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# A Qualitative Study on How a Teacher's Religious Beliefs Affect the Choices They Make in the Classroom

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# A Qualitative Study on How a Teacher's Religious Beliefs Affect the Choices They Make in the Classroom

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For graduation with Honors

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## Abstract

This qualitative research project explores how a teacher's organized religious beliefs may influence their practice and the choices they make in the classroom. Such areas of impact include character development, classroom management, development of lesson plans, the handling of difficult parents and colleagues, discipline, and a teacher's overall attitude while teaching. It is recognized that there are many hidden ways our beliefs shape the choices we make. This project focuses specifically on how organized *religious* beliefs and practices affect an educator's choices. The research involved the interviewing of nine educators from the Ohio school system ranging from those who teach kindergarten to professors at universities. Private religious school teachers as well as public were interviewed using the same list of questions for each. Though a wider array of religions and non-religions was desired to be studied and represented, only those of Judaism, Christianity, and atheism are present in this study.\* Five themes emerged from the data and were analyzed. Overall, the teachers who considered themselves to be Christian or Jewish seemed to be heavily influenced by their religious beliefs while the atheist teachers were not as influenced and tended to keep religion out of their classroom as much as possible. This study shows the importance of

educator's recognizing their religious influences and choices they make. In previous studies, religion in the classroom has been found to have both positive and negative effects. Teachers have a strong influence on the students they teach and must be aware of how the choices they make, by what they say or do, impacts the students they teach.

\* It is important to note that atheism is a view on religion, but it is not a religion itself.

### **Introduction**

Every belief a person has shapes the choices they make. So why shouldn't this be true for religious beliefs? I started this research by first wondering how teachers, especially in public schools, are able to separate their religious beliefs with their work. During the forming of the United States of America, the founders of this nation agreed on the idea of separating the church and state. This has been a vital part in shaping the democratic values of the United States. This continued belief of the separation of church and state can be seen in the third article in the Bill of Rights which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof (History of the Separation, 2003)." We have freedom of religion in the United States, including in our schools, but not in regards to the expression of a teacher's religious beliefs in the classroom.

However, it was not always this way. The first public schools in the United States were created by the Massachusetts Puritans in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Their goal was to teach children to read so that they could then read the Bible (Marshall, 2008). Slowly other religious sects, such as Catholicism, had problems with the way the Protestant-based public schools taught about certain aspects of the Christian religion. Alternative schools started being formed where parents felt the religion they practiced was being correctly taught in the school. This is even seen today when a child is taken from a public school because the school failed to accommodate for the beliefs of the parents religious minority group (Marshall, 2008).

Although U.S. schools were established from the beginning with religious values and a curriculum that matched the religious demographics of their communities, those values quickly became contentious when the demographics of the community changed from the original religious majority (Marshall, 2008).

Public school positions on religion in the classrooms are changing today as well. More criticism is being thrown at schools who continue to put up Christmas Trees in the hallways or sing Christmas carols during the school plays. The only way to help minimize some of the conflict is by creating a school culture that is more sensitive to and culturally informed about other people's religious beliefs (Marshall, 2008).

Furthermore, there has been continuous tension in the United States over the separation of church and state. On one side, there are those who feel religion is a positive aspect to a classroom and should be shared freely by both students and their teachers. On the other side of the argument are those who feel that no teacher in a public school system should ever mention or show their own personal religious affiliation.

Below I will briefly highlight some of the many controversial news reports and trials that were based on the separation of church and state. The first trial to be discussed is *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1962). This case prohibited mandatory bible reading in public schools (*Abington School District v. Schempp* n.d.). There was also *Engle v. Vitale* (1961) where it was found that the reading of a nondenominational prayer at the start of a school day violated the "establishment of religion" clause of the First Amendment (*Engel v. Vitale* n.d.). Finally we have *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1971) that exempted Amish children from having to always attend school until the age of 16. This case came from parents who were being criminalized for not allowing their children to attend school because of religious reasons. The Court held that individual's interests in the free exercise of religion under the First Amendment was more important than

the State's interests in compelling school attendance beyond the eighth grade (*Wisconsin v. Yoder* n.d.).

