that anything is possible. A life that demonstrates spiritual formation is not complacent or stagnant, but active.

Adolescents, especially, need to be encouraged to develop an active relationship with God through prayer, reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture because through these

disciplines "we increase our understanding of who we are, we increase our awareness of God's presence in our lives (in joy and sorrow), and we increase our ability to become weak so that God might become strong in us (2 Cor. 12:9)" (Smith, 1994, p. 3947). According to Ortberg (2012), "To grow spiritually means to live increasingly as Jesus would in our unique place (7:36 min)." Instead, we often perceive our spiritual life as another aspect of our life—but "the term, spiritual life, is simply a way of referring to one's life, every moment and facet of it, from God's perspective" (8:39 min). God is interested in our whole life- not just the spiritual aspect.

Christian Schools and the Spiritual Formation of Adolescents

Spiritual formation is not to be confused with "the transformation of becoming a new person in Christ" (Carlson, 2010, p. 223). While transformation "is a work fully completed by God," spiritual formation "requires that the believer cooperates with the work of God" (Forrest, 2013, p. 29). Sink et al. (2007) described spiritual formation as "a dynamic process whereby a person moves from an immature faith to a deeper, more richly textured spirituality" (p. 39). However, Smith (1994) and Wilhoit (2008) noted that whether it is recognized or not, and whether the movement is toward or away from Christ, the process of spiritual formation takes place in every person's life. Themes of nurture; a journey or a race; and an experience of death, life, and resurrection found throughout Scripture have been associated with and referenced when discussing spiritual formation (Boa, 2001; Mulholland, 1993; Thornhill, 2012 Wilhoit, 2008). These themes can be applied in the Christian school setting as decisions are made on approaches to utilize when supporting a positive spiritual formation.

Although the spiritual condition of adolescents does not change much as they age (Barna, 2003), "a greater capacity for abstract thought emerges along with a search for new meanings in life experiences" (Kim & Esquivel, 2011, p. 756). Additionally, as one searches, he most likely

will face struggles since "spiritual struggles are particularly relevant to conceptions of faith development" (Rockenbach et al., 2012, p. 68). In fact, Smith (1994) proposed that "spiritual formation can only occur in the midst of struggle" (p. 3895). Therefore, it is important to expect those struggles as students develop their faith and consequently provide a healthy and safe environment that enables students to wrestle through their doubts and questions while ensuring that they are aware of the consequences of influences (I Cor. 15:33). Pazmiño (2008) noted that one can learn from Deuteronomy 31:9-13 the implication of the need to "relate biblical themes to contemporary life and help students in all educational programs to grapple with the implications of biblical truth for their response in the world" (p. 30). This includes teaching theology and doctrine to students in a creative and stimulating way that is attached to everyday experiences (Smith, 1994). Pazmiño (2012) explained that "through education, we must confront the implications of the lordship of Christ for all areas of social interaction, including the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres" (p. 281). Schools should be aware of these areas of struggles and view them as opportunities to deepen students' faith as well as their worldview.

Any school with ties to religion includes faith as an important aspect of education and incorporates it into the school in some manner. In fact, according to Sink et al. (2007), "one of the primary goals of Christian schools is to promote healthy spiritual development" (p. 36). Gaebelein (1968) described Christian schools as "God-centered, Christ-oriented, Bible-based education" (p. 15). Davis (2013) noted that parents who send their children to a Christian school expect "that their child will be graduated a better person, prepared for engaging everything the world will throw at them" (para. 6). But how successful is this incorporation? What makes a school truly Christian in more than just name? How can Christian schools prepare graduates to face the world in which they will live? Davis (2013) stressed the following point:

A school isn't Christian because the education is provided by Christian teachers, has a

board made up of Christians, where prayer begins class time, or at which chapel is

celebrated. A Christian education is identified as being "integrally Christian," each

course conceived from an avowedly Christian point of view! (para. 8)

Christian education must be based on God's truth and the idea that "God's truth is of

universal scope"; thus, "every aspect of education must be brought into relation to it" (Gaebelein,

1968, p. 7). Integration of God's Word must be visible in all areas and at all levels to encourage

true spiritual formation that is lasting. Integration "is the living union of its subject matter,

administration, and even of its personnel, with the eternal and infinite pattern of God's truth"

(Gaebelein, 1968, p. 9). However, Pazmiño (2010) warned that "a focus on information alone in

formal education can be sterile, if not complemented by attention given to the formation of the

hidden curriculum with opportunities for mentoring and . . . intentional discipleship," but even

these "yoked effectively can be misguided if not continually renewed by God's work of

transformation" (pp. 363–364).

Findings of the Cardus Educational Survey postulated that although graduates of

Protestant Christian schools registered high raw scores in the areas of "preparations for a vibrant

spiritual life, obligation to accept church leadership authority, frequency of church attendance,

biblical authority, and strong biblical values, the school's effect on these positions achieved

much lower scores" (Davis, 2013, para 9). These findings suggest Christian education lacks a

long-term impact within these areas, which limits its ability to have a positive impact on the

world for Christ. Davis (2013) asserted Christian schools are too narrow in their stance of

critiquing the culture. Rather, Christian schools should have the stance of encountering and

engaging today's culture while being influenced by spiritual formation, and should be

"characterized by a deliberate curriculum which integrates the world outside, consciously pushing students to think outside the 'Christian bubble'" (para. 9). There is a necessity for Christian schools to promote "harmony, cultural engagement and academic achievement being influenced by spiritual formation" (Davis, 2013, para. 10). This mindset will support the equipping of citizens who portray both character and integrity (Davis, 2013). Christian schools should develop spiritual formation in their students that is visibly evident.

According to Fowler (2004), religious education implies the need to give children "love, care, and formative support" as they are taught of God's love for them (p. 413). Christian education cannot only be about building Christian principles into the lives of students, but about giving opportunities to build those principles into the lives of others and enable them to see the natural outflow of their faith. Fowler (2004) further stated religious education entails the need to engage students with their faith to the point that their faith becomes "meaningful and sustaining resources in their imaginations, will, knowledge, and moral development" (p. 413).

As Christian schools strive to guide the spiritual formation of students, they address the concept of educating the "whole" child, which refers to a person's heart, soul, and mind. Willard (2002) described that the whole person, the concepts of the heart, soul, and mind of human nature, can be broken down into six basic aspects. These aspects are: thought; feeling; choice, or one's will, body, which includes one's actions and how well one interacts with his or her physical surroundings; social context, or one's interpersonal interactions; and soul, which is "the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life" (Willard, 2002, p. 30). Accordingly, a Christian school with the priority to invest in spiritual formation will have a process that is "personal and social in nature" (Sink et al., 2007, p. 43). This process includes the three spheres: one's relationship with God, with oneself, and with others (Ma, 1999). By addressing the

concept of educating the heart, soul, and mind of their students, the school can "influence key aspects of functioning (e.g., religion, stress management, beliefs, emotionality, self-care, gender identity, identity, creativity) and guide students' ability to find meaningful work, to love, and to have deep friendships" (Sink et al., 2007, p. 43).

Fowler's Faith Theory

As a person grows, he experiences several developmental stages within areas such as cognitive, affective, and social development. Piaget (1932) focused his studies on cognitive development from birth to adulthood. His theory suggested that people grow cognitively as they age and have various life experiences that include interacting with knowledge, people, and the world around them. Piaget's (1932) theory also noted that one's schema develops according to observations and experience through a process of assimilation, reinterpretation, and either accommodating or changing the current schema. Furthermore, Piaget (1932) reasoned that an adolescent went through a time of transition from concrete thinking based on physical experiences to more abstract thought. Hoekstra (2012) noted that "as an adolescent develops an increasing ability for abstract thought, the young person is likewise increasingly able to consider matters of ethics, morality, and religion within a more theoretical schema" (p. 37). Fowler's work is influenced by Piaget's cognitive development theory and Kohlberg's study of moral development (Avery, 1990; Fowler, 2004). His theory adds four additional constructive dimensions: (a) one's ability to respond to and evaluate authority sources, (b) one's ability to expand the perspectives of social awareness, (c) the ability to construct meaning and coherence of the world, and (d) one's ability to shape and respond to religious symbols and rituals (Fowler, 2004). Fowler's faith theory is explained as "an essential component of the human psyche" (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992, p. 75). As such, he focuses on the content of faith, beliefs, and values

as a phenomenon separate from putting that faith into action (Jardine, 1992). Fowler's definition

of faith suggests that one's developmental processes and construction of human understanding

determines one's faith (Avery, 1990; Fowler, 2004).

Fowler's Faith Theory has seven stages. These seven stages begin with Primal Faith at

infancy and continue to advance through adulthood (Parker, 2006). Although the movement

through each stage of development varies with each person, most adolescents find themselves in

stage three, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, as their motivational faith is to be accepted by peers in

all areas (Camp, 2009). Stage four, Individuative-Reflective Faith, requires critical reflection on

one's faith and an evaluation of inconsistencies (Parker, 2006). Thus, one would expect this

stage to occur during the teenage years or beyond. This stage of development could transpire

when one is faced with various influences that could shape the formation of one's character. As

one enters adulthood, it is not uncommon to experience struggles as one reflects on faith and

spiritual growth (Rockenbach et al., 2012). Fowler (2004) noted that "it should never be the

primary goal of religious education simply to precipitate and encourage stage advancement" (p.

417). Instead, the stages are useful to allow educators to be mindful of the process individuals

go through in order to help "shape our teaching" (Fowler, 2004, p. 417). Additionally, one must

keep in mind that these stages do not follow a prescriptive timeline for each individual,

especially for adolescents.

Adolescent Development

Adolescence can be a challenging time as adolescents develop socially, morally,

physically, and spiritually. Sanford recognized that students need a balanced environment that

contains the right amount of challenge and support; too much challenge without support may

result in a student who is defensive and adopts negative behaviors, while too much support with

no challenge will not encourage development (as cited in Jones, 2008). Therefore, during this time, adolescents "need to build community and to be given the chance to make meaningful contributions to their communities" (Enright, Schaefer, Schaefer, & Schaefer, 2008, p. 39). The adolescent stage is also known as a time of transition, especially in individuals' thought processes and abilities.

Piaget (1932) noted this time as one of transition from concrete to abstract thinking. Furthermore, "as children develop greater cognitive and meta-cognitive capacity for reflection and better understanding of phenomena outside their immediate surroundings, they become increasingly able to assign meaning to religious and spiritual experiences" (Kim & Esquivel, 2011, p. 756). This transition to abstract thinking is believed to be a foundation for religious thought (Gorsuch & Walker, 2005).

Spiritual formation is an important aspect of identity development (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000; Smith, 1994). Kim and Esquivel (2011) theorized that as adolescents gain the ability to think abstractly, they begin to search and question more, which plays a role in their spiritual development, thus affecting their identity formation. According to Erikson (1968), adolescence is a pivotal time for identity development, as the individual learns to integrate with important peers as well as adults. According to Uecker (2003), adolescents need a safe environment as they struggle with moral and ethical challenges. Adolescents want and need positive influences in their lives that they can trust to be a good "mirror" and help them develop a positive identity (Smith, 1994).

Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, and Colwell (2006) posited that students should be equipped "with theological constructs that yield" the support and guidance that would be more

supportive than "customary prescriptives" offered seemingly with no care or support (p. 252). In fact, Erikson (1960) stated the following:

> The strengths a young person finds in adults at this time—their willingness to let him experiment, their eagerness to confirm him at his best, their consistency in correcting his excesses, and the guidance they give him—will codetermine whether or not he eventually makes order out of necessary inner confusion and applies himself to the correction of disordered conditions. He needs freedom to choose, but not so much freedom that he cannot, in fact, make a choice. (p. 47)

Therefore, support and care are important aspects that must be considered when assisting adolescents with their identity formation and their development.

Several theories have been developed that should be taken into consideration when assessing various aspects of adolescence. Kohlberg (1984) posited that as individuals develop, they go through various stages. Generally, Kohlberg's third and fourth stages are experienced during adolescence, with stage three being the principle of mutuality in which one tends to treat others as they want to be treated and they look for acceptance of others, while stage four concentrates on the role that individuals play within society, as adolescents have a tendency to take into account the well-being of others (Manning, 2005). Fowler's Faith Theory closely aligns with Kohlberg's stages, as stage three of Fowler's theory occurs when individuals seek acceptance of others, while stage four focuses more on the individual and his or her discovery of personal identity and beliefs while evaluating her or her own behavior. Learning theories from Bandura (1986) and Vygotsky should also be taken into account when discussing adolescent development.

One area of Vygotsky's research addressed the role that culture plays in cognitive development and is known as sociocultural theory (Woolfolk, 2007). Akers (1986) defined culture as codes of conduct that create and transmit value patterns, ideas, beliefs, and moral evaluations to its members. Not only should one's interactions be considered, but cultural interactions with others within the environment should be evaluated as an influence on one's cognitive development, values, and beliefs. Vygotsky suggested that interactions with others such as parents and teachers, who displayed more advanced thinking, foster cognitive development (Woolfolk, 2007). Additionally, "Vygotsky emphasized the tools that particularcultures provide to support thinking, and the idea that children use the tools they're given to construct their own understanding of the physical and social worlds" (Woolfolk, 2007, p. 41).

Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory expanded existing behavioral research theories and acknowledged principles of reinforcement and punishment. Later, the role that social influences and observations of others had on learning was added to his theory. His research distinguished between acquiring knowledge, learning, and the observational learning through behavior. The observation included four elements: attention, retention, production, and motivation/reinforcement (Woolfolk, 2007).

Teenagers experiment with a variety of roles with their identities and future ideals, and this process determines much of who they become. If a student lacks a sense of identity, he or she becomes "susceptible to the influence of others, and prone to stress, which often manifests itself in destructive behavior" (Smith, 1994, p. 3880). Additionally, if a student cannot develop a positive identity that provides a sense of belonging, he or she will feel alienated. Manning (2008) stated that "previous research suggests that alienation may develop partly from a

student's perception of negative practices or interactions in the classroom with teachers or peers" (p. 43). Adolescents struggle with identity and at times can develop a negative identity as they become focused on becoming what others do not wish them to be (Erikson, 1960). These experiences form the basis for either a negative experience of alienation from students and teachers or a positive experience, which supports the development of both the academic and social skills (Sankey & Huon, 1999). Furthermore, students use not only their experiences, but their surroundings, beliefs, and influences of others to help them develop their sense of identity (Smith, 1994). Smith went on to state that adolescents either attempt to imitate others as their sense of identity or integrate the beliefs and behaviors to discover what is real.

Current scientific research has focused more specifically on adolescent brain development due to recent technological advances that have enabled neuroscientists to see inside the adolescent brain (Roaten & Roaten, 2012; Tusaie, 2014). These studies indicated that the brain is more responsible for adolescents' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors than hormones (Roaten & Roaten, 2012). During adolescent development, "the reconstruction of the cortex allows the beginning of conceptual thinking and creative exploration" (Tusaie, 2014, p. 295). This time also brings changes within the brain that impact the "thoughts, beliefs, interests, abilities, and skills developed" and therefore must be supported and addressed in educational approaches for long-term impact (Roaten & Roaten, 2012, p. 6). Although no one can change what is physically happening within the adolescent brain, the information can be utilized to guide the development of methods for how adults react and respond that will provide the support needed (Gorman, 2006). In fact, Tusaie (2014) stated that the "ability to be present with the adolescent and the process of becoming, through many unpredictable experiences, is vital" (p. 296). This support can impact a long-term identity.

Although this development is an individual process, "adolescents need peers and adults who allow them to explore their social and physical environments and who support them in the process" (Long, 2001). Erikson (1968) and Tusaie (2014) noted that adolescence is a critical period for the development of identity as one learns to integrate with both peers and adults. Thompson (2012) asserted that although a child's relationship has a "developing influence on the growth of moral character," by adolescence, "social influences outside the family are increasingly important to oral development" (p. 426). Kohlberg's cognitive-development theory postulated that providing society role-taking opportunities that enables others to socially participate will affect their level of moral reasoning (Bar-Yam, Kohlberg, & Naame, 1980). Additionally, the level of a teacher's moral reasoning may be a factor in their students' moral development (Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975; Rest, Turiel, & Kohlberg, 1969). Schools need to be aware of these factors of moral development in order to actively support adolescents. And, as a result, schools must be promoters of this supportive environment and encourage critical and independent thinking that can "promote both integrated internalization of values and more autonomous moral judgment" (Weinstock et al., 2009).

Current Spiritual Health of Teens

Words and actions that were defined as inappropriate a decade or two ago have now become the norm for society (MacArthur, 2006). Pazmiño and Kang (2011) noted the draw of non-Christian views and standards and the fact that "Christian values and way of life have competed poorly with the world- and life-views peddled by a media-saturated global culture" (p. 380). Growing up and living in a society that is turning away from God influences adolescents and their religious beliefs and practices. Additionally, as adolescents are forming their identity, the world "projects a distorted image" that negatively influences and hinders true identity

formation (Smith, 1994, p. 3917). According to Smithwick (2008), assessment data collected from over twenty years of biblical worldview testing of Christian youth hypothesizes that at least 90% of youth from Christian homes, regardless of whether they attend public or Christian schools, are "consistently abandoning the Christian worldview in favor of the Humanist/Socialist worldview" (para. 8). A longitudinal study by The National Study of Youth and Religion looked at the religious and spiritual lives of American adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 and found "slight shifts away from standard religious beliefs and decreases in religious practice" within this age group when they compared the results to data from adolescents from the same age group from 2002 and 2005 (Denton et al., 2008, p. 3).

In order to combat the world's negative influence, an environment that encourages and cultivates a strong spiritual foundation is crucial. The context in which one is placed provides conditions that are more apt to foster positive spiritual growth (Thomson, 2009). Christian education seeks to provide the context that cultivates spiritual growth.

Character and Kingdom Education

Character education is a well-known area of discussion within the educational realm to the point that public schools spend time and effort to build it into their curriculum and programs. Additionally, Haynes and Thomas (2001) noted that in schools in which character education has been implemented, teachers have recognized fewer discipline and behavioral issues, thus making their jobs easier and allowing them to focus on teaching. However, character education programs have not been proven to enhance adolescent spirituality, and today's multicultural society needs a spiritual education that is centered on shared beliefs and based on mutual respect (Kim & Esquivel, 2011).

Society's emphasis on the importance of character unfortunately appears to be out of alignment with the focus on character education in schools. Many people who are considered celebrities are not strong role models when one looks at their lives. In *The Quest for Character*, MacArthur (2006) noted that "our society's most prominent celebrities include countless people who actually are known best for gigantic character flaws" (p. 9). This is not surprising "because celebrity itself counts more than character in a society without any moral anchor" (MacArthur, 2006, p. 9). Further, he stated that our society has become twisted in its morals to the extent that "honest character is now seen as totally optional-or worse, hopelessly unfashionable" (p. 10).

Ryan and Bohlin (1999) defined character as knowing the good, loving the good, and doing the good, and stressed the importance of character education as the foundation for effective schools and strong students. Several intellectual authorities have strongly voiced their belief in the need to give attention to teaching character formation and focus "our human energies on living worthy lives" in order to teach moral values (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999, p. 19).

Lickona (1991) stated that character has three interrelated parts that should be developed for the sake of society: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. Today, society teaches and behaves as though the outcomes of our lives depend solely on our decisions, that we were not created by design and with a purpose (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013b). We forget that we "have to decide who we are going to learn to live from" and that "Jesus is the best and only one for human beings to learn how to live from" (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013b). Therefore, society, apart from God, cannot teach us to be good and live worthy lives. Thus, "it is only the person who is becoming good as God views and intends good who is able to live the good life" (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013b). True character education is promoted within a cohesive environment; which a Christian school can provide (Wilheim, 2005). Therefore, in the

eyes of society, character education appears to focus on the present with the goal to make the world better. Schwartz (2008) noted that true character education happens when students become independent thinkers who are committed to moral principles and are likely make the right choice despite challenging situations. However, can public schools teach true character education? Fawcett (2003) suggested that since public education turned away from its Judeo-Christian values and became more secular, it no longer prepares graduates with character, only graduates with knowledge.

Schultz (2002), on the other hand, stressed the term *kingdom education*, which appears to be more closely related to the purposes of spiritual formation. Kingdom education is something that defines us as a person and involves our heart, mind, and body. Additionally, the focus of kingdom education is the eternal. The aims of kingdom education are that the children know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, that they are continually transformed to be like Christ, and that they are fully prepared to serve Christ on a daily basis for life (Schultz, 2002.