Joanne Marshall, in the article *Whose Religious Values?*, discusses how an increase in court rulings over whether a religious practice in the school is right or wrong has mainly stemmed from the Scopes trial of 1925:

During the *Scopes* trial of 1925, the nation watched as Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan battled in a Tennessee courtroom to decide whether John Scopes, a high school biology teacher, could teach evolution. Since then, courts have ruled on cases involving not only the teaching of evolution, but also school prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance and appropriate winter holiday practices. These cases always involve interpretation of the freedom of religion clauses of the First Amendment: the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses (Marshall, 2008, p. 3).

Newspapers and other forms of media also contain reports on teachers imposing their religious beliefs on their students. For example, on January 24, 2014, a teacher at Negreet High School belittled a Buddhist student and told him his religion was 'stupid.' The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit against the Sabine Parish School Board on the student's behalf (Kuruvilla 2014). Then on February 19, 2015, a group of atheists threatened to sue because a "beloved teacher" had angels and crosses put on her memorial (DeMarche 2015). The Huffington Post reported on a teacher who had threatened to discipline an atheist student

for not standing for the Pledge of Allegiance, a pledge that mentioned “Under God,” which went against what he believed (Ashtari 2014).

The conflict over separation of church and state is one that occurs every day in many schools across the country. There is no way to solve this conflict unless we separated every single student into schools where they all believe the same thing (like current private schools which can still include students who may not actually follow or believe in the religion). However, this would lessen the diversity many public schools are trying to promote. It is a balance between freedom of religious beliefs as well as freedom from someone imposing those beliefs on others.

### Literature Review

When I began this research project and started looking at previous research on the topic, I found that there was very little written about my area of focus, with the majority of the research concentrating on adding religion to the school curriculum. There was a considerable amount of research on the debate between teaching evolution versus teaching creationism. Overall, I found minute research about how a teacher’s general beliefs and experiences affect the classroom, let alone their religious beliefs. Yet to fully understand this topic, we must look at the origin of religion in the United States and the history of integrating and

separating religion from the public school system. Many of the papers and journal articles I will be reviewing involve topics that generally relate to the topic of religion in education.

To start, The First Amendment Center published a pamphlet titled *A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools* to assist public school teachers in understanding what they should and should not do in their classroom as related to the constitution. They provide a list of frequently asked questions that teachers have asked concerning religion in the classroom. Such questions include, "Is it constitutional to teach about religion?" (p. 2). Their answer is that it is considered constitutional. They endorse the study of religions in the classroom. "Growing numbers of educators throughout the United States recognize that the study about religion in social studies, literature, art, and music is an important part of a well-rounded education (A Teacher's Guide., 1999, p. 2). The First Amendment Center clarifies that any discussions in the classroom regarding religion must be free of advocacy on the part of the teacher. The First-Amendment requires that public school teachers teach about religion "fairly and objectively, neither promoting nor denigrating religion in general or specific religious groups in particular" (A Teacher's Guide., 1999, p. 3). A clear distinction is made between teaching about religion in

the school verses the *practice* of religion in the public school. Even with the controversy over teacher's imposing any form of personal religion in the school, the First Amendment does allow some leniency, even with regards to religious texts. For example, any art, music, literature, or drama that contains religious themes may still be used in the classroom as long as it serves an educational goal in the curriculum (A Teacher's Guide., 1999). Additionally, it is important to note that though teachers are prohibited from showing personal religious values, students are not. Since public school teachers work for the government, which embodies many religions, these teachers must adhere to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment which states that, "congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." Because of this, teachers may not pray with or around students during the school day (A Teacher's Guide., 1999). Whenever students are in the presence of a teacher, that teacher may not show their religious beliefs and values.

Often, religions that believe in spreading their religion such as Evangelical Christians, find tension between teaching in a public school that requires them to stay silent about their religious beliefs, while also feeling pressure from their religion that is pushing them to share it. This may lead to some teachers going to work at a private school that is

affiliated with their religious beliefs, so that they may freely share them with their students. Nevertheless, public school teachers cannot use their position as a teacher to promote their religious beliefs (A Teacher's Guide., 1999). It may seem that teachers are unable to share or show any semblance of their religious identity, but that is not true. They may wear non-obtrusive jewelry like a cross or Star of David (A Teacher's Guide., 1999). In general, students have much more freedom in expressing their religious beliefs than teachers do simply because the teacher is meant to be representative of the government, a figure of authority. Teachers should not be seen representing one particular religion when they are supposed to be supporting all of them equally.

The qualitative research I am conducting is meant to focus on how a teacher's religious beliefs impact and/or affect the classroom. The interviews of the participants used in this study have been used to evaluate a teacher's decisions and practices, and to see if any of the participants can identify any conscious decisions they make that are directly related to their religious beliefs. As stated previously, direct evangelism of a teacher's own personal religious beliefs onto their students is unconstitutional. Yet it is difficult to identify any unconscious or indirect evangelism done on the part of the teacher. Religion is so ingrained into

making a person who they are, whether they identify as “religious” or “nonreligious.” Religion is often seen as something private that should be left out of the classroom, and is therefore rarely discussed even in the field of research (Thiessen, 2013). Neutrality is seen as the ideal. Yet Thiessen (2013) in his article *Evangelism in the Classroom*, states that the problem with the opposition to evangelism in the public school classroom is that teachers “cannot help but influence their students to some degree, whatever their religious or non-religious position happens to be, and however hard they try to remain neutral” (p. 221). As humans, we are always influencing those around us in conscious and unconscious ways. It is natural for humans to try to influence or manipulate others to agree with any belief they have, not just religious beliefs (Thiessen, 2013).

Evangelism, though, is more specific than that. It is any effort at religious influence or persuasion. People try to influence others every day, whether they are consciously aware of it or not. We relate with others by finding commonalities among us. Therefore, it is only logical that we try to force more connections between ourselves and other human beings.

Nonetheless, it is still important to note that teachers must never view their students as being mere objects to their evangelism program (Thiessen, 2013).

We must then pose the question: why even talk about the issue of religion in the public school system if it has no impact on the students? We know religion has an impact on the lives of students; it can play a large role in the identity of many students in public schools. Students are at a critical age developmentally and their minds are open to easy persuasion. This is why the teaching of critical thinking is so vital. If students can view arguments objectively, looking at both sides, and making a logical case for one or the other, rather than thoughtlessly accepting anything their teacher proposes then they have a better chance at being successful in life and developing their own ideas and opinions. Grade-school children are growing in their understanding of the world and deciding who they are as well as who they want to be. Just as religion may play a key role in the life of a teacher, it can also play a key role in the life of each student. In a 2010 study by Jason Nelson, a participant interviewed who was a public school teacher, stated that she could tell which students went to church, even if they never told her. She could tell because of the way they spoke, how they carried themselves, and their actions. She, Jada, noticed that they showed much more caring and empathy towards other students (Nelson, 2010). Wallace and Forman (1998) studied how religion could impact a healthy lifestyle by using a large, national sample of adolescents.

They found that more-religious adolescents consistently eat healthier foods, get more hours of sleep, exercise more often, and are more likely to use a seat belt than less religious or non-religious adolescents (Marshall, 2008). Wallace and Forman (1998) concluded that religious behaviors and expressions during adolescence promote long-term physical well-being (Marshall, 2008). Additionally, the National Study of Youth and Religion (2003) found that public schools “lag behind catholic schools in average educational achievement of students in low-income neighborhoods” (p. 15). Moreover, they found that as the religiosity of parents increased, child delinquency generally decreased (Regnerus, 2003).