God Himself instructed this focus when He commanded, "You shall teach them diligently to your sons" (Deuteronomy 6:7–9). We must teach the next generation to be "rooted in Christ," to train both their hearts and minds to effectively serve God throughout their life (Schultz, 2002 p. 31). To be "rooted and grounded" signifies that one "is growing in the truth," that one's roots are grounded in God's Word for nourishment (Gaebelein, 1968, p. 55). Growing in the truth is a continual process, not just "an end goal for when you die" (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013b). Being rooted in Christ involves living in God's kingdom on a daily basis. Consequently, "such a basis for living means much more than doctrinal correctness; it implies increasing knowledge of divine truth, a desire to communicate it to others, and practicing it in daily life" (Gaebelein, 1968, p. 55). Living in God's kingdom "has to be what we want more than anything else" and

Christians must seek it, and look for its present everywhere with all their hearts (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013c). By seeking, Christians allow God to respond to them and them to respond to Him (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013c).

To accomplish this training, kingdom education must encompass the whole child at all times. Therefore, "true education cannot exist without both of these foundational building blocks—Jesus Christ and God's Word—in place at all times" (Schultz, 2002, p. 33). By helping children form biblical beliefs as the foundation of their lives, educators help them become people of integrity (Schultz, 2002).

Kingdom education is "a life-long, Bible-based, Christ-centered process of leading a child to Christ, building a child up in Christ and equipping a child to serve Christ" (Schultz, 2002, p. 29). This pertains to maintaining a mind focused on Christ as a basis for joy and keeping Him "as fully present" as possible (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013c). Kingdom education aids others in realizing that "our ultimate need is to see our place in Christ's world . . . and to know that everything is taken care of…that all that is good is God in action" (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013c). In reality, kingdom education is discipleship.

Discipleship

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a disciple is "one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another" (2003). Thus, to disciple is part of the process of discipleship. Discipleship should be a continual process that occurs as one matures and grows in his or her personal relationship with Christ. MacDonald (1975) noted that one's acceptance of Christ as his Savior is only the beginning of a journey; he must live a life that is committed to Him. Sadly, there is no longer a clear difference between those who follow Christ and those who do not (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a). Beard (2015) identified discipleship as "the key to

success" because it is "the cornerstone of a renewal process that will restore growth, health, and relevance" (p. 177). Therefore, a Christian, life must be about discipleship and being transformed (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a).

Being transformed does not refer to behavior modification (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a), which is where legalism tends to focus. Being transformed happens from within and flows outward. When one's mind, heart, body, and soul are working together, the "whole person simply steps into the way of Christ and lives there with joy and strength" (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a).

Today, many focus on outward actions to conform to religious expectations and push others into Christianity. Legalism results when one begins to live by a list of rules and expectations of actions. Foster (1988) aptly referred to this as "another set of soul-killing laws" that "breathe death" (p. 9). As such, "legalism has repeatedly defeated the best intentions of the best people of Christ's followers through the ages because it simply does not deal with the life of the individual; it simply deals with the behavior" (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a). Legalism stems from a desire to manage the lives of others (Foster, 1988). When we act on our belief that "inner transformation is God's work and not ours, we can put to rest our passion to set others straight" (Foster, 1988, p. 10). It is then that true discipleship can begin.

True discipleship should be like a magnet that pulls others in. Teaching should flow naturally out from close communion with God and should be like water to someone in a desert (Pazmiño, 2012). Specifically, "a disciple is someone who has become so ravished with Christ that they want to be like Him. They look at life and the kingdom of God and they say 'this is the best thing I ever saw in my life. I must have that'" (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a). Teachers, especially in Christian schools, must recognize their responsibility to mentor their

students. Winn (2010) noted that "good mentoring relationships can transform mentees" (p. 35).

Ghezzi (2003) noted that these mentoring relationships results in significant improvement in both

attitude and academic performance. Pazmiño (2012) declared that as teachers, "we are called to

use our power to free and empower others, to share the essential content of our faith, and to seek

to understand the implications of the lordship of Christ for all areas of our personal life. The

focus of such teaching is to be doing the will of God, and not just knowing God's will" (p. 281).

MacDonald (1975) stressed seven aspects of a life committed to Christ and the process of

growing to be more like Him. They are: a supreme love for Jesus Christ, denial of self,

deliberate choosing of the cross, a life spent following Christ, a fervent love for all who belong

to Christ, an unswerving continuance in His Word, and a forsaking of all to follow Him. A life

committed in this way must involve knowing Christ, not just having faith in Him (Knowing

Christ Conference, 2013a).

Faith without knowledge tends to focus on decisions made that are based on feelings, but

"faith is a reflection of knowledge" (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a). The world today has

divided faith from knowledge (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a). Dallas Willard, in a

conference on spiritual formation, stated that while faith and knowledge are different, they are

both vital and "must remain in the same arena together" (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a).

Discipleship should include both faith and knowledge. As one knows more about Christ, his

faith deepens, thus affecting his relationship with Christ.

Teaching and instilling this type of personal love relationship with Christ must begin

within the one discipling another. Discipleship begins when "a person enjoys a love relationship

with the Lord" and then concentrates "on instilling this love in the hearts and minds of the

generation to follow" (Schultz, 2002, p. 29). One must also remember that spiritual growth

should never stop; it goes beyond the initial commitment. Teachers especially must be aware of this and strive to continually "deepen and strengthen their ongoing relationship with Jesus" (Pazmiño, 1994, p. 146). Myers (2010) stated, "The matters of the heart overflow into one's life, and it is this passion that causes genuine influence to bloom" (p. 25). The responsibility of the Christian community "is not to make things happen," but to have words and actions align in such a way that it pulls people into discipleship (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a). Myers referred to this as cultivating others.

Cultivating Character

Cultivating is "to nurture, foster; to seek the goodwill of; to improve, tend; to promote the growth of; to form, refine; to prepare to bear fruit" (Myers, 2010, p. 28). However, as Pazmiño (2010) stated, "God is an active teacher through the Holy Spirit to disclose truth if we dare to listen" (p. 363). It is important to remember that everyone needs to be cultivated because no one will ever completely be like Christ. Teachers must be nurtured to be able to nurture their students. Pazmiño (1994) asserted the following:

> The ultimate purpose of nurturing the spiritual life of teachers must always be kept in focus, namely to glorify and enjoy God forever. . . . The ministry of teaching is a high calling, and Christian leaders must nurture the spiritual lives of teachers so that the Gospel may be lived in and out today. . . . Nurturing the spiritual lives of teachers requires attention to the demands of Christian discipleship and to daily walking with the Holy Spirit . . . and holds the promise of their effective ministries in nurturing the spiritual lives of their students, fulfilling Paul's exhortation in
> 2 Timothy 2:2 (p. 152).

As God continues to cultivate our lives, we can help others in the process as well.

Helping others does not involve telling others what to do, but modeling how to live. In other words, character cannot be mandated; it must be modeled. Modeling should also include providing opportunities for students to serve and translate their beliefs into actions with the result of growth (Uecker, 2003). Zukowski, Ristau, and Haney (1997) aptly described a model as "a person who through observation, discernment and guidance, provides others an opportunity to clarify their relationship with God, to focus their direction and to share their witness" (p. 5). Faith is not just having knowledge. It includes "an invitation to a student to walk alongside and learn from your life" (Myers, 2010, p. 63). Cultivating minds must be intrinsic to the Christian community first in order to serve society; not with the primary motive being to transform society, but to be obedient to Jesus Christ; thus, the outcome is to love God with the mind, regardless if efforts to do so are recognized by the culture (Litfin, 2004, p. 57). Daniel did not look for confrontation with the Babylonians, but looked for a compromise. Instead, "He sought to live faithfully to the Lord in the midst of a people who thought and operated very differently" (Litfin, 2004, p. 57).

A study by Zigarelli (2005) showed that people who demonstrated a strong Christian character could be described as those who manifested high levels of "gratitude, joyful living, and God-centeredness through the practice of the spiritual disciplines" (p. 23). Foster (1988) described joy as the "keynote of all the Disciplines" (p. 2). The practices of these disciplines are based on inner attitudes. "To know the mechanics does not mean that we are practicing the Disciplines . . . and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life" (Foster, 1988, p. 3). Willard (2002) noted that external manifestation of acting like Christ is not the focus in spiritual formation.

Biblical Worldview

Many worldviews exist throughout the world today. A worldview is one's concept of the universe and man's relation to it (Tackett, n.d.). A worldview involves what one believes about God, the Bible, truth, creation, man, sin, death, and redemption (Winsor, 2004). These are key areas that affect how one lives his life because it shapes what he believes about his purpose in life and his future. One's worldview is applied to how one lives his life (Winsor, 2004).

If a Christian school does not foster the practice of a biblical worldview, then it is Christian only in name (Winsor, 2004). Therefore:

> Since schooling is one of the most powerful shapers of both learning and acquiring world-view, it makes sense to attend to ways in which children actively shape their contexts and begin to model their worlds and the way in which we, in turn, shape the possibilities available for learners" (Lincoln, 1995, p. 89).

It is essential to understand the Christian worldview as it relates to life and learning so as to shape educational views that influence the character development of Christian students (Wilheim, 2005). Kingdom education instructs a child to think and act according to God's ways by developing a worldview that is God-centered (Schultz, 2002). God-centered education must be built on God's truth. If a school embraces the principle that all truth is God's truth, then not only the statements of this principle must be visible, but the supporting action as well (Gaebelein, 1968). As a result, the "comprehensive pattern of God's truth" must be applied to every aspect of Christian education (Gaebelein, 1968, p. 19). Therefore, kingdom education must be grounded in God's Word to foster a true biblical worldview.

A study by Meyers (2003) suggested that the length of time one is enrolled in a Christian school is not a significant contributing factor to the existence of a biblical worldview. However, "it is unrealistic to assume that Christian young people are immune to the emotional problems of

our time" (Gaebelein, 1968, p. 92). Other studies have revealed other factors, such as family and peer influence, that appear to have a larger impact on one's worldview and subsequent choices in life.

Factors Impacting Spiritual Formation

Research within the Christian society has been focused on the spiritual formation of school age children and young adults. Several factors have been found to play a role in the spiritual formation of youth today.

People are influenced by others, by their relationships with others, and by their environment. Haynie (2002) suggested that the network of friends with which one is associated directly affects an individual member's behavior. Social context is another factor that affects one's identity and how they perceive their life experiences (Bird, 2016). Erikson (1960) postulated that although the success of early developmental stages are dependent on completion of previous phases, success in later stages relies on other interaction with others that he perceives as models. Eckelbarger (2009) explored the role of mentors and found that mentors play a large part in the building of a spiritual foundation. The central message of a person's life can be seen by looking at how his words and actions align (Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a). This holds true for educators as well.

Christian schools must recognize that teachers make up part of the school's environment of influence. While acknowledging a teacher's influence on spiritual formation, a study by Scott and Magnuson (2005) also conjectured that a teacher's influence and "religious knowledge or education" may shape spiritual formation (p. 447). Gunnoe and Beversluis (2009) acknowledged that the two can work together as a teacher can provide opportunities for students to appreciate and be in awe of God's power. Religious knowledge should be consistently woven throughout a

Christian curriculum, and once completed, remains constant. But, a teacher can be more of a

challenge and inconsistent due to turnover and other factors such as worldview and their outward

actions. Zukowski et al. (1997) emphasized the significance of "loving adults who live their

Christian faith in a committed way" (p. 4). Therefore, Christian schools must take into account

the worldview of each educator being considered for a position. Gaebelein (1968) stressed the

necessity of educators to have God's Word at the center of their thoughts and actions in order to

have "a Christian frame of reference" (p. 45). According to research by Deckard, Henderson,

and Grant (2002), Fyock (2008), and Wood (2008), Christian school educators' worldviews will

impact, at some level, the worldview of their students. Research by Fyock (2008) found that

"teaching a course from a biblical Christian worldview by an experienced faculty member

increased biblical understanding on a number of worldview issues" (p. iii). Schultz (2002)

posited that "the most important factor in the development of a young person's worldview is the

influence of his teachers" (p. 51). Gaebelein (1968) further stressed this point in the following

statement:

> The fact is inescapable; the world view of the teacher, in so far as he is effective,
>
> gradually conditions the world view of the pupil. No man teaches out of a philosophical
>
> vacuum. In one way or another, every teacher expresses the convictions he lives by,
>
> whether they be spiritually positive or negative. (p. 37)

This most powerful form of influence is a teacher's personal conduct (Schultz, 2002). Pazmiño

(2008) noted the following:

> Truthfulness of the person of a teacher is at stake in terms of integrity. What is
>
> incarnated in a teacher's life is a witness. Modeling a wholeness and integrity is a life-

long challenge for Christian teachers in following Jesus into their classes and outside of

class as well (p. 175).

In other words, "Few things can be more damaging to students and faculty than a gap between

the professed principles and the actual practices of those who are in authority over them"

(Gaebelein, 1968, p. 91). It is critical that the life of a teacher exhibits and aligns with his or her

beliefs. Pazmiño (1994) referred to this importance as "how the Gospel is both lived in and lived

out by those called to teaching ministries" (p. 143). During the hiring process, it is imperative

that Christian schools attempt to glean information regarding the teacher's conversion and how

their outward life supports their faith. Pazmiño (1994) described this interaction between one's

inward and outward life as "Christian spirituality" and stated that for teachers it "implies a

discipleship centered upon Jesus Christ as Lord and a walk with Christ's Spirit, the Holy Spirit"

(p. 144). Additionally, a Christian teacher should be confident in whom lies their identity. By

establishing the truth of one's identity, a relationship with God can grow, a genuine love for God

can develop, and the right motives for practicing spiritual disciplines can be established (Smith,

1994). Having a solid foundation for one's identity will be evident and can be used in teaching

students these two important concepts. Pazmiño (2014) posited that "ignoring whose we are

subjects us to the narcissism of our age and ignoring who we are subjects us to collective

anonymity and conformity" (p. 422). The relationships created provide opportunities for

students to make connections that influence their faith development.

Powell (2010) found that authentic connections and previous spiritual commitments

during one's youth affect their faith development. Studies done by Shuster and Mongetta (2009)

and Stella (2003) suggested that nonacademic factors, including subcultures and environment,

influenced the spiritual formation of a young adult. These factors included connections made

and relationships built with teachers. Pazmiño (2008) remembered teachers in his life "who shared their lives along with their teaching" and notes that "those loving actions of teachers were associated with their vibrant and living Christian faith" (p. 180). Sink et al. (2007) suggested that, in addition to teachers, counselors played a key role in Christian schools' ability to effectively integrate spiritual and faith development into both the curriculum and the environment. However, LeBlanc and Slaughter (2012) discovered that families, churches, youth groups, and mission opportunities appeared to have a stronger impact on the spiritual formation of students than do schools. Churches today face many challenges. Beard (2015) noted that churches struggle with identity and stated that "the identity crisis of the church corporately has influenced the identity of the individual disciple in palpable ways (p. 179).

Despite the role of other factors on the spiritual formation of young adults, Christian education still has an influence. A study by Bryant (2008) suggested that students "appear to know core biblical doctrine, but fail to apply it consistently" (p. 101). Schools develop a unique culture that can set the example of a life integrated and directed by God's Word to influence students through mentors and relationships. According to Kim and Esquivel (2011), "building positive, lasting relationships with role models" is a benefit for adolescents (p. 762).

Peer relationships and interactions also play a role within school culture. Thus, "by socializing with like-minded peers, religious adolescents not only receive reinforcement of moral values and attitudes conducive to positive healthy behaviors, but they are also protected from peer pressure related to socially undesirable behaviors" (Kim & Esquivel, 2011, p. 762).

Schools not only need to set the example but ensure that God's Word is the basis for all subjects to train students to apply biblical doctrine consistently to all areas. Burton (2003) stated that "ideally, integrated learning leads to integration of faith in all aspects of a person's life and

character" (p. 102). Thus, by intentionally being proactive to integrate faith into all areas of life in a natural way, schools can support families as they raise another generation for Christ.

Summary

As adolescents today are developing into young adults, they face many challenges and decisions. How they handle these situations and life experiences relies heavily on their spiritual and moral condition (Barna, 2003). God has given parents the responsibility to raise their children (Genesis 6:4), and schools can be a support system. Christian education strives to educate the whole child by integrating faith values as the basis for all aspects of life (Burton, 2003).

Gaebelein (1968) posited that students in Christian schools are taught a great deal about the Bible, but learn "too little of the Word of God" (p. 16). Schools must be careful to ensure that students do not see learning about the Word of God as a monotonous chore. If they do, students will struggle to build a strong biblical worldview of which they take ownership. Foster (1988) added that "the life that is pleasing to God is not a series of religious duties" (p. 4). Practicing spiritual disciplines is not the end goal; they are but a means to purposely develop intimacy with Christ (Whitney, 2003), which should bring deep satisfaction and true joy.

Studies by The Nehemiah Institute described by Smithwick (2008) and Barna (2003) suggested that as adolescents reach young adulthood, they do not have a true biblical worldview but more of a humanistic one. The culture of today's society is one of instant gratification. Foster (1988) suggested that this desire for instant satisfaction poses a primary spiritual issue because spiritual formation must go deep within oneself, which requires time.

How have Christian schools utilized time with students to develop personal relationships with Christ, attitudes towards living a Christian life, and long-term spiritual formation of

students? How do graduates perceive the impact of their Christian school in these areas?

Biblical spiritual disciplines must be developed with the mindset that inner motivation and

attitudes behind the disciplines are key to developing and maintaining an ongoing personal

relationship with Christ. Students must be taught that disciplines are practices, not attitudes, but

right attitudes and outcomes such as demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit or positive character

qualities result from right practices (Whitney, 2003). In a conference presentation, Whitney

(2003) theorized that one must learn to desire to fully seek God with both one's head and heart

through the spiritual disciplines.

What can Christian schools do to help youth to develop a strong, biblical worldview?

ACSI has recognized the need to evaluate current students and schools to gain information on

how to improve their programs. But what about the Christian school's long-term impact on

graduates? What aspects of Christian schools create an atmosphere that prepares and enables

students to passionately and authentically pursue God throughout their lives? What can

Christian schools do to foster spiritual formation of students that endures and withstands the

influence of a society that is moving away from God? This aspect of Christian education has yet

to be a topic of focus in current research. This study aimed to help address this gap in the

literature.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This study examined the impact of select international Christian schools in South America on the spiritual formation of its graduates. This chapter discusses the methods utilized in this phenomenological qualitative design. The design, site, participants, personal biography of the researcher, and the data collection methods are described in detail.

Design

A phenomenological approach was utilized for this qualitative study. A qualitative design enables a researcher to investigate why something has happened within intricate issues that surround human beliefs and behaviors (Kelly, 2016). According to Moustakas (1994), qualitative research using a phenomenological approach searches "for meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and explanations" (p. 21). A phenomenological approach "is fluid, interactive, and multi-directional" (Ballard & Bawalan, 2012, slide 8). Neuman (2014) adds that qualitative research gleans more insights and is therefore better suited to "developing the deep understanding that is a qualitative researcher's goal" (p. 72). Exploring the area of spiritual formation of Christian school graduates might very well present ambiguous aspects both outside of and within the Christian school environment. Naturalistic evaluation facilitates the study of a situation in which unclear factors are likely to be present (Rubin, 1982). By utilizing this evaluation, an attempt can be made to understand the application of a school's attempts to address the area of spiritual formation of students within the context of their everyday lives and their perspective on the school's efforts.

As noted by Moustakas (1994), "In accordance with phenomenological principles, scientific investigation is valid when the knowledge sought is arrived at through descriptions that

make possible an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience" (p. 84). A phenomenological approach is a valid design because it explores the shared experiences of graduates from international Christian schools in South America to draw a common meaning of the impact that international Christian schools have on the spiritual formation of graduates.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do alumni perceive their attendance at an ACSI international school influences their ability to live a life after graduation that demonstrates spiritual formation?

RQ2: How do alumni perceive their attendance at an ACSI international school affects their personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

RQ3: Based upon their time at an ACSI international school, how do alumni describe the impact of spiritual formation on their attitude and actions towards living a life for Christ that is visible to others?

Setting

This study focused on international, accredited Christian schools within South America. International Christian evangelical schools located in South America and accredited by ACSI were used as the study sites. The setting of this study was three of the countries in South America in which some of these schools were located. Schools chosen were those that had directors or other administrators who had been associated with the school for at least eight years; this allowed the students who participated in the study and the school climate during the attendance of the participants to be familiar to the administrators. All three schools had been in existence more than 50 years, had bilingual educational programs, and were dually accredited by ACSI and AdvancED. They all had beautiful campuses that housed both elementary and secondary levels. There were plenty of spacious classrooms as well as recreational areas.

During the times of my visits, the teachers, school personnel, and students were very pleasant and positive about their school, which created a warm and inviting atmosphere.

The student body of each school was eclectic, with students primarily representing countries in North America, Latin America, and Asia. Although the PK-12 student body ranged from approximately 180 students to 500 students, their teacher-student ratios were similar, ranging between 10 and 17 students per teacher. A U.S.-based curriculum was followed in the schools, and the requirements of the host country's educational system were added for students who followed a dual program.

A total of three schools and nine graduates participated in this study. The schools (pseudonyms used) were American Christian School (ACS), International Christian School (ICS), and Christian Academy International (CAI). ACS was accredited at the same time with both ACSI and AdvancED, a secular, U.S. accrediting agency. ICS and CAI were first accredited with AdvancED and then obtained ACSI accreditation at a later date. The nine individual participants (pseudonyms used) were Anahi, Pedro, Marcelo, Juan, Rafael, Taddeo, Jose, Hernan, and Claudia.

Participants

Merriam (2009) stated that the number of participants in a study must be sufficient to adequately address the question of the study. A purposeful sample of participants was utilized for this study. Suri (2011) noted that purposeful sampling provides cases where one can glean rich information about the central issues of the inquiry. A minimum of six graduates (at least two per school) from three of the ACSI International schools in South America were set as the purposeful sample of participants of this phenomenological study. However, graduates who met the requirements and responded as being willing to participate were utilized. These subjects

were required to have graduated between the years 2007 and 2009. This age group provided

participants who were likely to have had completed a college degree and be settling into a

routine in the next stage of life with jobs and possibly starting families. Graduates lived

anywhere in the world, but had to be accessible via an online web conferencing software

program with recording capabilities.

The researcher requested that a current administrator of each school contact the graduates

within the specified years. Each graduate was invited to participate in this study in order to

minimize the effect of delimitations and to ensure saturation of the studied topic. Therefore, an

open-ended survey consisting of the three research questions guiding this research was also sent

to each contacted graduate. Those graduates who expressed willingness to be interviewed were

contacted by the researcher. A minimum of two graduates from each school were chosen to

create a small number of individuals who have experienced this phenomenon so as to best

describe the meaning of their common experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Procedures

Once IRB approval (see Appendix A), and ACSI approval (see Appendix B) were

obtained, I contacted the director of each of the three selected schools to obtain permission to

utilize their school and their graduates for this study (see Appendix C). Each director was asked

to assist by contacting available graduates as potential candidates for participation in this study.

The directors were sent an invitation letter and link to a survey to send to the graduates. The

consent form (see Appendix D) for the graduates and the three guiding questions for the study

were included in the initial contact through the survey. I contacted each graduate willing to be

interviewed to send them the journal questions (see Appendix E) and set up a day and time for

the interview.

This study utilized individual interviews and journals to collect data that aided the researcher in understanding the impact that Christian schools have on the spiritual formation of its graduates. According to Moustakas (1994), long interviews are the most common method to collect data for a phenomenological method. Merriam (2009) stated that interviews are necessary when the focus is on past events or situations impossible to duplicate, or when one is unable to "observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). I recorded and transcribed the interviews, and participants checked for accuracy.

The Researcher's Role

My name is Mrs. Dawn Monzon. Currently, I am teaching in a public school for the first time. I just completed four years of teaching junior high and high school Spanish in a Christian school in Texas. I also recently ended a three-year position as the Director of Accreditation Services for ACSI Latin America.

I was raised in a military family and moved a lot, including overseas. My father accepted the Lord when I was in first grade, and my mother rededicated her life to the Lord soon after. From that point on, we began attending church regularly. While overseas, we attended a church retreat. Missionaries with Child Evangelism Fellowship conducted the meetings for children. At the end of one of those meetings, I stayed behind to talk with them about the question of my personal salvation and prayed to receive Christ as my Lord and Savior. When we moved back to the States, I was entering sixth grade. My parents enrolled my brothers and me in a Christian school. Despite being bullied and ostracized from second grade through ninth grade, I did well in school and liked my teachers. My parents and teachers supported me through those years as they prayed and spent time with me. I remember those teachers who passionately lived their love for God and influenced my Christian growth. Those experiences made me sensitive to

students who socially struggle in school and made me realize the important role that I play both as a parent and as a teacher.

Upon graduating from a Christian school, I went to a Christian university to study education. Three weeks after graduation, I went to teach in a Christian school in South America. It was not until I was on my own that I felt true ownership of my convictions and confident of my identity. I did not experience a period of rebellion nor a time of walking away from the Lord, but I was faced with answering the question of whether or not the way I acted and what I claimed to believe was a true portrayal of me or of my parents and upbringing. This became more evident to me as I began to teach my students and live my beliefs on a daily basis.

Since sixth grade, I have been involved in Christian education within the United States and in South America as a student, teacher, and administrator. I spent nine years in Christian education in South America as an educator and six years as an administrator. Additionally, I have been heavily involved with ACSI as a member of the Latin America Commission, as the Director for accreditation services for Latin America, as a member of accreditation teams for international Christian schools, as a chair for accreditation teams in national Christian schools in Latin America, as a presenter at an international conference, and as a professor for ACSI intensive teacher certification courses.

Throughout these years, I have seen students who have been enthusiastically involved in the spiritual aspect of the school. I have also seen uncommitted students who appear to only be fulfilling requirements. I have observed graduates, regardless of what type of student they were in high school, live their lives for the Lord as well as graduates who have not. I have also observed teachers influence a school's spiritual environment and culture, both positively and negatively. Due specifically to my experiences as an administrator, the burden of my heart was

to figure out why and what we as Christian educators and schools can do to encourage a genuine relationship with Christ that will have a long-lasting impact.

I had to be very careful to bracket my beliefs and passion for the importance of the spiritual formation of students in Christian schools as well as my emotional responses to those graduates who were not walking with the Lord. When reading initial responses from the guiding questions, I recognized a potential role conflict as I began to feel annoyed at some of the responses and found myself at ease with other responses (Ahern, 1999). As a result, in order to maintain neutrality and bracket my emotional responses, I wrote a statement to begin my interview with one participant in particular (Appendix F). Additionally, I involved a third party to read through my coded interviews and give feedback. The feedback was given through the first five interviews. I also met twice in person with two other peers and gave an overview of my study, shared the results, and discussed emerging themes. Evidence and rationale was also provided. The peers asked questions and gave feedback (Ahern, 1999; Creswell, 2013).

Due to my involvement with ACSI Christian schools in South America, I did know a few of the participants, but I had not had much contact with them for several years. According to Rubin (1982), my role was to understand meaning, not "to predict or control" (p. 60). I best accomplished this by adhering to the planned questions and reminding myself that I wanted to hear the insights of the graduates in order to get a clear and realistic picture and insight to the heart of the issue.

Data Collection

Document Analysis

Prior to any interviews, I collected documents from each participating school. These documents provided information regarding the school's mission, vision, purpose, and expected

learning outcomes for graduates. Schools also provided any other information available that pertained to the spiritual aspect of the school. According to Rubin (1982), reviewing documents to obtain descriptive data provides a broad database of potential issues to be investigated throughout the research process.

Interviews

The principal of each school was interviewed to obtain background information on the school's environment, as well as any follow-up information or clarification needed after interviews with graduates. The graduates were interviewed once individually. This allowed the opportunity to investigate personal experience and issues (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The questions for each interview were created to explore the students' experiences from their time in school and their current life experiences. Giorgi (2009) stated that the goal for phenomenological interviews "is as complete a description as possible of the experience that a participant has lived through" (p. 122). These interviews were then transcribed by the researcher and sent to the participant for review (see Appendix H).

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. In what year did you graduate, and at what grade did you enter the school?

2. What 'spiritual activities' did your school have?

3. Were you involved in those activities? If so, how? If not, why?

4. What actions did your school take to encourage a personal relationship with the Lord?

5. What aspect of your school best prepared you to maintain a close, personal relationship with the Lord? The least?

6. What event during your time as a student at that school influenced you the most/least with regard to your spiritual formation?

7. Where are you currently living?

8. What is your current job?

9. What are the main interests and/or activities with which you are involved?

10. Describe your current personal relationship with the Lord.

11. Do you regularly have personal devotions and prayer time?

12. Do you attend church? How often? If you don't attend church, why not?

13. Are you actively involved in any way with your church? If so, in what ways and how often? If not, why?

14. Describe your purpose in life.

15. What do you believe are the main responsibilities of a Christian?

16. How do you believe your attendance at the ACSI school you attended helped or hindered you to prepare for the activities in which you are currently involved?

The purpose of questions one through six was to gather information about the participants' spiritual experiences and regarded the participants' perceptions of their life during high school. Question one was to verify that the participants graduated within the years stipulated for this study and to find out the number of years they had attended their respective schools. Question two was to ascertain the spiritual activities that the participants remembered and compare their memories with the others. Question three was to discover the extent that the participants were involved in these activities and to gain knowledge as to their reasons for their choices. Questions four through six were to know the participants' perceptions of their school's actions to influence their spiritual formation. Questions eight through 10 were asked to gain current background information of the participant's current life. The purpose of the last four questions was to ascertain the level of spiritual commitment to spiritual formation. Question 11

was to understand the interviewee's perception of his or her personal relationship with the Lord. Questions 12 through 14 were asked to identify current outward spiritual activities and the depth of those practices.

Journals

Collecting documents from participants during a qualitative study is yet another method one can utilize to gain insight into the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2013). These journals enabled me to uncover possible significant issues that could be addressed in the interviews (Rubin, 1982). General questions were sent to the participants to guide their journal entries. These questions addressed reactions, attitudes, and actions in response to their day. Additionally, each graduate participant was sent a second set of questions and asked to choose six of the seven questions to answer. These questions were open-ended, less structured, and allowed an opportunity for graduates to reflect on events in their past (see Appendix G). All but one of the final nine participants completed at least half of the journal, with six participants completing the entire journal.

Standardized Open-Ended Journal Prompts and Questions (Appendix E)

First Set

1. Share something positive that happened today and how you responded.

2. What does a typical day look like for you?

3. Share a challenge you have faced this week and your attitude toward the challenge.

4. Share how your actions today affected someone around you.

5. Share what a typical weekend looks like for you.

Second Set

1. Share a favorite memory from high school.

2. Share a least favorite memory from high school.

3. Talk about some of the memories that come to mind when you remember high school.

4. Share some of the highlights in your life since high school.

5. Share some of the challenges in your life since high school.

6. Share your thoughts on the role God plays, if any, in your life today.

7. Discuss the type of impact attending a Christian school has had on your life.

Data Analysis

Horizontalization of the Data

Data collected from interviews and journals were considered on the same level with all significant statements listed that expressed how participants experienced the phenomena or that provided an understanding of the experience (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) identified this process as horizontalization. These statements were then grouped into larger units of information or themes through the utilization of a spreadsheet. I read these significant statements several times and color-coded them according to common emerging themes (see Appendix I). This process allowed me to evaluate the experiences of each participant while looking for common themes among the participants, and created a textural description of what the participants experienced.

Constant Comparison Method of Data in an Analysis Spiral

Data collected were consistently reviewed to clarify emerging themes. The data were organized, read several times, coded according to themes, clarified in interviews, and reviewed again. According to Creswell (2013), coding involves accumulating all of the data and separating them into "small categories of information" and then "assigning a label to the code"

(p. 184). This process allowed me to evaluate and clarify possible emerging themes while getting a clearer picture of the common experiences of the participants.

Personal Experiences with the Phenomenon

Due to my extensive experience with similar phenomena, my personal experiences must be fully explained. This was to aid in bracketing my experiences as much as possible so that I could focus on the experiences of the participants in the study. The experiential explanation allowed for increased objectivity.

<p align="center">**Trustworthiness**</p>

Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is one of the most important aspects to support trustworthiness in qualitative research. An aspect of credibility that yielded trustworthiness was in the "development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations" (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). I had spent time at each of the participating schools in this study and was familiar with the culture of each school through key professional interaction before initial data collection. The evidence of the same information shared by various sources also provided credibility within the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, transparent data analysis ensured credibility (Kelly, 2016).

Purposeful sampling. A purposeful sampling was implemented for this study. According to Creswell (2013), this concept is beneficial as the researcher selects the site and participants that will best inform an understanding of the phenomenon guiding the study.

Member checks. Participants reviewed transcribed interviews, analyses, conclusions, and themes to determine the accuracy of each account (see Appendix J). Involving participants in this way was a vital aspect of credibility because it harkened to the core of the issue by

allowing the participants to judge the accuracy of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013; Guba, 1981). However, only two of the graduates responded despite several attempts to request a response via email.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is related to the consistency of the findings that could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Often, dependability is associated with reliability (Shenton, 2004). However, reliability means that similar results would be obtained if the study were repeated utilizing the same methods and participants (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that credibility could ensure dependability. However, a thorough description of the design, data gathering, and implementation would provide the ability of a future researcher to repeat the study, "if not necessarily to gain the same results" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71).

I sought confirmability in the findings of the study in order to ensure a neutrality and a non-bias position (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Shenton (2004), a researcher needs to pursue the participant's input over that of the researcher's. Triangulation can promote such confirmability.

Triangulation of data. Several sources were utilized to glean information. Triangulation occurred through using multiple sources of data and methods such as interviews and documents (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The emerging themes were supported in the different sources of data. Creswell (2013) referred to this as triangulation of data as the evidence corroborated from various sources provided validity.

External audit. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) recommended the utilization of an external audit to evaluate the data's accuracy which supports the "findings, interpretations, and

conclusions" of the study (External Audits, Definition). I engaged outside sources to evaluate the validity of the results in reference to the data.

Transferability

The transferability of a study relies on detailed descriptions that enable one to evaluate the findings and select aspects that apply to the context (Kelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004). In the long run, one must understand the results of the study within the context of the organization and geographical area (Shenton, 2004). Kelly (2016) also noted that a complete description of a researcher's background in this area also lends itself to the ability of one to assess the findings and determine transferability.

Rich, thick description. This technique involves the researcher providing detailed information about the setting and the participants. Description is important because it enables readers to determine transferability of the study to their site and situation (Creswell, 2013).

Negative case analysis. I was required to reformulate themes as the inquiry advanced. The importance of this analysis lay in the fact that with this type of study, not all statements fit a pattern or code. By including these statements, I provided a realistic assessment of the phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

Negative results could impact schools and graduate participants. Therefore, I use pseudonyms for all participants and identifiable names. All files were safeguarded in a locked file in my home. Electronic data were kept on my personal computer, which is password protected. With the high probability that I would know some of the participants, extra care was taken to ensure that responses were not influenced. This was done through carefully scripted

interview questions from which I did not deviate. This also aided me in bracketing personal experiences and emotional responses.

Summary

This chapter described the methods that were utilized in this phenomenological qualitative design. The design, site, subjects, personal biography of the researcher, and the data collection methods were explained in detail. This chapter also explained the approach for data analysis. This chapter ended with how trustworthiness was established and supported through a variety of reliable approaches.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

ACSI schools have purpose statements that include a reference to influencing students on a spiritual level. The desire is that the influence continue throughout one's life. However, little research has been done to evaluate whether there is a long-term impact on the spiritual formation of graduates from ACSI schools. Therefore, this study was created utilizing three core questions that guided the study within the framework of a qualitative phenomenological approach.

Qualitative research focuses on depth instead of breadth as the goal is to develop a deep understanding of an experienced phenomenon within a genuine, individualized setting that cannot be measured. Because the researcher does not attempt to predict results, the role of the participant is key to enable the researcher to develop an understanding of the phenomenon from the participant's understanding of their own experiences (Neuman, 2014). However, with regards to the organization, Milacci (2003) noted that "decisions regarding the construction of the phenomenological text fall solely upon the shoulders of the researcher" (p. 71).

This chapter focuses on the results and is organized around the themes and discussed in the order of the three questions:

1. How do alumni perceive their attendance at an ACSI international school influences their ability to live a life after graduation that demonstrates spiritual formation?

2. How do alumni perceive their attendance at an ACSI international school affects their personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

3. Based upon their time at an ACSI international school, how do alumni describe the impact of spiritual formation on their attitudes and actions toward living a life for Christ that is visible to others?

The remainder of this chapter explores the answers to these questions. The exploration includes brief backgrounds of the participants (pseudonyms used) and is then centered on the major themes that presented themselves in the data collected.

Participants

Directors

The directors of three ACSI international schools agreed to be interviewed and to contact their graduates for possible participation in this study. Two of the schools involved in this study described themselves as having a fairly good spiritual atmosphere during those years, while one described them as "years of big transition." Regardless, all three schools took steps during the time frame studied to address the spiritual formation of their students in similar ways such as small groups, chapel, outreach programs, Bible classes, biblical integration into other subjects, and other intentional training activities on spiritual leadership. Pseudonyms are utilized with all participants.

Mr. Silas, director of the International Christian School (ICS), noted a change in perspective of how the school approached the topic of spiritual formation between 2007 and 2009. He shared:

> We were forced to do what every school really needs to do, and that is to not look so much at what we do or how we do it but what we are accomplishing, and then make the modifications or changes to adjust programming and even give up things we've been doing for decades if we are not accomplishing what we say we are accomplishing. So that was a real time shift for us as a school—from just assuming that the right people are doing the right things . . . to actually looking at the results and determining whether we are doing the right things.

Since 2009, all three schools have made adjustments and/or additions in more than one of these areas to help strengthen the area of spiritual formation. Each school acknowledged utilizing surveys and feedback from its stakeholders to aid in evaluating the spiritual quality of their school. One of the schools also keeps a file on each student through their years at the school to track their spiritual formation. This record-keeping is helpful because this school, due to being an international school, tends to see fairly high teacher turnover. One school has recently become much more intentional in evaluating how well they are accomplishing their goal of spiritual formation. Additionally, the school now requires the director to report progress on spiritual formation on an annual basis to the School Board. Mr. Lansing of the Christian Academy School (CAS) made an interesting comment during his interview regarding the topic of evaluating spiritual formation. He made note that:

> It's one of those areas that of course we as Christian schools, it's what we say is most important, but it's an area that sometimes can be challenging to evaluate. It's an area that we sometimes even are hesitant to evaluate because then there's a component of being judgmental toward it. I say that because even when you're looking at some of the organizations that drive us educationally, they don't necessarily give us any tools to evaluate our kids and their spirituality and where their level of life is spiritually. And so it's a much-needed area, but it is something I think that a lot of times the Christian education community treads very lightly as they discuss it. (The researcher edited this quote by removing filler words and repeated words for easier reading and understanding of context).

Despite having some contact through social media or when graduates visit, none of the schools directly contact their graduates to assess their long-term spiritual condition. As one

director explained, "Most of our contact with alumni is about serving them. We've not yet asked them to give us much." However, most recognize the need to evaluate in this area and plan to move in that direction in the near future.

Snapshot

A total of 26 graduates responded to the initial invitation to participate in this study with 18 of them answering all three of the guiding research questions and one only answering the first question. Of the 18 graduates who answered all of the guiding questions, 13 gave their consent to continue in the study, but seven of those 13 agreed only to complete the journal and did not wish to be interviewed. Three follow-up emails, which included the journal questions, were sent to these seven, but only one responded. The journal of the one who responded was included in the study and, subsequently, it was assumed the others did not wish to participate any further in the study and were removed. A total of six graduates remained who agreed to be interviewed. However, this number did not meet the minimum requirement of at least two from each school.

As a result, the director of the one school that lacked sufficient participation was contacted. The director sent out another email to the graduates encouraging their participation. Five responded positively, but three never responded to emails requesting to set up an interview. Two responded, were interviewed, and were included in the study. This gave a total of eight participants who were interviewed and one who only participated through the journal. However, only five of the eight graduates completed their journals. Even after emails requesting that they be completed, only two of the participants interviewed partially completed their journals, and one never submitted the journal. Regardless, information collected from all interviews and journals was included in this study. Saturation was reached with nine participants as the themes

could be fully developed, no new data or themes were discovered, and the themes that emerged were evidenced throughout the other collected data (Ahern, 1999; Creswell, 2013).

The eight graduates who participated in the interview created an almost equal representation of the three schools involved with this study, as two of the schools had three participating graduates and the third had the minimum of two graduates. The participant who was involved only through a journal was a fourth participant for one school. Regardless, some background information was provided by the participant in the initial responses to the guiding questions. It is interesting to note that four of the participants were students at their Christian school since either pre-kindergarten or kindergarten: three entered their schools in the middle of their elementary years, one began their experience in the Christian school in junior high, and one attended for their last three years of high school. However, the number of years they were associated with the school did not appear to influence their experience of spiritual formation.