There are numerous studies supporting the teaching of religion and the benefits of adolescents having religious beliefs; but there is a disconnect between the advantageous view of religion for young adolescent development and how it is viewed in the public school classroom. In every public school, students are allowed to display and discuss their religion openly. They have the freedom to express their religious beliefs since they are only representing themselves, whereas the teachers, as government employees, are representing the government of the United States of America (or on a smaller scale, their school and/or district’s beliefs).

One research article that more closely aligns with my own is Jason Nelson's *Teacher Dispositions and Religious Identity in the Public School: Two Case Studies*. Nelson was looking at how teachers deal with their religious identity along with their teacher identity in diverse settings. Both teachers in his study taught at a highly diverse public K-8 school. Both teachers similarly attended the same church and affiliated with Christian Baptist beliefs. Jada, one of the participants in the study, finds virtue in being a Christian teacher in a public school because she feels it helps make religion an open topic in the curriculum (Nelson, 2010). For Jada, this openness is possible through the "ownership and embodiment of her own religious identity" (p. 342). Her coworkers and employers have told her to tone down the religious elements to her teaching. Though she is reluctant, she understands their concern and how careful she has to be. Nelson believes that Jada is implying that religious talk and expression are tolerated, as long as they are kept casual and in the background, not being directly addressed as part of a lesson. Gwen, the second participant understands the negative impacts of never mentioning religion in the classroom "when any mention of religion whatsoever is avoided, religion becomes the 'unmentionable,' and this, I believe, is destructive" (Nelson, 2010, p. 346). Teachers and students feel more comfortable when they

know there are others that share the same beliefs they do (as you will see later with Tiffany, one of my participants). Gwen shows support for this idea when she states,

There are quite a few people here that pray, that go to church, that believe in God- they may not be Baptist-and who know that I do also. So, there's more freedom to talk, to just say things to each other, like 'pray for me' or 'I'm praying that...' and use religious terms like that. I think that when you come out and it's not this big secret, then everybody feels more comfortable and they come out too (p. 344).

### Significance

As teachers, we must understand our biases and how our beliefs can affect the choices we make in the classroom. We make numerous unconscious decisions that are influenced by our beliefs and experiences every day, it is imperative we know how they impact our choices as a teacher. We influence other future citizens in our classroom each time they walk through our door. Living in a country that values the separation of church and state in public schools requires teachers to recognize how their beliefs affect others, especially the young minds that look up to them.

## **Methods**

Originally, I set out to interview just Christian teachers, but was later convinced to widen my search to other religions as well. This allowed me to see if there were any similarities or differences between teachers of different religions. When searching for participants to interview, I decided to interview teachers from public and private schools to see if the results would be similar or not.

Before I started my research, I got IRB approval from Otterbein University. Afterwards, I asked my thesis advisor if she knew of anyone who would be willing to participate. Purposive sampling was done, instead of random sampling. Teachers of any religion were welcomed to participate. I found it easy to find willing Christian teachers to interview in

both public and private schools, as well as willing Jewish and atheist teachers, but found it more difficult to find any practicing Muslim or Hindu teachers who wanted to participate.

I did not set a limit on how many teachers I would interview. I also did not limit myself on the type of school, the subject taught, or the gender of the interviewed teacher.

I gathered my data in two ways: through in-person interviews with a tape recorder which was used to transcribe later, and through email. The participants were asked the same questions for each method, whether it was through email or in-person. This allowed them to choose which was most convenient for them and for me to have more participants who could be involved in the research. The list of questions asked can be found in Appendix A.

After I made contact with a potential participant, I sent them the informed consent form, my abstract, and the list of questions I would ask them so that they knew what to expect. After they had read all of the documents, they articulated whether or not they were willing to participate.

Any participants that chose to interview with me in-person had their interview recorded electronically through an application on my phone. After their responses were transcribed, the audio files were deleted. Participants

were given pseudonyms so that their identity would be safe, including on my computer. Any identifying information mentioned in the interview was taken out.

When the transcription for an individual was complete, I sent them their transcribed responses so that they could check to see if they were being accurately represented. They were encouraged to make any changes or additions if they wanted to, and were notified that their responses could be deleted at any time if they chose.

Once the draft and final copy of the paper was completed, I sent a copy to each of the participants to review to make sure their beliefs and statements were being accurately portrayed.

## **Results**

Overall, I interviewed a total of five Christian teachers, two atheist teachers, and two Jewish teachers. Of these, there were six females and

three males. Four of those interviewed were private school teachers and five were public school teachers. An inductive approach was used to discover themes, allowing for the themes to surface on their own.

Throughout the literature and interviews, a total of five themes were reviewed and will be discussed below. For organizational purposes, a chart is located in Appendix C that contains pertinent information about each of the individuals interviewed. This makes it easier to keep track of basic information for each participant while reading.

### *Theme I: Behavior Similar, Reasons Not*

Between all of the participants, regardless of their religious beliefs, the behaviors and educational decisions for what each teacher chose to do in the classroom was fairly consistent, but their reasons for a particular decision or belief came from different reasons. For example, when asked whether or not they believed their religious beliefs affected how they handled classroom management, many of the participants stated that they try to show respect to their students, to show that they have value and that their thoughts are important. However, each participant's reason for wanting to show students respect was different. Carrie explains that respect is valued in Judaism which is why she shows respect. Rebecca

uses scripture from the Bible to teach students about how they should behave, which also includes respect. “I want them to know that we respect other people, that we are kind, that we don’t put people down, that our words hurt people. I can use what God has said because God is the source of truth anyway when dealing with issues. I respect students by the way I talk to them, my choice of words, communicating to them that I value them even though I might not appreciate their behavior, but that they have value” (Rebecca). Her reason for showing and teaching respect in her classroom is because of the truth she finds from God’s word in the Bible. Jason also believes in treating his students with respect, trying to show them that he is not the “all-knowing provider of information.” He wants his students to gain a desire to do schoolwork because they know “we are all on the same ship.” As an atheist, Jason’s reasons for showing respect do not come from any non-religious belief. His desire to show respect comes from his experiences, education, and what he personally values, rather than what his “religion” values.

This theme likewise emerges when participants are asked about how they go about their daily day at work as well as their general attitude. Danielle explains that she tries to be happy at work and have a good attitude. She is careful with what she says because she wants people to

see that she is different from the others around her. She wants the people in her school to know that she is Christian from the way she behaves.

Danielle's behavior, her positive attitude, comes from her religious desires.

Jason describes that his work brings him joy. His happiness stems from his work, whereas Danielle is happy because of her Christian religion. Yet Jason believes that he goes about his day the same as his coworkers, those who follow a religion or not. It is true that from the outside, the behavior may seem the same, but the reason for the behavior is quite different. Aaron, who teaches in a private Christian school, also tries to stay positive:

Humanly, I'm affected as anyone is by a job with long hours and frustrating moments, but I try to stay positive. This is something bigger than myself, and there is a point to the training which is to equip students for whatever God has in mind for them. It may involve grammar or it may not, but I feel I'm adding to their tools. And there is an endpoint to it all. The book of Revelation and other prophetic books discuss the end times. All this will be gone someday, and I'm trying to maximize the worth of the time.

Aaron is staying positive because he believes he is helping train his students for whatever God has for them in the future.