Although family background was not an aspect of research in this study, two participants shared that their family was involved in some way in the ministry and four others shared that their families are involved in the business world. However, these backgrounds did not appear to distinguish differences among the participants and their responses.

Currently, six of the nine participants live in the United States, and three live internationally. Four of the interviewees waited at least one year before starting college and are completing their studies within this year, and the other four have completed their university studies and already have a job or are looking for one. The one participant who contributed through the journal has a full-time job in the United States.

Table 1

General Description of Participants

Participant	Interviewed	Gender	Years at Christian school	Currently living	Current situation
Anahi	Yes	F	13	international	Seeking employment
Pedro	Yes	M	12.5	U.S.	Seeking employment
Marcelo	Yes	M	3	international	In school
Juan	Yes	M	8	U.S.	Employed
Rafael	Yes	M	10	U.S.	In school
Taddeo	Yes	M	14	international	Employed
Jose	Yes	M	6	U.S.	In school
Hernan	Yes	M	13	U.S.	In School
Claudia	No	F	Unknown	U.S.	Employed

Anahi

Anahi was a student at her Christian school for all her school years. She shared that she came from a Christian family, and as a result, had a difficult time distinguishing which entity influenced her as they were so intertwined. Upon graduation, Anahi left the country to go study, and obtained her bachelor's and master's degrees. During the first few years after graduation, she went through a period of rebellion. At the time of her interview, she was in the process of restoring a growing relationship with God, settling in to a new country, and looking for a job.

Pedro

Pedro spent all but six months of his school years in the same Christian school from which he graduated. The other six months were spent in another Christian school. After graduating, Pedro left the country to study abroad. He has graduated from college, but has been unable to find a job. He was very disheartened and was looking for an apprenticeship.

Marcelo

Marcelo attended his Christian high school from his sophomore year through graduation. He remained in South America and has been working full time for a Christian company while attending college. He was on the verge of completing his degree at the time of his interview.

Juan

Juan was a student for a total of eight years at his Christian school. After graduating, he attended and graduated from a university in the States. At the time of this study, he was enjoying a job with a missionary organization in the States.

Rafael

Rafael attended his Christian school for ten years. Upon completion, he remained in the country and worked for year with his father. He was finishing his last semester of college at the time of his interview.

Taddeo

Taddeo was a student at his Christian school for 14 years. He went to the States to attend college, graduated with his degree, and returned to South America. He was currently teaching at an international Christian school.

Jose

Jose spent six years at his Christian school. He went into a branch of the U.S. military after graduating, and so did not directly start college. At the time of his interview, he was in the military reserves and attending college.

Hernan

Hernan attended his Christian school from the time he was in kindergarten. He waited four years before starting college. He was a college student at the time of his interview.

Claudia

Claudia did not state how many years she attended her Christian school, but did state she attended for most of her elementary and all her high school years. She attended and graduated from a college in the United States. She has traveled and lived in many countries. In her journal, she stated that she was currently a journalist.

Results

Overview

The task of phenomenological research is to endeavor to look at data in order to find the meanings of the experiences and discern overlaying themes (Moustakas, 1994). This data analysis was my attempt to find meanings and themes based on the participants' experiences while bracketing personal opinions.

Data Analysis and Organization

Initially, a total of six general topics were identified from the interviews, journals, and guiding questions: personal relationship, perception of the school, actions by the school, attitude, actions by the student, and outside influences. As these topics were coded, several others surfaced: influence/impact, option/choice, real world/bubble/shock, reinforcement, purpose, and ownership. Topics of perspective, personal/heart issues, and judgment were not a common thread among all of the interviewees, but still appeared to have significance and were therefore coded.

As these six initial topics were analyzed, they were compiled to form four major themes that comprise the results of this study describing the spiritual formation of the graduates: (a) perceived disconnect between school and life, (b) student ownership and spiritual identity, (c) teacher influences, and (d) application of learning.

Table 2

Major Themes and Categorical Aggregations

Major Themes	Categorical aggregations
Perceived disconnect between school and life	Perception of school, school actions, real world/bubble/shock, perspective, judgmental
Student ownership and spiritual identity	Personal relationship, option/choice, personal/heart issue, purpose
Teacher influences	Outside influences, influence/impact
Application of learning	Student attitudes and actions

These themes correlate with the guiding questions of this study. Theme one correlates with the first research question of how alumni perceive their attendance at their school influences their ability to live a life after graduation that demonstrates spiritual formation. Theme two can be tied to the second research question of how alumni's perception of their attendance at their school affects their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The third research question of how alumni describe the impact of spiritual formation on their attitudes and actions toward living a life visibly for Christ can be observed in the last two themes of teacher influences and application of learning. But, in reality, each theme has facets that can be connected to each question. The rest of this chapter will focus on these four main themes and how they support the research. The researcher edited quotes included from the participants by removing filler words and repeated words for easier reading and understanding of context.

Theme One: The Perception of a Disconnect Between Life in a Christian School and Life after Graduation

Throughout the data collection, graduates made reference to a difference between high school and life after graduation that required an adjustment in some form. These differences

were grouped into three categories: the view of high school as a bubble, the belief that everyone

in a Christian school is the same, and the perception of what Christian schools are like and how

they prepared them for life. Yet, the perceptions of participants' shared experiences of these

differences varied in several ways in that what some participants viewed as negative, others

viewed as positive. Additionally, it was noted that within some of these categories, the views

expressed were not always evidenced in all three schools.

High School as a Bubble

Five of the nine participants (Marcelo, Rafael, Anahi, Pedro, and Hernan) viewed their

transition as one that required a great deal of adjustment. Marcelo experienced "a major

setback" after graduation when he encountered "how different people are outside of Christian

communities. It's appalling to see how people treat each other, the language they use, or even

that people are open about having malicious intent against one another." Rafael stated:

> It was kinda like a big shock to a certain extent, and I could definitely see it in the more
>
> conservative, we could say hardcore Christians. That they were having a whole lot
>
> harder time adapting to that. It was more all happy-go-lucky I feel like.

Both Pedro and Anahi expressed their experiences as living in a Christian bubble when it

came to friends, teachers, and points of view. Anahi "just wanted to live outside of the Christian

bubble" and wanted "some freedom." She stated:

> My whole life was basically the school. I didn't have friends outside of it. . . . I didn't
>
> know what life was outside of that. I really wanted to get out and start thinking for
>
> myself and not just doing things because well this is how it should be, or I should do as
>
> I'm told. I did do everything as I was told until I graduated, but I, I wasn't satisfied with
>
> it. And I think I also wanted some freedom.

Pedro felt he was not "really exposed to other point of views . . . so it was too much of a bubble. . . . It was kind of a shock when you come out in the real world and you have to talk to nonbelievers." He also associated the bubble with how he was taught when he shared that "Every day, every teacher was a Christian. I know you really want everybody to be a Christian, but if that's the bubble, then you don't know what to do when you get out in the real world." Hernan perceived that after being within a "conservative world" where it tended to "bias my perception towards one worldview . . . a more narrow world view," he entered a "different set of circumstances" after graduation and found it "very difficult to adapt those teachings."

Everyone in a Christian School is the Same

A second difference perceived between high school and life after graduation was the perception that attending a Christian school makes you a Christian, and that all Christians have the same beliefs. The responses of six of the participants (Rafael, Jose, Pedro, Anahi, Juan, and Marcelo) made references to how they identified themselves spiritually during high school, how they viewed others associated with the school, and challenges faced when they left high school.

Rafael referenced this perception that everyone in a Christian school shares the same beliefs when he described "going out into the real world where there's all kinds of different people with all kind of different beliefs." Jose noted the perspective from which they were taught as he pointed out in his interview that he was "obviously not exposed to a non-religious background".

Pedro stated, "My years at CAS made me Christian to begin with. I think people are just kind of automatically raised into it, and they believe it anyway." He attributed his being a Christian to his environment as he shared, "I guess it was . . . that everyone around me was Christian so that's probably what kept me Christian for so long and, you know, made it sink in so

deeply or something." When responding to an initial question, Pedro noted that according to his observations, it would "appear most alumni eventually shed religious beliefs" as he did, and recognized that he did not "see anything that CAS could have done to have kept me as a Christian later."

Jose also acknowledged the school's support by "trying to get you into discipleship studies." He participated in spiritual activities while professing to be a Christian during his years at ICS, but no longer claims to be a Christian. For Anahi, "it was just a given that I should have a relationship with the Lord. It was what was normal for me; everyone in school had one. I wasn't really allowed to have non-Christian friends." Juan alluded to this perception when he noted a change among the students during their years in high school when he shared: "I really miss back to the days with Teacher A that when we were all more like living . . . for the Lord before we started growing up and doing some other things." Marcelo expressed his perception in the following way:

> Anytime you have a big group of people, there's always going to be people who agree
>
> and disagree with the main with the general . . . sentiment or mindset. There were always
>
> people who were causing trouble, or I wouldn't say they were bad Christians or that they
>
> were not Christian, but people who just . . . liked discord and would get a little obnoxious
>
> at times . . . just to see how people could take something good, like even chapel and . . .
>
> derive bad things out of it like fun of things like prayer or worship.

Views of Expectation and Preparation

A third perceived difference between high school and life after graduation was in the memory of what high school was like and how that time was preparation for experiences in years after graduation. Some saw the differences as a normal process of growing up and becoming

one's own person, while others viewed some aspects of high school as causing challenges in various areas. Even though Juan saw some of his Bible classes as being "more like filling in a workbook" that "seemed more like busy work rather than . . . discussing. . . . the Bible," he believed that his time at ACS and at a Christian college gave him a Christian basis for his beliefs and helped him understand "why I believe the way exactly I do believe." Juan observed for himself and several of his peers, that college was a "crossroad" as they "had an opportunity to start over start fresh." They "were ready to make some different decisions apart from the way they were raised to solidify what they believed." Even though Jose does not profess to be a Christian, he still believes that during his time in high school he was "exposed to Christianity and was properly versed in the Bible, Christian doctrine and teaching" and due to influences and studying about other religions, he believes it "prepared [him] . . . to be a world citizen, adapt to different situations and respect others." Jose also describes his high school as having "enforced a set of morals I have now." Hernan highlighted the challenge of feeling a need to adapt what he was taught:

> I think that by having to set a Christian and deeper faith curriculum often times that can bias my perception towards one worldview to a more narrow worldview. I already graduated and I had to enter the labor world and then the academic world outside of the Christian organization, a Christian institution. It was very difficult to adapt those teachings.

Rafael, Anahi, and Hernan recollected their schools as having set expectations for behavior and responding in a judgmental way that lacked love. Rafael recalled the school as having strict ways of how they were to live, even outside of school, as he remembered that "if you don't act the way that we think you should act . . . there's a punishment for that instead of all

right let's see then why you're acting this way. . . . There wasn't any like love so much that they spoke about." He also focused on the negative punishment he observed and perceived the school as being "Bible pounders" where they promoted "a life abiding to the student handbook that met faculty and staff behavioral expectations." Anahi also discussed her memory of her school as having "more judgment than love" and discussed how she viewed it as having an attitude of "closed-mindedness." She believed that she was "lacking the ability to stand firm" in her faith and struggled the first few years after high school. Regardless of this experience, she believed that her school gave her a purpose and good foundations for life. Hernan felt "that there was this need for ICA to make itself look as a Christian school" and so rules would be implemented that were "on the legalistic side" and were a "force that came for just law rather than . . . the will of the people there." Although Hernan also perceived his school as being judgmental, "which is common in Christian communities," and having "strict and inflexible rules" with "rigid ideas," he credited the school with providing him precepts that he carefully considers, but within a different set of circumstances than those in which he finds himself today.

All the schools attended by the participants have a curriculum where the Bible and a Christian worldview are integrated, have Bible as a required class, and offer an optional discipleship program either during or after school. Nevertheless, many did not go beyond mentioning these aspects or giving a brief description of them. When discussing how their school prepared them for life, Taddeo, Juan, Jose, Claudia, Pedro, and Hernan mentioned aspects of their Bible classes as an influence on their preparation. Taddeo shared that he "cannot deny the amount of biblical content that [he] learned" and that:

> What helped me the most was being able to talk through and think through some of the
> doubts I had in Bible class and other classes and being able to appropriately have my

Christian life be my own and not just my parents. That was . . . I think . . . a very helpful

thing . . . that was accomplished through talking through things in Bible class specifically

about apologetics.

Juan found that the Bible class that prepared him the most was the one taught by a teacher who

"was very real with us about struggles she faced . . . being a Christian in a secular environment,"

while other Bible classes were "memorizing Bible verses, a little more kind of academic, not as

interesting and not as actually impacting as class with her was." Jose found his school to be

supportive of spiritual formation and mentioned discipleship study groups and an apologetics

class. He described the class as "very informative" and remembers it as being a class of

"different religions and . . . what other religions say, and also what Christians say about their

faith as well." As a senior, he found himself wondering what he believed "and everything like

that and just wanted to explore different options in a way." He believed apologetics was a

critical class for him, as it "made [him] want to learn some more about religion and other

religions as well." He also recalled a specific Bible class and shared:

> I remember one Bible class I took. The teacher had us write about what our religious
>
> beliefs were. I thought I could write about what the Bible taught me and what other have
>
> taught me throughout my life. However, I thought to myself, was all that teaching really
>
> something I believed? So I decided to write about other ideas I had about religion that
>
> were not as standard to Christian belief.

According to Claudia, "It is unfortunate that the curriculum at ICS does not focus on

hermeneutics and critical analysis of the biblical narrative." She went on to say that "there was

not the space to ask questions and discuss issues with open dialogue narrative." Claudia also

remembered that she "never received any instruction regarding the exegesis of scripture and

hermeneutics. We were solely taught a sort of fundamentalist biblical narrative that aimed to steer us away from conversations around science." She further stated that, "unfortunately, ICS never provided an open understanding of all biblical perspectives"; instead, it "allowed me to understand the closed-minded fundamental ways some Christians have." She attributed her opportunity "to learn about evolution, and the creation story in a totally different way" after she graduated and attended a Christian university in the United States.

Both Pedro and Hernan alluded to Claudia's observations and utilized the word *explore* when they discussed their memories of class experiences. Pedro expressed like he learned a lot about the Bible, but appeared frustrated when he shared, "I feel like everybody kind of starts at . . . accepting the Bible already. I think people are just kind of automatically raised into it, and they believe it anyway." As a result, he "wasn't really exposed to other points of views" and remembered that he "didn't explore like apologetics, and no one showed any kind of fruit or evidence of why Christianity is true as opposed to other religions." Hernan remembered experiencing "some restrictions about talking about certain things . . . in more open ways just to not offend . . . people who . . . had more conservative views." He believed his thirteen years at a school with a "very distinct worldview . . . didn't allow me to think . . . which to me is super important being able to have . . . the ability to just explore anything what is now incredibly important . . . and I was afraid of learning about . . . or exploring certain things." Yet, Hernan stated that once he "was able to get past that fear of investigating certain things that were maybe sensitive to the Christian faith, I always had that anchor that guided me in that exploration."

The related experiences of the participants appear to show that there is a disconnect perceived between high school and life after graduation in four general subthemes: high school is a bubble, everyone in a Christian school is a Christian, Christian schools do not consistently fully

prepare students to live in the world and yet not be of the world, and Christian schools do not fully prepare graduates that can capably defend their faith. Several perceptions from this theme were related to personal views of spiritual identity and are therefore closely connected to the second major theme apparent in the data.

Theme Two: Student Ownership and Spiritual Identity

The second major theme became apparent as the participants made reference to their personal view of God and Christianity. The questions utilized in this study were aimed at understanding the high school experiences and current lives of the participants with regard to their personal relationships with Christ without directly asking for their testimony. Participants were asked how their high school experiences encouraged a personal relationship with God and to describe their current personal relationship with God and the role that He plays in their lives today.

There did not appear to be a difference between the participants and their spiritual identity when grouped according to what school they attended. All three schools required students to obtain a certain number of outreach or service hours. These hours could be community service projects, which may or may not be spiritual in nature. Likewise, each school also had at least one informal or formal discipleship group that were optional for students. The involvement in any of these activities, regardless if they were optional or required, did not appear to be a major influence in the current spiritual identity of the participants.

Throughout the data collection, almost all of the participants appeared to be very open, direct, and passionate about this aspect of their lives. Regardless of how they perceived their high school experiences and their relationship with God, the participants indicated in one way or another that spiritual identity was ultimately their choice.

Present Sure Personal Relationship with Christ Acknowledged

      Taddeo. Taddeo was the most emotionally engaged as he discussed his personal relationship with God and offered to share specifics about the event in his life that most affected his spiritual formation. Taddeo described himself as having grown up being a good student and an ethically good person, as he usually did "what was expected of me from my parents, from the school, [and] teachers." Even though many spiritual activities of the school were required, Taddeo noted that he "participated fully" in the school's weekly and yearly spiritual activities. The school also had an optional gathering one night a week that was similar to a youth group in which Taddeo participated for most of his high school years.

      Taddeo recalled that while at a school event, the importance of being a fully committed disciple and completely following the Lord was explained. Taddeo stated, "I saw the need of Christ not only being my Savior but the absolute Lord of everything in my life" and described that moment as "taking on . . . faith as my own, to have faith you would have to grow in." According to Taddeo:

> Through that kind of crucial moment in my life I had to decide . . . truly giving all of my life, to commit all of my service to Him. So that was a big shift, I mean probably one of the biggest shifts in my life because it affected me more than I probably could imagine. But from there, I sought out ways in which I could grow my skills or grow into my training for service to the Lord, which led me to change my career plans and my college plans and that has continued till now which I seek to serve him with all I have. So that would be the biggest event that probably transformed the direction of where my life was going.

When it came to this level of impact on his life, Taddeo believed that the transformation was a personal decision as he observed that "although the information was there and was available to all my other classmates, what really makes a difference was the heart issue of all that. It was the commitment level to Christ." He described the school as a "tool" and that one's commitment level is not "specifically dependent on the school," but "that the desire to know Christ and to serve him ultimately lies on himself and the Holy Spirit . . . not a physical or mathematical specific thing which is just in response to the school." Later in the interview, he again emphasized his belief that spiritual formation is "the responsibility of the person" as he stressed that "although there are detrimental things that influence our own school, there are reasons that could have come to the school that deal with spiritual formation. I think there is still a responsibility of the person."

At the time of the interview, Taddeo was heavily involved in several different mission activities at his church, working with the youth group, and teaching one night a week at a seminary associated with his church. He also discipled young men from his neighborhood and helped lead a ministry to college students. When asked to describe his personal relationship with the Lord, he exclaimed:

> Growing and enjoying him more and more every day. Seeking to conform myself more to him seeking to serve him more, trying to not just keep on doing daily habits of reading Scripture and prayer, but helping others do the same thing.

Taddeo fought tears and was choked up for a minute as he was asked about his purpose in life and what he believed to be the main responsibilities of a Christian. With an emotional and passionate voice, he shared: "My purpose in life is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever" and the main responsibility of a Christian is "to love the Lord and love others."

Juan. Juan also asked if he could share his testimony and acknowledged that he had seen God's faithfulness at work in his life. He was also involved in the weekly and yearly spiritual activities at his school. He also remembered an evening youth group–like meeting, but that it was not a consistent event. However, during his senior year, he was involved in helping and being a leader for the other students. Juan recalled high school as being a challenging environment for him. He described it as follows:

> Going to a small school wasn't easy for me. I remember how kids used to be very cliquish. We were never really very accepting of people who weren't cool. It was a real struggle fitting in. I remember not really having friends that I could trust. One minute "Jon" was my friend and the next, he was making fun of me. Others would use intimidation to pick on the timid. It was a real dog-eat-dog existence.

Entering college was when Juan found himself trying to find out what he believed. He shared that he had grown up as a missionary kid and basically spent his life growing up in the church. He described college as a "crossroad" for many as they looked back on past decisions, both good and bad, made in high school. Juan described his experiences from high school and college as somewhat like a journal where:

> Along the way made some mistakes, and realized that like God had used those mistakes to . . . help me understand others who are . . . lost and searching for the truth. I just believe in my life God's faithfulness. There has really been the faith to continue doing what I'm doing, and being obedient, and sharing the word with others.

Juan described attending a Christian high school and college as "building blocks" that helped give the basis and understanding of why he believes "exactly the way" he believes. He acknowledged that "God loves me unconditionally." He attributed his beliefs, his knowledge

about God, and his knowledge about the Bible to attending a Christian high school and college and other "life experiences."

Juan defined himself as being "more of an attender" at church when he was growing up. At the time of the interview, Juan attended a large church that preached "victory." He explained that he had "heard of people going to churches that have been a little bit more about come broken . . . come hurting . . . kind of like sometimes perpetuate a spirit of like the victim." Juan did not desire to view himself this way and emphasized:

> I want to see myself as victorious in the Lord; a person who struggles with real issues, but at the end of the day my strength is through God's strength and he gives me the victory so I can make progress.

For the most part, Juan was still simply an attendee at church, although he had considered volunteering in some of the outreaches. He was involved in two different small groups that met weekly. One small group was associated with his church and Juan remarked that it was "a great atmosphere to meet other believers and kind of share and pray together, and that's very uplifting." The other group consisted of a wide range of ages and was a creativity group. Juan shared that most of the group "are believers and we pray together and we share needs and then just kind of discuss like what God is doing in our lives."

Juan defined his life as a "current journey" in which "it would be really trusting the Lord's timing and learning to be obedient right now." He revealed:

> I'm just trying to be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit in my life and what God is telling me. I feel like God will put situations in my way for people, and I just try to really be open to his leading. I've had times in my life that I like, kind of quieted the Holy

Spirit a little bit and ignored the leading . . . and I always . . . like it was a huge

opportunity missed.

Juan believed that staying "in communion with the Lord" did not only involve "reading His

Word, but also just staying in the habit of prayer. The more I pray the closer I feel like to God

and his leading and his passion for people and things." He had also begun to consider the act of

fasting as he saw that as "the next step."

In his journal, Juan indicated that part of his purpose was to "succeed in life and work

hard." When asked about what he believed his purpose in life was, Juan was quick to respond

with a strong note of confidence in his voice:

I believe my purpose, at least what has been revealed to me, would be to honor the Lord

with my life and be an instrument in his hands that would be not an object of wrath but a

blessing. To kind of be the hands and feet of Jesus, to proclaim his good works and his

faithfulness in my life, and to proclaim it to you know the hurt, the lost, the broken, the

struggling, the questioning. I believe our testimony is something that we really need to

share with others. I believe it is great for the edification of the church. I don't think it is

something you know you keep to yourself locked up in a little box only to remind

yourself. I think it's something that we should share with others. There can be a lot of

things that grow out of that, and it just shows the goodness of God to those who may be

going through something tough or similar.

Juan's purpose in life was supportive of what he believed as the Christian's responsibility of

carrying out the Great Commission. He believed we are to be good examples anywhere we are,

and that "we are responsible to perpetuate that grace and that love that God showed to us."

Anahi. Anahi was involved in basically all of the spiritual activities in school, including the optional ones such as the informal discipleship groups that were offered. Although Anahi struggled with low self-esteem and low self-confidence through her school years, she was appreciative of her school because that was where she got to know some "great Christians," "make some great friends," and got to meet her "first love . . . Christ." Upon graduation, though, she expressed that:

> As soon as I went to university, I didn't do any of the things we used to do in school anymore. . . . I didn't follow . . . all the Bible studies and Bible classes. I didn't really take that into my life. My relationship with God remained in the sense that I still believed in him...

Instead, for the first two to three years after high school, she did not "really acknowledge a Christian living . . . it was not my primary purpose to be a good witness." When she did start living her Christian faith, she struggled to find a church where she agreed with "the theology of the group."

Anahi was currently in a transitional stage in her life. At the time of her interview, she had just arrived in a new city and was staying with friends while seeking employment and housing. Therefore, she had yet to settle in and find a church. Devotions were also difficult as she shared her room. She also believed that her relationship with God was "strengthening . . . again after many times making decisions without really putting them before the Lord." Statements made in her journal evidenced that she was seeking the Lord about a current decision. She acknowledged that "I desperately want to be in God's plan" and "I prayed for the Lord to give grace and be in accordance to His purpose." After her time away from living her faith, she recognized that "it's pretty tough in this phase. . . . I feel like I'm starting over from a more

mature side after having fallen down many times as well, sometimes even feeling unworthy." Her experiences from high school to this point had enabled her to no longer see a "judgmental God." Anahi's conviction was easily noted as she exclaimed, "I don't believe in a religion that condemns. I believe in a God that loves me and takes me back however many times and who wants the best for me."

When discussing her purpose in life, Anahi paused a moment. She explained that she writes down her goals and reevaluates them about every six months. When it came to her spiritual purpose, she stated that it "is to become a virtuous, courageous, strong, Christly woman who helps others and becomes closer and closer to the Lord." She also later expressed that her purpose was also "to grow and help others."

Anahi's purpose in life closely correlated to what she believed are the main responsibilities of a Christian. She acknowledged these responsibilities were to:

positively affect the people around me starting with my family—immediate family—parents and then eventually my own family that I will have—my husband and kids. And to transmit the message of the gospel, but I don't think that I have to preach to everyone oh Jesus died for you. I have to show it through my actions. I mean I'm actually still debating that if, it is my responsibility to explicitly tell people about Jesus or not; I don't know that yet.

Marcelo. Marcelo remembered the common required spiritual activities, such as chapel and Bible class, as well as an optional out-of-school spiritual activity. Yet, he also added that since it was a Christian school, "almost everything we did like extracurricular were pretty much Bible oriented—like even at the lock-ins we would have like special times." He acknowledged that he "attended" all of those activities, but was "not involved as far as helping" because he

"just didn't have the time or there were just other people doing it all the time." He appreciated attending a Christian school because it encouraged him to have a personal relationship with the Lord through having "a daily Bible related interaction with people, so it was-it just became a part of us." He explained it as:

> It's easier to build up habits that include God or church with spirituality when you have all of the activities we had. For example, like Bible study, and chapel, and everything. Since it's normal, you grow around it and then it's not so weird to just like go to church, or have a personal relationship with God, or pray.

Later in the interview when asked about how his school prepared him for what he currently does, he shared that the school:

> strengthened my relationship with God to the point where I feel the need to be in touch with God, even if I don't attend church regularly, to have that need to read the Bible, to pray regularly, and . . . to treat other people the best way I can.

At the time of the interview, Marcelo worked and went to school full time. In fact, his interview was not until late at night after a very full day of activities. Although he seemed to be fairly open, he also seemed to be a little distracted and tired as some of his answers appeared to conflict to a certain extent. Additionally, I somewhat felt that he wanted to complete the interview as quickly as possible as his answers were short and he gave general responses. When probed for specific examples, he could not think of any or kept those examples somewhat general as well. Marcelo stated that "sometimes I don't make the best decisions, but that's just a part of life I guess," and described his personal relationship with God as "not exactly where I would want to be like proximity-wise with God." He attributed it to "either lack of time, or just whatever reason it may have been that has driven me apart from God or the church." Regardless,

he still considered himself "a spiritually firm Christian" as he prayed frequently and read his Bible. He shared that he has audiobooks on his phone and listens to the Bible or other books while in the car, which was "several hours a day."

Marcelo's purpose in life and what he saw as the main responsibilities of a Christian are somewhat connected. He perceived his purpose in life as "to learn as much as I can about the world that God created and to touch as many people's lives as I can in a positive way. I just try to be the good part of somebody's day." He identified the main responsibilities of a Christian to first be "prioritizing God and the work of evangelizing others." He also added that "sharing the gospel with other people, and then also every Christian should have the responsibility of treating other people the best possible way, being nice, helping people out when they can, just to spreading God's love on earth basically."

No Present Sure Personal Relationship with Christ Acknowledged

Rafael. Rafael also remembered the typical spiritual activities such as chapel, Bible classes, spiritual emphasis week, and teachers praying before class. He did not remember any activities outside of school that were optional, but did state that there was a chaplain available and that there were optional Bible groups to join. He shared that he "was more involved in those things during my elementary and middle school before high school." However, he stated that when he reached high school, although he got along with those who were chaplains and sometimes talked with them, he "didn't partake" in the optional activities because he was "never really engaged" because he "didn't really feel comfortable in it" as "it required a lot out of me" and "talking about certain things . . . was out of my comfort zone." Rafael also believed the required spiritual activities least prepared him to have and maintain a personal relationship with the Lord because "definitely sometimes you didn't really feel like going there, but they required

you to go and that actually pushes some people away." The required spiritual activities "started to become like that's something that you do like a chore instead of a personal decision."

At the time of the interview, Rafael was in his last semester of college. After high school, he remained at home working with his father for a year then went to the States for college. When asked to describe his personal relationship with the Lord, he replied that he is:

> at a point right now where I don't even know like how to go about it. It's where I think I know what I'm supposed to do, but I don't know; there's just something in me that it looks like I'm scared of going back into that kind of lifestyle. It's like I feel I wouldn't be able to enjoy that completely without it bothering me in a certain way. You know? Like I would feel like a hypocrite if I did the whole thing.

Rafael explained that he would react this way because of choices made in high school. In high school, he went out and partied with friends. He explained that in the culture, it was acceptable to drink. At the parties, he drank and got drunk. As a result, there were consequences at school that affected grades and "everybody knew about it." Regardless, he "definitely" thought about his relationship with the Lord. He sees it as something that:

> helps me not to do something . . . a form to hold me back from going overboard and just like completely go crazy out of my mind. I definitely sometimes use it like, and I know it's bad . . . a fire extinguisher . . . where I turn to find comfort.

At the close of the interview, when asked how his school either helped or hindered him for the current activities in which he is involved, Rafael made the following comment: "On the spiritual side, it definitely, you know there's still that part in me that's always wondering you know what else there is to life. What more is there than the physical, material world that we live in?"

Rafael struggled to have his devotions, in part due to reactions from his current roommates, and attended church a couple of times each month. He described the most difficult aspect as trying to live a life as one that devoted "more time to God and to other people instead of my own."

Rafael's purpose in life did not connect to what he saw were the responsibilities of a Christian. When asked what his purpose in life was, Rafael appeared to be a little surprised at the question. After a brief pause, he exclaimed, "I'm not sure! Is that a valid answer?" But there was little to no hesitation when asked what the responsibilities of a Christian are as he stated: "to put others before him, to be a servant, and to do it genuinely."

Hernan. Hernan recalled attending chapel as a required spiritual activity and optional Bible studies and Christian service opportunities. He mentioned that he was involved in various Christian service activities.

Hernan remained home after graduating from high school and worked for four years before going to college. At the time of his interview, he was working on his undergraduate degree at a secular university and was involved with a Christian organization. In the guiding questions of this study, Hernan was asked how his school prepared him to have a personal relationship with the Lord. He responded that his experience made him "consider on a permanent basis what my relationship with Jesus is." In the interview, he was asked to describe that relationship. He shared:

> I believe in Jesus and I possibly talk to him. I do think of Jesus a lot less than when I was
> at the ICS; I guess just because it's brought up much less. But it's a very personal
> relationship.

He reads the Bible and prays every day. When talking about praying, he added this: "When the day's going well, I thank him. Whenever it's not going well, I also thank him. It's hard to count how many times a day." He did not attend church as he was involved with the Christian organization that met every Sunday night for a Bible study, although he did not go every Sunday. Hernan added that he believed that "the purpose of church is finding a community, and I've found that . . . even though it's not officially church, it is a community."

Hernan's purpose in life appeared to align with what he believed are the main responsibilities of a Christian. He described his purpose as "to impact anyone that I come in contact with." When discussing what that looked like, he responded, "taking the time to improve the people that I work with . . . being a good son, brother, and in the future father . . . showing people what Christ has done in my life, but in a much more subtle way in my case." Hernan perceived the main responsibilities of a Christian as "helping people that are in need." He elaborated on this as he explained that it could be in a general way, but helping in "any way possible."

Jose. Jose was very involved in spiritual activities while in high school. He remembered several of the weekly and yearly required activities in which he participated as he asked questions, sang, and interacted with speakers. He mentioned his involvement in more than one outreach activity as well. For one of these activities, the students would go to a place where "really poor people lived" and would hold vacation Bible schools and feed and educate them. Another outreach activity began while Jose was a student during his middle school years. The outreach activities included mentoring and playing games. These experiences led him to become a mentor when he entered high school.

While in high school, he noted that he "participated in and professed to be a Christian" and the school was "very supportive of that." Nonetheless, he did not profess to be a Christian, but pointed out "there was never really any negative impact of that from school and that was just a personal decision I had." He shared: "Especially in my senior year, I was . . . wondering . . . what do I believe and everything like that and just wanted to explore different options in a way."

Jose did not enter college immediately following high school, but was in college at the time of the interview. Although he did not profess to be a Christian, he sporadically attended church as he liked to "ask questions and go with other people as well." Additionally, he liked "going and researching different religions and kind of understanding them, reading maybe the book of Koran or Mormon . . . to see what other people think or believe." He saw this as being "very educational" and he stated he:

> definitely respect[s] people who are very religious just because . . . going through a lot of different stuff to get to that point because . . . it's a good thing. It's just not my personal thing right now, but I do respect those that have that.

Jose knew where he is going in life. Jose did not hesitate when asked what his purpose in life was. He stated:

> to succeed as much as I can, in as many areas as I can, to work hard, and to achieve the goals I have set for myself so I can fulfill what I set for me in my life whether it be spiritually, professionally, or academically.

Jose believed the responsibilities of Christians should basically be the responsibilities of everyone. He shared "not just Christians, but maybe other people as well to dedicate themselves to their religion and respect others and their religious ways." In fact, in earlier comments, it was apparent that observe the issue of respect was important to him.

Pedro. Pedro remembered having Bible class every morning, attending chapels, and attaining required service hours. He added that he attended church every Sunday. A few times, he chose to be part of the worship team for chapel. Pedro also mentioned that students could choose their projects for their service hours, which did not have to be spiritual in nature. However, he chose one that was spiritual in nature and went to a "spiritual camp to convert people in a neighboring city" for a week. Pedro also recalled participating for a few years in an optional small group activity during lunch where "you would meet up with a few friends and there would be a teacher, and it was supposed to be like 'how's your spiritual life going?' kinda thing." When asked what event at school most influenced a personal relationship with the Lord, Pedro noted that the school also offered a Christian camp, which was an optional activity he chose to attend. He described the camp as a "church thing where you could be with all of your friends and the closeness that you feel" and shared "that probably did the most for me."

While in high school, Pedro "was a Christian there, so I guess my years at CAS made me Christian to begin with." Conversely, he claimed in the interview to be an atheist and stated in his journal that "God in my life today is a controversial subject." Pedro viewed religious education as "long and boring" and "not particularly beneficial" as he "was compared to some inhuman standard, pressured to love an invisible silent person who apparently watch my every move." In his interview, Pedro explained that while he was in college his brother became an atheist. Pedro, who "was still a Christian," decided to "set out to prove him wrong." As a Christian, Pedro believed that the responsibility of a Christian was to "convert as many people as possible." He described that, after extensive research:

I basically couldn't find anything that would prove the existence of God or show me how

the Bible was divinely inspired . . . and then I encountered a number of problems . . . so

without any kind of evidence that He actually exists, He doesn't exist.

As a result of his research, Pedro also became an atheist. But, near the end of the interview,

Pedro shared that his dad is a pastor and added the following comment about his current beliefs:

As far as Christianity goes, I think there's a lack of proof of the existence of God, a lack

of some ways to verify the beliefs. I feel like everybody kind of starts at, you know, at

accepting the Bible already. I think people are just kind of automatically raised into it,

and they believe it anyway. So, there is a lack of proof of the existence of spiritual

things. As far as I'm concerned right now, is I don't think there is any, so I don't know

what you're supposed to do about that. If you find something let me know.

At the time of the interview, Pedro was looking for an internship. He went to college, but

was unable to find a job upon graduation. He believed that his purpose in life is "to pass on your

genes . . . and raise good kids one day . . . hope to help the world in some way . . . hope to leave

some type of benefit to the world and the people around me."

Claudia. Claudia agreed to participate in answering the guiding questions and

completing a journal, but did not wish to be interviewed. Claudia attended ICS for most of

elementary school and all her high school years. She remembered being involved for her

outreach service hours at a local slum. Among the fond memories of friends, sports, and

outreach services, she also remembers "the daily bullying from students . . . I endured during

these years."

Claudia shared her opinion that the school "needs to require [a] higher educational

background and training from their educators to provide a more well-rounded understanding and

critical thought around spiritual formation." She believed that her school aimed "to provide the spiritual formation and resources to foster a relationship with Jesus Christ," but did not "particularly think that my time at an ACSI international school had any impact of spiritual formation." Instead, she stated the way she lives today "is entirely due to the formation I received at the Christian undergraduate institution." Nevertheless, she did credit her attendance at ICS to her decision to attend a Christian university.

Claudia did "not consider [herself] a Christian, but . . . continue[s] to dabble in various other religious narratives and understandings." She further stated, "Presently, I aim to have conversations regarding the Christian tradition and theology. I do not attend a church. I consider myself an agnostic."

Throughout the data collection process, participants discussed their personal, spiritual identity. Many referred to their identities as a personal decision they made at some point in their lives. As they discussed their identities , they also mentioned the influence, support, or example of others, mainly teachers, in their lives. This leads into the third theme gathered from the data, that of the influences of teachers on the lives of their students.

Theme Three: Teacher Influences

Most of the participants mentioned chapels, Bible classes, service hour requirements, discipleship groups, and camps when questioned about the required and optional spiritual activities offered by their respective schools. When responding to the question about spiritual activities, it is interesting to note that several participants also included teachers taking prayer requests and opening class with prayer. However, all but one of the participants mentioned relationships with teachers and staff as an aspect or event during their high school years that either most or least impacted their personal relationship with Christ. Additionally, participants

also included observations of their teachers' words and actions as an aspect that either positively or negatively influenced their spiritual formation. In fact, these relationships and events were discussed in more detail than the majority of spiritual activities mentioned.

Two of the three administrators interviewed also pointed out the teachers and their role in the students' spiritual formation. Mr. Altec, director of American Christian School (ACS), emphasized the importance of the administration's role when hiring teachers when he stated:

> I think one of the largest areas of spiritual formation for our students is actually the lives
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> of our teachers. We as administration try to hire teachers that are born-again Christians,
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> that love the Lord, that have a testimony of Christ. That is very important and we have
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> had feedback saying that the lives of our teachers have impacted our students. I think
>
> that is one of the greatest areas of impact that we do have on our students.

Mr. Silas, director of ICS, discussed his school's view of their teachers within the area of spiritual formation as he stated, "They're not just teachers who are Christians, they are part of the Christian spiritual formation commitment of the school."

Negative Influences

Often, when one thinks about the high school years, the memories of specific teachers come to mind. It was no different with this group of participants. Seven of the eight participants interviewed, and one who partially participated, mentioned the influence of teachers. Most of these memories were positive. But four who fully participated also mentioned some negative memories, and the one who was not interviewed mentioned negative memories.

The negative memories centered on teachers' actions and words. Claudia, who was not interviewed, stated in her journal that a least favorite memory of high school for her was the

"micro-aggressions of certain faculty I endured." Anahi and Hernan both mentioned comments made by teachers that seemed judgmental. Anahi explained her experience in the following way:

> Some teachers would even say some prejudicial, prejudiced comments, which to me at the time was okay because I didn't, that was my world you know—only Christians—this is how everyone should think. This is the right way, which I still do believe, but I don't think you should encourage intolerance to your students.

Hernan shared his experience with one of his teachers in the following way from his journal:

> A Bible/Health teacher judged me in front of class for something he assumed about me. Many of the words that teacher said were motivated by a disapproval of my personality and by a judgementalism. . . . In my opinion, the way that teacher tried to correct behavior was by instigating guilt. I now understand that judgementalism was the teacher's personality.

Juan and Taddeo both mentioned that the lives of some of their teachers had a negative impact on their spiritual development. Juan stated that he was frustrated with a Bible teacher who approached the subject more as an "adjunct professor." He also perceived that some teachers "didn't really live their faith" and stated how frustrating that was. He gave an example of observing teachers outside of class and stated that "we judge people based on what you see. Sometimes when you're under pressure in a certain environment, where maybe you're not demonstrating like the most Christian values and characteristics." However, he used that observation to realize that "nobody's perfect, and that you just can't put your trust and faith always in people . . . they make mistakes and not to let that really affect you totally." Taddeo shared a similar observation of how the personal lives and testimony of teachers "affected us negatively" as he perceived that "sometimes conflict management or just . . . how some teachers

don't do some things, probably didn't help of being an example of people that truly want to do or

do things well in the Christian life." Despite some negative recollections of the lives of some of

the teachers, many more interactions were shared that impacted the participants' lives in positive

ways.