Ashley, who is a Christian working in a public school, does not say outright that she tries to stay positive, but she describes how she is able to take away frustrations during the school day:

Something I've been trying to do lately is making sure that I start my day by meditating with some truth, scripture or something. I try to refer back to that truth throughout the day as I am frustrated and feeling unthankful while missing my child. On the days I am able to do that, not only do I feel that I get more done, but I enjoy being there and I have a better attitude towards the kids and the job in general. That definitely is a huge way that I am impacted by my spiritual beliefs.

Ashley's day, whether it is good or bad, can be largely affected by her religious beliefs.

Lastly, Carrie, who works at a private Jewish school, describes how her positivity comes from the fact that she thanks God for something every day.

Though many of the teachers find that they behave in a positive manner, Tiffany and Peter did not describe their general day at work or their attitudes toward their work, but simply stated that they did not believe their religious beliefs affect either their overall attitude or how they go about their day at work.

### *Theme II: No Direct Religious Teaching, Mostly Question Answering*

The participants who taught in a public school, no matter what religious affiliation they aligned with, never directly or formally taught religion. These teachers only discussed their beliefs when their students specifically asked. The private, Christian school teachers are the

exception. They will discuss their beliefs outright in class since they are actually expected to share their faith with their students.

The educators of the Jewish or Christian faith seemed to be more comfortable overall in sharing their religious beliefs unlike the non-religious participants. For example, Peter, an atheist, described his discomfort with the idea of sharing his personal religious beliefs with his college students:

I'm very reticent to do that. I will hold back, I am not likely to do that. It may come up at times. For example, if we are talking about the topic of evolution, I may explain my position. It's not that we don't care whether or not students actually believe in evolution, but we want them to understand it and that it is not unreasonable. There are good reasons that other people would think that evolution happened, even if their religion is such that they can't accept it. Sometimes in a conversation like that, I think it would become pretty obvious to students that I am non-Christian or ex-Christian, or whatever it might be. In that sense, sure that's fine. But I am certainly not going to have the whole talk with students about my religious history or my beliefs or how do my beliefs compare to yours. If it comes up, it's going to be incidental, and I'm not going to let it play along very far. I am going to move the conversation along quite quickly.

Likewise, Jason, also an atheist, shows the same hesitancy towards sharing his personal beliefs:

I would only feel comfortable in a set up situation where people were openly discussing their beliefs in a non-hostile manner. Maybe some sort of religious discovery club or something to that effect. I am not saying that's how I believe others should act, just that I wouldn't speak to students unless there was a set up situation. I wouldn't ever feel comfortable talking about something so personal with students unless they were in a situation that was clear that they wanted to hear it and share.

Both atheist teachers, one a college professor and one a pre-service teacher, showed reluctance to share anything about their personal religious beliefs, even when prodded by their students.

Though the teachers may not directly teach about their own religion or any religion for that matter, they will occasionally slip it in when appropriate. Ashley discusses how she determines how much she and her students will talk about religion and when it is appropriate:

I am definitely comfortable talking about my religion with students. Generally what happens is if it's relevant to what we are talking about in class, I'll just talk in class. For example, last year I was teaching 11th grade and we read the *Scarlet Letter*. That dealt a lot with Puritans and Christianity. But if it doesn't fit in with the lesson or it's not particularly relevant- since sometimes kids ask teachers a personal question to get them off track- we don't talk about it. In those cases I always say that I would be happy to talk with them the last couple of minutes of class by my desk. That way, if they really want to know what I think, then I am happy to talk about it with them. I am also not wasting class time. I have had several kids come up to me over the years and ask what Christians believe or other questions about religion.

Another public school teacher, Danielle, feels comfortable talking about religion with some of her students when she knows they believe what she also believes (Christianity). She gives an example of how it was beneficial for a parent to know that she (her child's teacher) was also a Christian:

I know my students well. I spend 7 hours with them – 5 days a week. I can pick out the Christian students quickly. Either because they talk about church and Jesus or I know the families. Once I make a connection with a student regarding our faith, I feel comfortable to talk a little bit about it. (They are only first graders, so we don't get too deep). But it's pretty cool. Last year I had a family who knew I was a Christian. Their daughter was in my class and terrified of thunderstorms. One day there were severe thunderstorms all day, the mother texted me and asked me to pray with her daughter if she was afraid at school. We did pray together and it was great! Sometimes I think it would be great to teach at a Christian school where I could talk about Jesus anytime!