Positive Influences

Seven of the eight participants mentioned that teachers positively influenced their

spiritual formation. This influence was the formation of positive relationships with teachers and

staff as well as their words and actions. It is worth observing that these influences took place

both inside and outside of the classroom and school settings.

It is interesting to note that Taddeo, Rafael, and Jose also mentioned the words *mentors*

or *mentoring* when discussing the relationships with teachers. Jose mentioned that teachers

"were available mentors for students," and "would have sporadic conversations and meals while

talking about personal issues and Christianity." In his journal, Jose also mentioned that the

school gave him "some mentors to follow and learn from." Rafael shared that he developed

"close personal friendships" with teachers and stated that "there were definitely a couple that

impacted my life and were more mentors especially in the spiritual side and just listening to their

experiences and what they had to say, definitely impacted me." Although Taddeo did not

believe that the impact of personal relationships with teachers were "ultimately the main thing"

influencing one's spiritual formation, he did believe that "the mentoring helped," and that it was

a "crucial" and "important" aspect of his spiritual formation, and that it did have "an effect" and

"a big influence."

Mentoring is possible when a personal relationship is built. Rafael, Anahi, and Hernan

mentioned specific memories of personal relationships built with teachers and staff. Rafael gave

a specific example of a time when he and a friend were "messing around . . . we just used to bother some of the teachers . . . we considered them our friends." When one of them said a curse word, Rafael and his friend expected the teacher to get upset, but instead:

> The teacher, actually he didn't get offended or anything, but he started asking like why. Why we cursed and like what we got out of it, and you know he took it somewhere where we never thought he would-we never really thought it would go—and then he just spoke to us about how he had, how he really controlled what he says and everything that he says he makes sure that he's speaking life into people and not bringing people down and not looking to offend other people with what he says.

Anahi pointed out that although several teachers would encourage them to pray and be a good testimony, students would form a closer relationship "to different teachers than others." She shared the following memory:

> At one point our family was in transition from church to church, and it was during a critical phase of my life. And I was growing, well my adolescent years, and I didn't have a good youth group anywhere. So I would go to that teacher's church; for instance, I would tell her about my problems and she would pray with me.

Hernan developed a friendship with a teacher that he had in middle school because "he taught me every year until senior year, which is just a coincidence that I was able to take classes with him." He acknowledged that "being able to build relationships with people very committed to Jesus and furthering that mission that people learn about Jesus" was the aspect he believed best prepared him to have and maintain a close personal relationship with Christ. In fact, Hernan also described the continued influence of one of his teachers as he shared that "I talk to the teacher that I was closest to and discuss how my faith has been to this day." As Anahi acknowledged

above, not all students connect with every teacher. Despite this, observations of teachers' words and actions can still influence a student's spiritual formation.

The international school setting is a little unique from stateside schools in that international schools tend to become a close-knit communities due to the fact that most of the faculty and staff are away from home. Faculty and staff tend to have more interaction with others and students tend to see them outside of school more often as well. As a result, students have the opportunity to observe their teachers in various settings. Marcelo, Rafael, Juan, Hernan, and Taddeo mentioned their teachers' words or actions or observations of their teachers' personal lives as influences in their spiritual formation.

Some of the participants were general when responding to the question about what most influenced their spiritual formation. Marcelo and Rafael both discussed teachers, but did not share anything specific. Marcelo said that his teachers helped to "solve problems we had from a biblical perspective," and Rafael stated that his teachers were "interested in our lives." Juan discussed teachers in general when he stated that they were "Christian with some being more outspoken about their beliefs than others. I remember some that were really there to minister, and others that were there that were like a little bit quieter about their personal beliefs." Hernan made the observation that "I think this school also hired very passionate people during my time there," and teachers who were "invocating a culture of speaking about their relationship with Christ. So there was that culture in every professor's and teacher's agenda." He explained how he observed teachers to be passionate when he said:

> Teachers that would take any time that I would want to talk with them about Christ
> demonstrates passion, and that's what they were there for. They weren't hurried to do
> anything else. They would spend their time to do that. You could tell by the knowledge

that they had and their interest to help other students understand that knowledge. They

were very the best, I mean the best teachers were those that were passionate but not

forceful about teaching about Christ. And you could tell they were passionate because

they had worked through how to impact life for the students' lives the most.

Hernan appeared to have several teachers positively influence his life. In his interview, Hernan

said that he had "some tremendous professors who really took the time to discuss with me and

about my relationship with Christ." Taddeo stated his teachers' care as something "quite

noticeable from my perspective" as he shared that "the fact that a teacher can maintain a good

testimony, I think that's one thing that would elevate the students' thoughts of the teacher of the

school and ultimately of Christ." He did recognize that Christian schools are not perfect, but

states that "seeing a Christian community, although flawed . . . was helpful to be able to live out

my calling I guess."

Juan and Hernan also shared more specific details in their responses as well. Juan

specifically discussed his Bible teacher from his sophomore year. He shared the following: "I

remember her being a real kinda influential in my life for the way she taught me—she really had

a mission mind." In fact, the teacher's home church in the States donated study Bibles to each of

her students. Juan remembered "that being like a really big deal for me. Actually, it's the Bible

I still use to this day. I really enjoy it." Juan explained in detail what made this Bible teacher

influential in his life:

I think for me it was her candidness and about her religion and sharing with us through

her experiences—her real-life experiences of not serving the Lord and then serving the

Lord. And I remember her telling us stories—you know she was just very open with us.

She didn't, you know, kind of hold things back. She was very real with us about her

struggles that she faced, struggles of you know being a Christian in a secular environment. I remember she told us how about her old job. I would say stuff like that and kind of people come and can be kind of like sharing their beliefs. But sometimes really seeing it from the person who is really living through trials and tries; that really is what I think made it more real for me and more applicable I'd say.

In his interview, Hernan shared that "the most influential people in terms of my relationship with Christ were a Bible teacher and my soccer coach." In his journal, he elaborated on why his soccer coach was so influential as he wrote:

I think our coach made that such a positive experience because he was interested in building the team members' character. He was also interested in sharing about Christ, but he never did so in a forceful way and rarely talked about Him. Instead he demonstrated what Christ meant and did in his life through his actions. He could do this because he was convinced about Christ and didn't feel any urge to have to talk his way into proving how important Christ is. He just demonstrated it.

The data appear to support the idea that both relationships built with teachers and examples that teachers set through their words, actions, and lives influence the spiritual formation of students in Christian schools. If that influence has a lasting effect, one should see evidence in the lives of those students from those relationships and examples. This leads into the last theme of application.

Theme Four: Application of Learning

ASCI has a mission to "strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire students to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ" (ACSI, 2016, Mission section). Each ACSI-accredited school has its

individual mission statement: what it desires as a school to accomplish in the lives of its students. Although the mission statements are worded differently, each statement addresses the areas of academics, community, and spirituality. Each school desires to cultivate spiritually well-grounded graduates who can positively and competently influence their world for Christ. All of the graduates who were interviewed expressed a desire to be positive influences on those around them in some way. They strive to be good influences and show respect to others.

Application through Relational Impact

Those graduates who claimed to not have a current personal relationship with Christ were striving to positively impact those around them. Pedro shared that he hopes "to help the world in some way. You know before I leave I hope to leave some type of benefit to the world and the people around me." In his journal, he also noted that he noticed that a relative of his did not get a lot of attention, and he believed the person needed it. As a result, he "tries to give" that attention and hopes that he is "doing something positive." Jose, at the time of the interview, served the United States in a branch of the military. In his journal, he stated that his school prepared him:

> just to be kind of a world citizen in a way, to adapt to different situations and respect other people you know religiously. It has enforced a set of morals that I have now. International Christian School has helped me become more multi-cultural. It has given me a compassion for those in need.

Claudia shared in her journal that she significantly engages with both her community and local government and appreciates the opportunity to foster "meaningful and valuable relationships across community." She worked with a group whose goal "is to continue to create environments where people of color and our police officials can come together and foster healthy relationships

with one another." Claudia also acknowledged that her "actions are constantly affecting the way others interact with me. I am not blind to the fact that we are social beings created to be in relationships with one another."

When evaluating the data collected on the level of positive impact, I discovered a slight difference between graduates who acknowledged having a relationship with God and those who did not. Rafael and Marcelo shared similar applications of learning as those in the group discussed above, yet to some extent, their responses were more general in nature. As noted in theme two, Rafael was not sure how he was to "go about" his relationship with the Lord. He believed it was the responsibility of a Christian to be a "genuine servant," but he was not sure of his own purpose in life and has a hard time "trying to devote more time to God." In his journal, Rafael stated that he tried "to go to church on Sundays, but it doesn't always happen."

As discussed in theme two, Marcelo saw part of his purpose in life is "to touch as many people's lives as I can in a positive way." He also shared that he believed we are on earth "to show love and learn how to love others." When answering one of the guiding questions about living a life that is visible to others, he wrote:

> Even if at some point an alum does drift away from religion as a whole, the fundamental truths of Christianity and Scripture will continue to influence their worldview. It goes without saying that for those who do stay close to God throughout their lives, nothing can help them develop and grow as righteous individuals and Christians better than having a rich knowledge of Scripture, the love and grace of God for us; as well as a strong community that reinforces correct attitudes and behavior.

Additionally, in his answers to the guiding question about how graduates are influenced to live a life that demonstrates spiritual formation, he stated that:

People either get frustrated and end up mimicking their environment or they learn to be

different with pride, embracing the culture of love they grew up in (as opposed to the

culture of hate most people grow up in) and do their best to be a light in the darkness.

However, Marcelo did not elaborate or give specific examples of how he incorporated these

statements, his purpose, or his belief into practice.

Hernan acknowledged that attending a "non-religious college" was very "enriching"

because he was "able to see a completely different worldview." That time enabled him to "put

my Christian education into perspective." He believed in God, but did "not attribute everything

or think about God constantly" like when he was in high school. In fact, he recognized that God

"is there to guide" him, but he realized "how little I can know of Him. This has made me a lot

less opinionated about my Christian views." Regardless, he viewed what he learned in high

school as "a source of wisdom that aids me in making good decisions." Hernan also desired to

impact those with whom he comes into contact and wanted to show them "what Christ has done

in my life, but in a much more subtle way." In his interview, Hernan shared that he believed

"that the people who made the most impact in my life are the people that were quiet and showed

what Jesus was about." As a result, in an answer to a guiding question, he stated that he has

"backed off from actively making myself visible as a Christian." When he worked, he noticed

some of the people were having trouble in their lives, and he attempted to help and show them

that "someone really cared" by how he interacted with them. Hernan acknowledged being an

introvert, but still attempted to affect others around him by making "people smile and feel

comfortable around me." When Anahi first graduated, she shared that even though she still

believed in and had a relationship with God, she did not "do any of the things we used to do in

school anymore." She did not attend church, did not "acknowledge Christian living," and did not

"follow at least all the Bible studies and Bible classes. I didn't really take that into my life." Recently, though, she felt that she was strengthening her relationship with the Lord and "trying to have His direction from now on." She acknowledged feeling "like I'm starting over from a more mature side after having fallen down many times." Her view of God has also changed from seeing Him as a judgmental God now to "a God that loves me and takes me back however many times, and who wants the best for me." Anahi also tried to be a positive influence and gave a specific example of cleaning a friend's apartment to thank her allowing her to stay there as she looked for a job and her own place to live.

Application through Mentoring Others

Two of the participants appeared to be actively applying the spiritual aspect of what they learned in high school. In their interviews, Juan and Taddeo shared that a big influence in their spiritual formation was the opportunity to mentor younger students. Juan shared that as "a senior and sort of helping out with like being a lead for the students" at a weekly, evening school activity helped influence his spiritual formation. He went on to state, "I do remember fondly those were the days of being kind of like more of a long-term mentor role to the lower-classmen that really looked up to the upperclassmen, but I do remember really just enjoying and feeling like it was a ministry at that point." As a senior, he also had the opportunity "to go back and work at the elementary camp and kind of volunteer there." Later in the interview, he added, "I do feel like that kind of service really helped me just kind of see the bigger picture and brought things into perspective of what it meant to serve and like see how God would work in their lives." Taddeo remembered helping during his senior year "with the meeting some at the Friday night meetings, which were extracurricular." He also helped with school camps and did "some junior counseling" with younger teens and elementary students.

Those opportunities for ministry as a high school student appear to have influenced the way they live their lives as adults. They both gave several statements and examples of activities in which they were actively involved. Juan shared that he was "supporting someone on a mission trip," was actively involved in two "small groups" which were like a discipleship, and regularly spent time reading his Bible and praying. He desired to honor the Lord with his life and be a blessing to others and felt the need to share his testimony with others. At the time of the interview, he was involved in a supportive role in a ministry that assisted the children of missionaries and viewed it "as kind of pouring love into these people's lives because we see the value of investing in our missionary kids." Juan shared how he lives his faith as he gave an example that happened just a few hours before his interview. He had stopped to fill up the mission van with gas, and a man started a conversation with him and then:

He asked me to pray for him and he asked me to bless him. So you know I was like sure and I like actually prayed with him just kind of showed like God . . . that kind of stuff like actually happens in my life. I feel like God will put situations in my way for people, and I just try to really be open to his leading. I've had times in my life that I'd like kind of quieted the Holy Spirit a little bit and ignored the leading and I always very like it was a huge opportunity missed you know, like so I tried to be obedient to his leading.

As discussed in theme two, Taddeo was heavily involved in several different ministries at least three evenings a week. These ministries involved teaching in a seminary as well as leading discipleship groups to both high school and college-age people. Additionally, he helped to coordinate the mission aspect of his church. He also taught and incorporated what he was personally learning into devotions with his students. He desired to continually grow in his personal relationship with the Lord through a daily habit of Scripture reading and praying and

wanted to help "others do the same." Another application of learning Taddeo noted in his journal was that "the standards and level of ethics has [sic] influenced me to have high expectations for ethics in the workplace or in other areas of education and life." Taddeo aptly summed up his belief that the application of learning is a decision that solely lies on each student as he stated:

> I think all of us are responsible for what we heard and seen, and we have the responsibility of, even if we see a good example or a bad example, we ultimately have a responsibility to do what is right.

Summary

Although the "phenomenon of spiritual formation is an integral aspect of the entire Christian school experience that cannot be reduced to a component or program" (Nunez, 2014, p. 6), common shared factors and experiences from various graduates can give insights as to areas within their school experience that appear to have an influence on their spiritual formation. These areas appeared to be a perceived disconnect between the school experience and real-life experience, student ownership and spiritual identity, teacher influences, and the application of learning.

Each participant had his or her own perception of memories from his or her experiences. Subsequently, each school director had his memories, experiences, and ideas. At the close of the interview with Mr. Silas, he shared the following:

> I think we have to be very careful not to take on the mantle of being the evangelizer and the mentor of all children by recognizing that our role is essentially a support role. And in a sense, an extension of the local church because we cannot take ultimate responsibility of the parents, but we can't shirk the opportunity that we have.

The purpose statements of ACSI Christian schools include a reference to influence students on a spiritual level, with the goal of that influence continuing for a long period of time. The findings of this study suggest that there are factors within international Christian schools that can influence the long-term spiritual formation of the graduates. The next chapter will discuss the analyzed data presented above.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This chapter briefly reviews the findings of this study. Following is an assessment of these findings in light of the literature base of Chapter Two and an incorporation of these findings in relation to the guiding questions of this research. This chapter concludes with the study's limitations, the implications of this study in light of the relevant literature and theory, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This phenomenological study sought to explore and understand the phenomenon of the impact that Christian schools have on the spiritual lives of their graduates. The problem was the influence that Christian schools have on the long-term spiritual formation of their graduates. Although Christian schools include spiritual formation as part of their mission statements and monitor this area within their current student body, no formal follow-up was being done to measure whether or not their long-term goals within their mission statements were met. Based on the findings in Chapter Four, it appears that Christian schools do influence the spiritual lives of their graduates through several aspects during high school experiences.

The data were collected from school documents, journals, and interviews with school directors and graduates. School directors were first contacted regarding their willingness to participate. Directors agreeing to participate were sent a letter to send to the graduates of their schools to obtain participants. In order to obtain the minimum acceptable number of graduates from each school, one director was asked to contact the graduates of his school again. A total of 26 responded to the initial contact, with 13 initially agreeing to some level of participation. As

the data collection continued, only a total of nine participated beyond the initial questions, with eight of those agreeing to be interviewed.

Experiences shared were examined and analyzed for commonalities between the participants. The insights produced practical implications that could improve how schools define, approach, and measure the area of spiritual formation. The findings of this analysis are more significant in light of research indicating possible key areas of impact that Christian schools can focus on to encourage positive areas of influence that would continue beyond a student's graduation.

Discussion

Four common themes resonated throughout the data. The majority of alumni from the three schools noted a perceived disconnect between their school experiences and their lives beyond graduation. Second, the key roles of student ownership and their spiritual identity seemed to play a large part in how graduates perceive their spiritual formation today. Third, the positive and negative influences of teachers appeared to have a significant role in students' lives. And lastly, the application of what graduates learned, perceived, and experienced in high school appeared to play a role in how they incorporated their memories of those events in their decisions and lives after graduation. Throughout the data analyses, even these four common themes are interconnected as the influence of each theme can be observed throughout the other themes. In other words, none of the themes have the largest influence, as all of the themes rely on and work together to support each of the guiding questions in this research. Therefore, this discussion of the findings will center on the questions that guided this study and how the themes support each one.

Research Question One: How do Alumni Perceive their Attendance at an ACSI International School Influences their Ability to Live a Life after Graduation that Demonstrates Spiritual Formation?

All three Christian schools created a culture and environment based on common issues of values, beliefs, and morals within which students and staff interact. In fact, all of the participants interviewed generally referenced this culture in some way, whether they perceived it as positive or not. These references applied to both the school as a whole institution and the classroom experiences and interactions as a "mini-institution" within the whole.

Institutions that are like-minded on core issues are commonly diverse on other issues. This common like-mindedness creates a foundation of trust that "tends to strengthen rather than inhibit" communication, enabling "more open disagreement" and encouraging the members to "explore their differences open and fully" (Litfin, 2004 p. 29). Kim and Esquivel (2011) further noted that a like-minded environment contributes to the reinforcement of positive behaviors. These behaviors should be the outward expression of developed and internalized morals and values. In fact, ACSI (2008) desired that graduates demonstrate evidence of values that are consistent with a person of faith. Although Wilcox (2014) noted in a 2012 survey by Cardus that Christian schools are a significant factor in specific practices of students, this research and the survey suggested that the long-term effect still lacked the complete desired outcome. I suggested that one factor in the failure to fully accomplish this goal is the lack of the creation of an environment that promotes, supports, and enables critical and independent thinking.

Weinstock et al. (2009) noted that internalized values and autonomous morals are likely to be promoted in an environment that supports critical and independent thinking. Only two of the participants, Taddeo and Jose, who were from different schools, expressed a perception of

their school environment in this way. Although he did struggle at one point in high school with the "guilt of not being able to live up to expectations," Taddeo was given the opportunity to "talk and think through some of my doubts." At the same time, Jose stated that his apologetics class was "critical" and that the morals he lives by today were enforced by his time at his school. Unfortunately, this perception was the minority.

Four of the participants—Anahi, Hernan, Pedro, and Claudia—stressed their frustration that they were not provided the opportunity to question or grapple with their doubts and issues. The trust required within classroom settings that enables open disagreement and exploration of differences was absent. These same four graduates, along with Rafael, all referenced this aspect of trust when they perceived that teachers made judgmental comments or used a strict form of punishment that appeared to focus on words or actions with no mention of a desire to see a heart change. This lack of opportunity to work through their doubts and questions contributed to the feelings of being in a bubble.

Although Anahi, Pedro, and Rafael were the only participants who actually used the word *bubble* to describe their schools, four other graduates (Hernan, Claudia, Marcelo, and Juan) made similar references as they utilized descriptions about experiencing a shock, setback, difference, or struggle to adapt to their environment, or being at a crossroad outside of high school and being unprepared for faced experiences. It is interesting to note that in the most recent survey by Cardus (2014), the findings suggest that:

> Private schools, including Evangelical Protestant schools, are not more likely to produce
> graduates who are isolated from social differences among their close ties. It seems more
> likely, then, that the sociability and lack of social segregation within private school
> communities—if not explicit socialization in inclusive norms in these schools—forms

graduates who are equally if not more open to interaction with difference in their adult lives (p. 31).