Though Danielle is willing and comfortable with discussing her beliefs with the students she knows come from Christian families, she will sometimes mention certain religious practices she follows if it pertains to the lesson.

I try not to “impose” my views on my students. I do wear a cross necklace from time to time. I talk about going to church when I model writing for the students and we write our “Weekend News” every Monday (Danielle).

Here Danielle is never telling students to agree with her religious beliefs, but she uses her religious practices, like going to church, to make illustrations and connections in class. She does not view this as imposing her beliefs on her students. It is simply her showing part of who she is and what she cares about. Then she goes on to explain how she would not want to have her own child's teacher impose their own beliefs on her child:

As a parent with a child in public school, I DO NOT want my child's teacher to “impose” his/her religious beliefs on my child. If I wanted that, I would send them to a Christian school. And I

definitely don't want my son's teacher teaching him other religious practices outside of Christianity.

*Theme III: The Sundry Facets That Make up a Person, Morals and All*

Religious beliefs and background experiences affect how a teacher views sharing their beliefs in the classroom. For example, Jason, an atheist teacher, attended a public school that celebrated Christian holidays. He recounts what it was like going to this particular school,

The school was largely Christian and so the school ignored and got away with ignoring keeping specific religions out of the classroom. By that I mean, religious views were put upon me and I was forced to act on them. For example, in fourth grade we had a daily prayer after the announcements. I never really complained about this, but I didn't participate either. I just kept my head down and stayed quiet. I never felt at the time that my rights were being imposed upon but I do know others who did, and spoke up about it.

Jason continues by describing how he teaches today. He believes in equality of religions, and he explains that he does not favor or idolize any particular religion. He has seen how uncomfortable it can be for students who are pushed to believe in something that is contrary to what they currently believe. Participants with experiences where their grade-school teachers imposed their beliefs on their students, tend to try to create a classroom environment that is free from teacher impositions. They try to create one that is accepting of all religious beliefs.

In addition, a teacher's general beliefs and opinions are developed from past experiences, society's morals and social norms, their unique personality, and religious views just to name a few. Everything in their life including what they read, watch, listen to, interact with, teach, learn, and experience contributes to making them who they are; and who they are affects the type of classroom they create. Religious beliefs play a role in a person's decision making, but it can be difficult to distinguish what decisions and choices are based mostly or solely on religious beliefs since there are usually many factors playing into person's decisions, religion being just one of them.

The teacher sets the tone for the classroom. The teacher's beliefs, morals, ethics, personality, background experiences, education and religion will all play a big role in the "feel" of the room. Although I teach in a public school where I cannot talk about my religion openly, I rely on my faith to get my through daily. I pray silently often. If a student starts talking about Jesus, I never stop them (Danielle).

Danielle is able to see how her Christian beliefs play into her decisions, but she also recognizes how there are many other facets that make up a human being that affect their decisions.

Furthermore, there is no clear distinction between whether an educator's teaching style is based on societal norms and morality or on their religious-based choices. Many of the participants interviewed

believed it was a combination of the two, while some of the private Christian school teachers felt that their decisions were solely based on their religious beliefs. Peter, an atheist, explains that even his religious non-beliefs probably affect his teaching style to some extent:

The more positive view of humanity makes me tend to believe students want to do good more than I thought before which was that everyone has the potential to sin and that my job is to somehow make sure that doesn't happen. I think that's the main affect. I don't know if those are societal norms and morality. It's more of a fundamental belief about people. It's more like a philosophy than a societal norm.