A Christian school, however, should be a different atmosphere from the world. It is impossible to address each issue or struggle that students will confront upon graduation simply because those issues will change. Therefore, Christian schools must focus their efforts on forming students who know not only what they believe, but why they believe. In order to cultivate that identity, an environment that enables students to work through their doubts and questions must be created. Therefore, "we must commit to go beyond teaching children what to think and focus on how to think and how to do so biblically" (Marrah, 2012/2013 p. 19). Parker (2006) noted this time of working through questions as stage four of Fowler's Faith Theory, where in order to grow spiritually, one passes through a time of critical reflection and evaluation of inconsistencies. Rockenbach et al. (2012) also noted that it is common to struggle as one reflects on faith and spiritual growth. Christian schools need to expect and prepare for this phase by creating the safe and supportive environment. Unfortunately, the majority of the participants in this research shared a frustration of not being provided this opportunity. On the other hand, some of these participants also appear to lack a foundation in their identity, which is related and tied to the next research question where it will be further discussed.

Even though the majority of the participants acknowledged being unprepared, the degree to which they expressed this feeling varied. It is interesting to note that the seven who felt unprepared were representative of all three participating schools. Furthermore, while the two participants from the American Christian School mentioned this perception in a matter-of-fact tone, other participants conveyed frustration as they made more than one opinionated comment regarding this aspect of their experiences. These five represented the majority of the participants

from the International Christian School and from the Christian Academy School. The creation of

an environment in which students can grapple with questions and doubts was not the only aspect

of their school that was perceived to influence their inability to live a life that demonstrates

spiritual formation; the observations of and interactions with teachers during the high school

experience were also noted as an influence.

Students constantly observe and interact with others. All nine participants mentioned

teachers at some point in the data collection process. The majority of the comments focused on

actions of their teachers, whether observed actions or interactions the participants experienced.

In fact, the researcher noticed a relationship between those participants who focused on their

negative experiences or observations regarding teachers and those who expressed a lack of

opportunity to wrestle with their doubt and questions.

Four of the seven participants who expressed their perception of the lack of opportunity

to discuss their questions also expressed a view of negative interactions with or negative actions

of teachers. Only Pedro and Claudia did not mention a positive interaction with a teacher. In

fact, Pedro stated that the fact that every teacher was a Christian was "overbearing," and that

"everyone stares at you for not accepting the Bible already," while Claudia perceived negative

actions from her teachers that portrayed "micro-aggressions I endured." Both graduates

provided negative feedback about their schools throughout their responses, which will be

discussed further in the next research question. Anahi and Hernan recalled both positive and

negative instances regarding teachers. Anahi remembered the prejudiced comments she

observed in her teachers that appeared to be closed-minded and judgmental. Her only positive

memory of an interaction with a teacher actually took place outside of the school day when

Anahi shared some struggles with a teacher who then prayed with her. Hernan also mentioned

his perception of a teacher who made judgmental comments to him in front of the class. However, Hernan also remembered other teachers who "took time to discuss my relationship with Christ" as well as his soccer coach who was "interested in building character" and who "demonstrated what Christ meant." He recollected those who were "not forceful" about their faith, and described those teachers as being "passionate about Christ." This perception is noteworthy, as Hernan made the comment when answering the very first set of questions that he has "backed off from actively making myself visible as a Christian." The remaining graduates who expressed they could not work through their doubts also mentioned teachers, but in a positive way.

Of these three remaining graduates, only one participant provided a general description, while the other two shared about a specific teacher. Marcelo's comments about teachers were broad and related to how they supported a school perspective of everything being "centered on the Bible and Jesus." He also generally mentioned that teachers helped "solve problems that we had with each other or at home." Rafael, who earlier discussed perceiving his school to be strict, remembered that teachers were interested in their lives and that some were more like "mentors on the spiritual side" as they listened to their experiences. He shared a specific experience of an interaction with a teacher after school when he and his friends were "hanging out" in his room because they considered him a friend. One of Rafael's friends made an inappropriate comment, and the teacher did not react in a way they expected. Instead, the teacher "just spoke to us about . . . how he really controlled what he says and everything that he says he makes sure that he's speaking life into people and not bringing people down and not looking to offend other people with what he says." I believe this incident stood out to Rafael because the teacher did not respond as he perceived the school responded when someone stepped out of line.

Juan was the last participant who felt to be at a "crossroad" after high school. He stressed several times the positive influence that one specific teacher had on his life due to the fact that this teacher portrayed a "mission mind" and was "very real with us." This Bible teacher shared struggles in the Christian life and also gave each student a study Bible. He compared this teacher with his other Bible teachers throughout his years when he said that the other Bible classes were more academic and "filling in workbooks" and "not as interesting or impacting." Those participants who struggled with doubts and had a difficult time after high school were not the only ones who discussed the role that teachers played in their lives.

It is worth noting that although Taddeo and Jose both discussed the influence of teachers as mentors in their lives, they made different decisions in life, which will also be further discussed in the next research question. Despite the fact that Jose acknowledged that he had "mentors to follow and learn from" that did result in a "compassion for those in need" and a "healthy respect of others' religions and those that hold none," these mentors "did not sway" his decision regarding a personal relationship with Christ. On the other hand, Taddeo did acknowledge a personal relationship with Christ. Taddeo recognized the value of personal relationships and mentoring from teachers as well as the personal interests that teachers took in his life. He also appreciated teachers giving personal lessons from their lives and observing their personal life "being played out as a Christian." Furthermore, Taddeo benefitted from the testimony of teachers and was "influenced to have high expectations for ethics at his workplace and other areas of education and life." Regardless, Taddeo expressed his belief that although this area is "crucial, important, and has an effect" he did not believe that teacher influence is "ultimately the main thing."

These findings are consistent with previous research showing that the interaction with and role model of mentors influences the spiritual base created in one's life (Erikson, 1968; Eckelbarger, 2009). Many hours are spent at school during the course of one's life. Therefore, within a school setting, teachers become one set of role models. Consequently, a teacher's conduct and worldview influence the lives, including the spiritual formation, of students (Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975; Gaebelein, 1968; Pazmiño, 2008; Rest et al., 1969; Schultz, 2002; Wood, 2008). However, some research supports the idea that non-academic mentors outside of school have a heavy influence.

According to Shuster (2009) Stella (2003), non-academic areas, such as subculture and environment, affect spiritual development. Within an international school setting, many students tend to spend many hours at school due to involvement with after school activities or because the school has become their base for family activities and friendship. Several of the participants viewed some of their teachers or coaches as their friends, and those are the teachers they remembered as having an influence. A study by LeBlanc and Slaughter (2012) also noted that family, church, and youth group appear to have a stronger impact on adolescents than schools. According to my observations at several international and U.S.-based schools, including the three in the study, teachers within an international school setting appear to spend more time with students outside of the classroom, thus creating more of an atmosphere of family and a youth group. Furthermore, all three schools have provided opportunities, two during the school day and one after school one night a week, for discipleship groups. Taddeo, Marcelo, Juan, Jose, Anahi, and Pedro mentioned these types of groups, and most participated in them for at least a couple of years. These experiences discussed appear to have some influence on one's ability to

live a life after graduation that demonstrates spiritual formation. However, there is one connection in all of these experiences that resonates with me.

The findings within this study are more significant in light of research indicating the importance of authenticity. Powell (2010) noted that connections that are authentic influence spiritual development. As observed previously, several graduates connected to teachers who "were real"; they felt connected with these teachers. Teachers are like the hands of a school that put the mission into practice. Therefore, it is imperative that schools be aware of this as they hire teachers. They must search for teachers that have a visible testimony. God's Word must be at the center of an educator's thoughts and actions (Gaebelein, 1968). This is especially crucial when one considers the influence a teacher's worldviews appear to have on the worldviews of students (Fyock, 2008). Students must be able to see the practicality of what it means to live a life centered on Christ—to see some of the struggles and how one works through them. And in turn, as students struggle and have questions, the teacher's role is to give support and help to these students that enable them to work through the questions and grow.
Creating an authentic, supportive environment for students to engage and grow will support schools' desires to have graduates that continue to live a life that demonstrates spiritual formation. But, as previously mentioned, each of the research questions is intertwined. Simply creating an environment for students to grow spiritually will not guarantee spiritual formation. A relationship must be present, which is discussed in the next research question.

Research Question Two: How do Alumni Perceive that their Attendance at an ACSI International School Affects their Personal Relationship with Jesus Christ?

The social theories of Vygotsky (Woolfolk, 2007) and Bandura (1986) noted the impact that culture has on one's values and beliefs. Forrest (2013) identified the Apostle Paul's

acknowledgement that if a person does not actively seek to be formed by Christ, then culture and society will perform the task "(1 Cor. 11:1; I Cor. 15:33, Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:5)" (p. 33). This influence and pull, especially during the crucial time of adolescence when personal identity is developing, can be life-changing (Erikson, 1968; Kim & Esquivel, 2011). In fact, Brown (1994) proposed that "those who have focused on knowing God in younger years are likely to give focus to their faith journey in later years" (p. 4023). Additionally, adolescents have a capacity for abstract thought, which plays a role in identity formation.

In the area of spiritual formation, the adolescent development period brings a time of searching and questioning topics relevant to faith development and affects the spiritual identity of the youth (Barna, 2003; Rockenbach et al., 2012; Kim & Esquivel, 2011; Smith, 1994). Smith (1994) suggested that "We must not create young imitators, sending them off to college, work, or marriage as hollow believers who can only mimic truths that are not their own. They must learn to own their beliefs" (p. 3902). The results of this study have a strong significance in view of the research indicating that the culture created during this time may have an influence on the long-term spiritual identity of the graduate. Therefore, it is important to provide a healthy and safe environment that enables students to wrestle through their doubts and questions. However, as discussed in the implications of the first research question, trust must be present to provide an environment conducive to allowing students to work through doubts. Unfortunately, five of the participants commented on certain circumstances and approaches that support the existence of legalism, which counteracts a healthy and safe environment of trust.

Legalistic individuals want to manage others and to deal with behavior based on the rules and expectations of others to conform to religious expectations, while kingdom living centers on dealing with the life of the individual, increasing knowledge of truth, communicating that truth to

others, and practicing it in one's daily life (Foster, 1988; Knowing Christ Conference, 2013a; Willard, 2002). Beard (2015) posited that "the focus of spiritual formation has become information and behavior" (p. 179). Five of the participants (Rafael, Hernan, Pedro, Claudia, and Anahi) perceived experiences that were legalistic, and the majority of their attitudes, views, reactions, and purpose in life all appear to be affected.

Rafael stated that he saw his school as being full of "Bible pounders" and environment in which a life that abided by the student handbook and met the behavioral expectations of faculty and staff was promoted. He considered himself as "a rebel according to their standards" and struggled during this time in school. When in elementary and middle school, he was more involved in the spiritual activities, but when he got to high school, he did not "partake" in the optional activities and stated that he was "never really engaged" because he "didn't feel comfortable" as it "required a lot out of me." Rafael also described feeling "out of my comfort zone." He perceived the spiritual activities as a chore. When discussing his current, personal relationship with the Lord, Rafael hesitated and appeared to have a hard time putting his thoughts into words. He saw God as someone he turned to for comfort and in hard times, as a "fire extinguisher" to hold him back "from going overboard." He wondered what more there is to life, did not know what his purpose is, and was at the "point where I don't even know how to go about it." It appeared that Rafael did not have the strong personal relationship base to build upon, and his perceptions of his legalistic experiences do not encourage a positive spiritual formation. Rafael is not the only participant who seemed to lack a strong, personal relationship with Christ that cultivates a clear observation of spiritual formation.

Hernan was the other participant who seemed to be very unsure in describing his personal relationship with God. His perception of his Christian school actually encompassed all Christian

communities, as he believed that "judgementalism is common" in all Christian circles due to the pattern of "instigating guilt." He made an interesting observation when he said that high school students are at a stage of development where they cannot discern between "God's Word and a person's opinion." Adolescent research supports his statement, as during that stage, adolescents are still observing others; trying to fit in; and forming their identity, thoughts, and beliefs (Bandura, 1986; Erikson, 1968; Gorman, 2006; Roaten & Roaten, 2012). Hernan claims to believe in Jesus, but when it came to the personal aspect of the relationship, he stated that he constantly considers "what my relationship with Jesus is" and stated, "I possibly talk to him." He also believed that "being a representative of Jesus is a very demanding request, especially for someone not involved in a religious environment." On the other hand, Hernan believed his purpose in life was to impact others and "demonstrate Christ." He was involved in a Christian group at his public university, but had very little interaction with any other Christians outside of that group. Just as Hernan and Rafael seemed to demonstrate an uncertainty regarding their personal relationship with God, two other participants (Claudia and Pedro), who also viewed their experiences as legalistic, expressed strong opinions about their personal relationship with God.

Claudia only completed the initial questions and the journal, as she did not wish to be interviewed. Regardless, in her responses to the initial questions and the journal, she was very adamant that her school only influenced her decision to attend a Christian college in the States and stated that her time in high school enabled her to "understand the close minded [sic] fundamental ways some Christians have." She was involved in an outreach group, but has no good memories of interactions with teachers. Claudia seemed to have a very successful career and was concerned about helping others. Although Claudia enjoys having conversations about

Christian tradition and theology, she acknowledged that she did not have that opportunity to question in high school. She does not attend church and considers herself to be agnostic. She was not the only one who adamantly claimed to not have a personal relationship with God.

Pedro considered himself a Christian while attending high school but also claimed to not have the opportunity to question and work through doubts. He did point out that for his required service hours, he "chose a spiritual activity" and was even on "the worship team a couple of times." However, he described only negative experiences with teachers and perceived his experiences as legalistic ones that provided no opportunity to "explore apologetics" or give evidence of the existence of God. Along with these experiences, Pedro had some other situations after graduation that contributed to his decision to become an atheist. However, during our conversation, he did request that if I came across anything that proves God's existence, to please share with him, which leads me to believe that he is still unsure of his beliefs and is still searching. These four participants (Rafael, Hernan, Claudia, Pedro) recalled their high school experiences as legalistic and they do not appear to portray genuine spiritual formation. Research supports this finding, as it suggests that legalism creates a barrier that hinders the process of genuine spiritual formation (Willard, 2002). However, one of five participants who viewed their schools as legalistic is an exception to this finding.

Anahi was one of five participants who portrayed evidence of having a personal relationship with God and had the desire to grow spiritually. She referred to her time in high school as being a bubble and she struggled after graduation. Although Anahi turned away from what she had been taught, she "never abandoned her faith" and has started to seek God's plan for her. She was able to overcome the barrier of legalism. At the same time, she is the only one of these five that claim to have experienced genuine spiritual formation, and now "understands

value as a daughter of Christ." Four participants did not share the experiences that the rest of the participants did, and, for the most part, their spiritual formation was notably different.

Three of the four participants in this group all came from the same school, which appeared to be a factor in their viewpoints. These four participants did not view their schools as being legalistic, but only two focused on the ability to question and work through their doubts, while the other two focused more on the influence of the teachers. However, only three claimed to have a personal relationship with God.

Taddeo and Jose, two of the other participants from different schools, did not express perceiving their school environment as legalistic and actually stressed the opposite viewpoint. However, the two showed different outcomes. Taddeo was given the opportunity to "talk and think through some of my doubts" and to "appropriately have my Christian life be my own." Taddeo was a strong example that supported the research aims of kingdom education because by being supported through his questions, he was enabled to work through them and be fully prepared to serve Christ on a daily basis for life (Schultz, 2002). Taddeo appeared to demonstrate genuine spiritual formation in all aspects of his daily life, as his activities and perspectives are centered on God. On the other hand, even though Jose stated that his apologetics class was "critical" and that the morals he lives by today were enforced by his time at his school, he questioned and struggled with his identity his senior year and ultimately made the decision not to have a relationship with Christ. Jose did note that his decision had nothing to do with the school, and that the school "didn't sway to be or not to be"; it was just a personal choice. The remaining two participants, Juan and Marcelo, who did not perceive their school as legalistic, did not focus their comments on the ability to question or work through doubts. Their focuses were different.

Juan was appreciative of the "building blocks" that his school gave him that formed his "Christian base" for living. He acknowledged facing a crossroad in life after graduation and making some poor decisions, but stated that "God loves me unconditionally and guides my daily life decisions. . . . He is all I need." Juan's memories focused more on the testimony of a teacher who lived a Christian life in a very real way. The influence of that is evident in Juan's daily life, as he is involved in living out his faith in serving others. His purpose in life is to "honor the Lord with my life and be a blessing," and he feels the "need to share his testimony with others." His daily life appears to portray genuine spiritual formation.

Marcelo, the last participant in this group, was very general in all of his comments. He did acknowledge having a personal relationship with God and felt the "need to be in touch with God." He demonstrated spiritual formation to an extent, but it was difficult to determine how genuine it was as his comments were generalized. He was very tired when we talked, as it was late at night after a full day of classes and work.

These nine participants were honest and straightforward regarding their personal relationship with God and their spiritual formation experiences. Although it did appear that their school climates and cultural experiences did influence their decisions to have a personal relationship with God to a certain extent, it was clear that it was also ultimately a personal decision. The cultivation and growth of that personal relationship is what a school and others can influence most. That includes one's decision to live a life that demonstrates spiritual formation, which will be addressed in the last research question.

Research Question Three: Based upon Their Time at an ACSI International School, How Do Alumni Describe the Impact of Spiritual Formation on Their Attitude and Action Towards Living a Life for Christ That is Visible to Others?

The legalistic experiences perceived by five participants appear to have impeded their spiritual growth. Even though Anahi portrays a life that evidences spiritual formation, she was frustrated by her experiences and observations of her school culture and teachers. Due to her perception of her time in high school, she struggled with how she saw God and turned away from a "Christian life" for a time after graduation. Her attitude and outlook on life have also been affected. Although she struggled with actions of adults at her school, she now has the "maturity to see that they were good people." She saw her worth in Christ and appeared to have an attitude of seeking God first in her decisions. Since graduation, she has struggled to find a church to attend where she felt like she belonged. Research supported her feelings as adolescents need to feel a sense of belonging and identifying with others, which perceived negative school experiences can hinder (Manning, 2008; Sankey & Huon, 1999). Furthermore, Anahi still struggles with the area of her responsibility to verbally share the gospel with others. She stated in her interview that she transmits the gospel through her actions. Both Claudia and Pedro seemed to have been greatly impacted through their perceived experiences, as they were mostly negative about their time at their school and have personally chosen not to live a life that portrays God. Hernan and Rafael seemed to be unsure of how to live a life that demonstrates spiritual formation in a visible way. Hernan's experiences of a perceived judgmental environment and his observation of those he categorizes as being passionate for Christ by not being forceful appeared to have influenced him to live in a way that is not visible to others that he follows Christ. On the other hand, Rafael seemed unsure of what his relationship with God

should look like, and therefore struggled with living a visible Christian life when surrounded by friends who do not have a personal relationship with Christ. Once again, those who did not perceive a legalistic school experience appeared to have an opposite attitude and live life differently.

All three schools required students to participate in some type of outreach to their communities. These activities varied, but all involved serving others. The majority of participants mentioned being involved in an outreach activity, and most of these activities seemed to be along the lines of serving the community in a tangible way. These experiences do appear to have a positive impact on the participants, as most expressed a desire to help others and even see that as part of their purpose in life. However, based on the data collected, I posit that students having time to spiritually build into the lives of others appears to have an impact more so than just serving others. This is significant in light of research by LeBlanc and Slaughter (2012), who proposed that nonacademic areas, such as mission opportunities, appear to have a stronger impact than school experiences. Taddeo, Juan, Jose, and Marcelo all mentioned having experiences of camp. At least two of the three schools have a camp for their students. Even the experiences between these four appear to have a marked difference. Marcelo attended as a camper, and his time there helped as he was "going through hard stuff." Jose's camp experience was more like a vacation Bible school where he was provided the opportunity to serve as a mentor. Taddeo and Juan were campers during their younger years, but in their last two years of high school, they were given the opportunity to serve as junior counselors at the elementary camp. Of these four, Taddeo and Juan are living a life that visibly demonstrates spiritual formation as they are both involved in Bible studies and pouring into the lives of others to basically disciple and mentor them. This finding is significant in light of previous research by

Pazmiño (2008), as he noted that when opportunities are provided to students to build learned principles into the lives of others, students are able to see and experience what should be the natural outflow of faith. The opportunities provided to Taddeo and Juan to put into practice what they had been learning and observing appears to have had a significant impact on living a life that demonstrates genuine spiritual formation.

Implications

The implications of this study have theoretical and practical implications. These primarily affect three areas of educational practices: the curriculum, the school and classroom environment, and the hiring and professional development of educators

Theoretical

First, all schools have curricula that are constantly being evaluated in order to fill gaps and to support the expected learning outcomes. The findings of the research indicate the necessity to be more intentional to create aspects of the curriculum, specifically in Bible and apologetics classes, that facilitate an environment to question and work through doubts. Creating such an environment would provide the opportunity for students to internalize biblical values as their own and to integrate these values into their lives, thus allowing the formation of a strong biblical identity that would remain over time (Long, 2001; Van Hoof, 1999; Weinstock et al., 2009). Rhea (2011) posited that an effective goal could be developing cultural literacy in order to discern and critique the messages "from an informed and enriched theological perspective" (p. 8). However, the curriculum is not the only key to support this environment.

Second, both the school and classroom environment need to be one that is perceived as supportive. Smith (1994) and Wilhoit (2008) noted that whether or not it is acknowledged, spiritual formation takes place in everyone regardless if it is toward or away from Christ. The

direction ultimately depends on the individual. However, a Christian school can cultivate an environment that demonstrates a genuine example of living a Christian life and therefore encourages a positive spiritual formation. According to Sink et al. (2007), healthy spiritual development is a primary goal for Christian schools. Thus, the environment must be "integrally Christian" (Davis, 2013, para 8).

Practical

When evaluating the data and the results, a practical implication was noted in the area of hiring and training educators. The hiring and professional development of educators must be a high priority of school administration. During the hiring process, teachers must be well-screened to ensure a common worldview base. Professional development opportunities must provide support and training to help educators become more adept in responding to students as they question and struggle through their doubts. Diekema (2000) stated "that a truly Christian college is distinguished by a mission statement that articulates a Christian worldview and implements it throughout the curriculum and by a faculty whose scholarship is anchored in that same worldview" (p. 57). Furthermore, it is vital that teachers have support and encouragement as well as opportunities to be equipped (Pazmiño, 1994). Pazmiño (1994) explained the importance of this:

> By discerning existing spiritualties of teachers . . . a leader is better able to affirm and/or confront those loves that order the inner and outer faith life of teachers and students alike. A concern for the order of our loves and lives implies an interest in discipleship, discipline, and stewardship to which all Christian are called (p. 150).

According to this study, it appears that teachers would benefit from professional development that focuses on true discipleship, creating an atmosphere that enables students to address their

doubts, and strengthening their ability to help students navigate through their doubts and questions while feeling confident in doing so.

Delimitations and Limitations

This researcher set several delimitations for this study. A number of limitations also became evident throughout this process.

At the time of this research, 13 American international schools in South America were accredited by ACSI. Although they had commonalities, there were differences that set them apart. The differences involved their specific vision statements, the size of the school grounds, the size of the student body, and the number of years that the schools had existed. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the researcher set the delimitation that graduates chosen were from three of the 13 schools that the researcher had personally visited and were similar. Regardless, cultural differences could have impacted this study as a limitation simply by cultural differences between the three countries that the schools were located in. Additionally, significant differences in spiritual formation can exist if there are theological differences (Wood, 2008).

Participants for this study must have graduated from one of these three schools between 2007 and 2009. This delimitation provided opportunity for participants to have graduated from a university and have almost a year to get settled into a job and a life routine. However, as with many international schools, students did not always choose to remain in the host country to attend university. The three participating schools had graduates that have traveled to countries in Europe, Asia, and North and South America to further their studies. Although interviewees were in a natural setting of their choice, they had to have reliable access to internet. This delimitation was set as the researcher was unable to travel to each participant for economic and availability reasons.

Although there is a certain level of English proficiency required for entrance into the three participating schools, and all offer a support system for their students, some students' levels of English might not be strong enough to enable their participation in this study. Therefore, the delimitation was made that each participant must be able to adeptly express themselves in written and oral English for the purposes of this study.

This study was limited in several ways. First, the schools utilized in this study were located in South America. Although the schools have systems in place to communicate with alumni, not all alumni keep their information up to date and contact can be lost. Therefore, the researcher could not contact every graduate within the stipulated years as potential participants, thus limiting the number of possible participants. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), qualitative work is not typically generalizable. This also limited the ability to transfer the findings of this study to other institutions, as the goal was to develop a deep understanding rather than gather data used to demonstrate wide applicability. Regardless, the goal was to provide "as much detail about the study's context as possible to enable transferability to different contexts, but it is up to participants from those contexts to determine whether the findings are relevant there" (Neuman, 2014, p. 72).

Second, the contacted graduates were volunteers, which required the willingness and availability to give their time to participate. Third, due to the number of possible participants and the number of actual participants, there was a limit of the ability to apply the findings of this study to other institutions, which is common in qualitative research (Neuman, 2014).

Due to the fact that participants were graduates of international schools, they were located throughout the world. This resulted in two limitations. First, the lack of face-to-face interaction may have hindered richer field notes. Secondly, time differences and schedules

limited the availability of some participants, which may have limited the amount that some of the participants shared.

Another limitation was made that each participant must be able to adeptly express themselves in written and oral English for the purposes of this study. However, this did not seem to be an issue, as it appeared that no one that responded had any issues with their level of English.

Finally, my experience with and observations of this topic posed a risk of maintaining impartiality and perspective. My experience and background of within this topic and within Christian schools in South America were viewed both as a help and as a limitation for this research. The observations of struggles and successes within this area that led me to research this topic, but this motivation was a limitation as it could have hindered my ability to bracket feelings and opinions.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several areas for future qualitative study could stem from the results of this research. First, duplicating this study in other schools and locations could help determine transferability of these findings. Graduates from the same school but from different decades could shed more light on whether or not the themes have changed over time. Third, a longitudinal study to track high school freshmen over a period of several years would provide more insight into the process of and factors that influence spiritual formation. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct an extensive qualitative study by traveling to several Christian schools and holding focus groups at a reunion after gathering individual information via online surveys or journals. Lastly, a quantitative and qualitative study could be done focusing on the educators and their attitude and feeling of preparedness to create an environment that allows students to question.

Summary

Mission and outcome statements of Christian schools include the spiritual aspect of the students, and schools evaluate their effectiveness in this area within their current student body. However, no assessment is done to evaluate the long-term influence of their graduates. This study attempted to explore the impact that Christians schools may have on their graduates.

Three Christian international schools located in South America were chosen for this research. After the appropriate permissions were acquired, school mission statements were reviewed, and the directors of each school sent a letter and a link to a survey to all the 2007 through 2009 graduates for whom the directors had contact information. I contacted those graduates who agreed to participate. They were asked to complete a journal and be interviewed. A total of nine graduates from the three schools participated.

An analysis of the data revealed four common themes: the perception of a disconnect between life in a Christian high school and life after graduation, the student's ownership and identity of their spiritual formation, the influences of their teachers, and students' opportunity to apply what was being learned and taught. These themes together provided insight into the three guiding research questions.

Ultimately, the transformation of a life depends on the individual, but the school can take steps to encourage positive spiritual formation. To do so, schools need to analyze their curriculum, school culture, and processes of hiring and training faculty.

With the prominent issues evident in our world today, Christian schools need to evaluate their curriculum, school environment, and hiring and professional development practices to support and encourage spiritual formation. The goal is a spiritual formation that is strong and long-lasting. Based on this study, I consider the school environment and the educators to be the

most critical aspects for a school to analyze. While teaching and maintaining a strong biblical worldview is important, the data suggested that it is equally important to provide an environment that allows students to work through their doubts and questions. This environment includes the importance of providing opportunities for students to put into practice what is learned, which includes discipling others. Equally important are the educators who create this environment. Administrators need to hire educators with a strong biblical worldview and make sure teachers are trained in discipling and guiding students as they grapple with formation of their belief system.

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APPENDIX A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 5, 2014

Dawn Monzon
IRB Approval 1859.060514: The Impact of ACSI International Christian Schools on
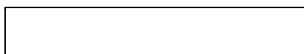the Spiritual Formation of Its Graduates

Dear Dawn,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the
Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection
proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to
human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms
for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the
requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be
included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your
research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX B

ACSI

ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL

Enabling Christian

Educators and Schools

Worldwide

May 29, 2014

To the IRB and Others Whom It May Concern:

The Association of Christian Schools International grants permission for Dawn Monzon to utilize the international school contact information of our association to conduct her research. We have confidence in Dawn Monzon to responsibly conduct research using the information and connections we have provided her. ACSI endorses her research and looks forward with anticipation to learn from her findings.

Sincerely,

David K. Wilcox, Ph. D.
Assistant Vice President - Global

APPENDIX C

Administrator Consent Form

The Impact of ACSI International Christian Schools

on the Spiritual Formation of Its Graduates

Dawn M. Monzon

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the impact of ACSI International Christian schools on the spiritual formation of its graduates. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an administrator from one of the chosen schools. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Dawn M. Monzon, doctoral candidate at Liberty University's School of Education.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of ACSI accredited International Schools in South America on the spiritual formation of graduates from those schools.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked do the following:

First, you will be asked to contact all graduates between the years of 2007-2009 via email to participate in the study and pass on returned information to the researcher. You will be given the information to send to them, and the process should take approximately thirty minutes. Additionally, you will be asked to send me any information sent back to you from the graduates. Secondly, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will be audio-recorded & transcribed (with an opportunity to review, comment and correct the interview transcript). The interview should take approximately one hour.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has minimal risks that are no more than you would encounter in everyday life. There are no benefits to participation. However, results of this study may be beneficial to Christian educators and administrators as they evaluate the effectiveness of their programs that educate and prepare students to have a strong, life-long spiritual formation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

The privacy and confidentiality of the participant will be protected through the use of an alphanumeric code (no SSN/names). The memory cards, interview transcripts, and other data will be kept in a locked storage file in the researcher's home. The cards will be destroyed at the end of the study. The transcripts will be maintained in locked storage for three years. The data

may be used for future publication but with great care taken to insure confidentiality of the participants.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or with your associated school. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

You are free to withdraw at any time from this study. If you desire to do so, please email the researcher with your request. Any information collected will be deleted from the researcher's computer if you so desire.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Dawn M Monzon. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at

(903) 941-9332 and/or Dr. Margaret Ackerman (advisor) at (434) 582-2445.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent

to participate in the study.

☐I agree to be audio recorded in the interview portion of the study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Consent Form

The Impact of ACSI International Christian Schools

on the Spiritual Formation of Its Graduates

Dawn M. Monzon

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the impact of ACSI international Christian schools on the spiritual formation of its graduates. You were selected as a possible participant because you are either an administrator from one of the chosen schools, or are a graduate of one of the chosen schools. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Dawn M. Monzon, doctoral candidate at Liberty University's School of Education.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of ACSI accredited international schools in South America on the spiritual formation of graduates from those schools.

Procedures:

This study has two levels of participation. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked do the following for the first level:

Respond to the three open-ended questions that are also attached to this email.

If you desire to further participate, we would ask you to do the following things for the second level:

Respond to a total of eleven broad questions in an online journal.

Answer interview questions that will be audio-recorded & transcribed (with an opportunity to review, comment and correct the interview transcript).

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has minimal risks that are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

There are no benefits to participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

The privacy and confidentiality of the participant will be protected through the use of an alphanumeric code (no SSN/names). The memory cards, interview transcripts, and other data will be kept in a locked storage file in the researcher's home. The cards will be destroyed at the end of the study. The transcripts will be maintained in locked storage for three years. The data

may be used for future publication but with great care taken to insure confidentiality of the participants.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or with your associated school. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

You are free to withdraw at any time from this study. If you desire to do so, please email the researcher with your request and state which level of participation you wish to withdraw from. Any information collected from the levels you wish to withdraw from will be deleted from the researcher's computer.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Dawn M Monzon. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at

903-941-9332 and/or Dr. Margaret Ackerman(advisor) at XXXXXXXXXX.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Human Subject Office, 1971University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent

to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

Standardized Open-Ended Journal Prompts and Questions

First Set

6. Share something positive that happened today and how you responded.

7. What does a typical day look like for you?

8. Share a challenge you have faced this week and your attitude toward the challenge.

9. Share how your actions today affected someone around you.

10. Share what a typical weekend looks like for you.

Second Set

8. Share a favorite memory from high school.

9. Share a least favorite memory from high school.

10. Talk about some of the memories that come to mind when you remember high school.

11. Share some of the highlights in your life since high school.

12. Share some of the challenges in your life since high school.

13. Share your thoughts on the role God plays, if any, in your life today.

14. Discuss the type of impact attending a Christian school has had on your life.

Standardized Open-Ended Individual Interview Questions

Questions

Pre-graduation from a Christian High School

1. In what year did you graduate, and at what grade did you enter the school?

2. What 'spiritual activities' did your school have?

3. Were you involved in those activities? If so, how? If not, why?

4. What actions did your school take to encourage a personal relationship with the Lord?

5. What aspect of your school best prepared you to maintain a close, personal relationship with the Lord? The least?

6. What event during your time as a student at that school influenced you the most/least with regard to your spiritual formation?

Post-graduation

7. Where are you currently living?

8. What is your current job?

9. What are the main interests and/or activities with which you are involved?

10. Describe your current personal relationship with the Lord.

11. Do you regularly have personal devotions and prayer time?

12. Do you attend church? How often? If you don't attend church, why not?

13. Are you actively involved in any way with your church? If so, in what ways and how often? If not, why?

APPENDIX F

Opening Interview Statement

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and helping me with my research. I really appreciate it. You mentioned in an email that you look forward to learning from me. Before we start, I want to make sure you understand that for my research, I need to maintain the integrity of our interview; I need to stick to my questions. This interview is an opportunity for me to get a look at your life then and now. I appreciate your allowing me to do that.

APPENDIX G

Sample Journal

Journal 1:

    a) Share something positive that happened today and how you responded.
I saw a movie that a buddy and I wanted to see on list of movies on cable for the day so I texted him and invited him over to watch it and eat pizza.

    b) What does a typical day look like for you?
Start work at 6:40, staff devotionals, about 3-4 classes a day consisting of computer and Bible lessons. Helping people with their IT issues on campus and fixing computers sporadically and sometimes frantically throughout the day. Lunch at 11AM. After school is out I work for about an hour finishing projects and prepare facebook posts for a Testament sharing ministry. Commute home at around 3:30. Some days I run for 20 min. Usually at 6:30 to 8PM I start an evening ministry-related activity. Almost all of them end around 9:30 and the rest at about 11:30PM.

    c) Share a challenge you have faced this week and your attitude toward the challenge.
I was asked a favor to man the sound booth for a church Christmas play rehearsal, but I turned down the offer, on the basis of being over committed on time. I tried to be respectful and maintain a firm position after being insisted to help.

    d) Share how your actions today affected someone around you.
I gave a neighbor a lift to his block. It was raining so I am sure he would have gotten more wet if he would have come by bus.

    e) Share what a typical weekend looks like for you.
Every other Friday night, a very relaxed ministry for college age young adults happens at the home of a church member. Usually involves fellowship, games, Bible study and food. Other than sometimes coordinating some of the activities and lessons, I usually buy and prepare food and usually give people a ride home.

Saturday mornings is usually sleep in time, or time to catch up on graphic design work, or a day to run errands (like documents or shopping) in town. Saturday afternoons is usually relax at home time. Saturday evenings, I with a group of about 7 other volunteers, run a youth group for about 50-80 youth.

Sunday mornings is church service. Afternoon and evenings are mostly naps, outing with friends, or prepare for the coming week.

Sample coded Journal

Journal 2 Second through Fourth Week

a) Share a favorite memory from high school.

My guess, some fond memories from HS would be spending time with friends after school, around the neighborhood and at events.

b) Share a least favorite memory from high school.

Having a 50 minuet bus ride home.

c) Talk about some of the memories that come to mind when you remember high

school.

(specific school event) was always a high light of the year. Mostly spending time with friends in class and at on campus events such and (specific school events).

d) Share some of the highlights in your life since high school.
Finishing college. Getting a job and successful events at church and ministry.

e) Share some of the challenges in your life since high school.
Dealing with relationships, and figuring out what to do with my life.

f) Share your thoughts on the role God plays, if any, in your life today.

I am highly dependent on Him and regularly need to draw near to him. Thankfully he continues to mold my character and attitude.

g) Discuss the type of impact attending a Christian school has had on your life.

Other than being exposed to His Word and to tools for being a Christian, I would note how the standards and level or ethics has influenced me to have a high expectation for ethics at the workplace or in other areas of education and life.

APPENDIX H

Sample Coded Interview

Researcher: Ok um, so you just mentioned ==you were not involved in any of the optional activities==?

Interviewee: No. I mean I got along with the people who were the ==chaplains. I talked to them every now and then==

Researcher: Uh uh.

Interviewee: Uh. ==I never really engaged in== the uh in the uh yeah not really engaged

Researcher: Ok. Uh do you have any any uh ideas as to why you did not? Why you did not ever get involved in the optional activities or?

Interviewee: I, ==I didn't really feel comfortable in it==. It was something that um ==required a lot out of me==. I mean I did==, I was more involved in those things during my uh elementary and middle school== ==before high school…==

Researcher: Ok

Interviewee: …and but it took out, ==I feel like it took a lot out of me. I didn't really feel comfortable in those (?) environment== and talking about certain things. I guess it ==just out of my comfort zone==

Researcher: Ok ok. Uh what, what actions, you kind of alluded to some, but what actions did your school take that to encourage a personal relationship for you to have a personal relationship with the Lord?

Interviewee: Um, I think the school as a whole well they had the chapel and the spiritual emphasis week, but then the ==teachers were also very interested in the students' lives== ==and would==

ask um you know questions and um if we were going through a hard time go by step to give us what to look for to look for God or look for Jesus.

Researcher: Ok. Alright. What aspect of your school do you, do you believe best prepared you to have and maintain a close personal relationship with the Lord.

Interviewee: Actually, I think the actually the personal relationships that I had with uh my close friend relationships that I had with the teachers there. There were definitely a couple that impacted my life and were more mentors then specially in the spiritual side and just listening to their experiences and what they had to say, um definitely impacted me and that is what I think of…

Researcher: Ok

Interviewee: …when I'm up to something, yeah.

APPENDIX I

Emerging Themes

Data Collection: Coding #1-- Personal relationship with Christ

#1

- So, I mean it's definitely on my mind. Um, I know it definitely uh the relationship with uh Jesus helps me uh not to do something you know? It's a form to hold me back from going overboard and just like completely go uh go crazy out of my mind…

- You know there's like definitely some days that um the work is overwhelming or I miss my family at home and that's where I turn to to find comfort.

#2

- I remember trying to kind of see for myself what I believed and along the way made some mistakes, and realized that like God had used those mistakes to kind of help me understand others who are kind of lost and searching for the truth so, and I just believe in my life God's faithfulness.

- There has really been the faith to continue doing what I'm doing, and being obedient, and sharing the word with others.

- So I would say my life experiences have given me an opportunity, have kind of, just kind of a journal and other ideas of who God is.

- And I believe going to a Christian, I learned a lot about the Bible in Bible school and college, and I feel like all that basis has really helped me with understanding why I believe the way exactly I do believe.

#3

- Well, I don't think he exists.

- Cause I don't think God exists.

- When I was a Christian, I thought it was (indistinguishable) convert as many people as possible.

- When I was a Christian, I thought it was my responsibility to to convert as many people as possible.

- I don't think my nonbelief has too much to do with what I did at CAI. Um, I mean you know I was a Christian there, so I guess my years at CAI made me Christian to begin with; but I don't see that uh, I don't see uh that anything that CAI could have done could have kept me a Christian later.

APPENDIX J

Participants' Feedback

Initial email:

Good morning!!! I deeply apologize for taking an extreme amount of time to get in touch with you. Life has been challenging, so I have been unable to move as quickly as I wanted. I am FINALLY starting to write my last 2 chapters of my dissertation in which you participated. Part of my dissertation to ensure that my results are 'accurate' as possible is to share those with you AND get your feedback. I took all of your interviews, journals, and 3 initial question reponses and looked for commonality between all of you. I had several key words/themes that were common and eventually combined them into 4 main themes.

My goal is to have Chapter 4 (which discusses the results) done by Monday night. Below, you will find a copy of the table of the main themes that I will be discussing as well as a DRAFT of the start of the first theme.   (pseudonyms used)

I would tremendously appreciate if you would respond to this email and give any thoughts, comments, or reactions

Reaction #1: Sounds good
Reaction #2: Dawn, I'm glad that you are almost done with your research. You've done a lot of work. It is understandable that a lot of people that went to christian schools went through some adjustments after High School. I'm glad that I was able to help with your dissertation and I'm sure that it will be a success.