Jason makes an interesting statement when he states that he believes the societal norms he follows, namely respecting other people, do not come from a particular religion.

I would say it's based on norms although I have never really thought of it in that sense before. I think that wanting to treat people with respect is a social norm though rather than something aligned to a particular religion, but I could be wrong. If it is, I am unaware. Not that I would associate religions with not doing this, just rather that I don't see it as a connection.

Though he respects other people because of social norms, it is important to note that most of our socially accepted norms and morals come from various religions. The most influential of the religions on societal norms would be Christianity, simply because it was the first religion to be established among the colonies that founded the United States (for the purpose of this discussion, I am disregarding the Native Americans who did

practice their own form of spirituality and religion and were also living in America before any of the colonists).

Carrie, a Jewish teacher, also believes that her teaching style is affected by societal norms and her religious beliefs, “I think that respect and responsibility, critical thinking, problem solving, and reflection are influences of Judaism but are also the norm in current educational practices.”

Rebecca, a teacher at a private Christian school, uses both societal norms and religious beliefs when teaching students, but believes that only her religious beliefs affect her teaching style.

I get my norms, not from society, but from what God says. Now, I use society’s norms and morality because my students live in this society and I need to speak in that context to the kids. But part of my goal is to show them the contrast between societal norms and what God’s standards are.

#### *Theme IV: Unaware Influences, How Decisions are Formed, and School*

##### *Policies*

Numerous participants were unaware of exactly how their religious beliefs truly impact their teaching, or how society’s cultural norms have been influenced by religion. Jason, for example, illustrates how his grade-school teachers followed the golden rule which states to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” He doesn’t give any mention that that

quote, that rule, can be found in the Bible (specifically Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12). Now whether this is the first written recording of the golden rule, or is simply an effect of our nation being founded in Christianity from the early colonial era, we can't be sure. But we do know that it has become a culturally accepted norm, a common phrase that demonstrates how people should treat one another. Furthermore, for many of the questions that asked participants to identify how their religious beliefs affected various aspects of their educational decisions, there was hesitancy in the answer. They often stated that they had never thought about it before and were not very certain how their religious beliefs affected or did not affect their teaching. The participants who appeared to be more active in their faith and/or religious beliefs (by mentioning attending worship, reading religious texts, or other religious practices) were often able to give more definite and clear answers on how their religious beliefs affect different parts of their educational decisions as a teacher.

As for school policies, most of the participants, excluding the private Christian school teachers, were unsure of exactly what their school policies are regarding religion. Hannah, one of the private Christian school teachers stated:

Our school policy is that there is a statement of faith that aligns with a specific denomination. We sign a statement of faith, and

if there is something in my own denomination that is contrary, I would not necessarily talk about that during my school day. I would honor the sacred faith of their denomination, which I do. I totally believe it. I don't believe I really have any restrictions in expressing my faith, except for the fact that we are an academic institution. I am a professional; I am not a youth pastor, a pastor, or a bible study teacher. There is a big difference there. So whereas I could spend all my time teaching books of the Bible, I am not the bible class teacher, someone else does that. I have a contract to teach English. I of course have biblical application within that and we look at themes within the literature or what we're writing about, but I also teach secular literature, and we look at all different types of authors and writings. It doesn't have to be a Christian writing. However, I guess my religion would restrict some of the choices I would make with literature because we don't do witches, or vampires, or satanic material. That would be a restriction. There is a lot of good stuff out there, so we just pick from that.

Carrie, who teaches at a private Jewish school, is also decently clear on what is expected from her in regards to religion:

I teach in a pluralistic school, meaning that all levels of observance and practice are respected and recognized. Children share the different practices they do at home while learning what is traditional. There is no shaming for anyone's level of practice. This includes teachers.

Peter explains the frustration he has often had when viewing situations that he feels are not following the Establishment Clause:

Most schools are pretty vague about what a teacher can and cannot do regarding religion. A lot of schools cut corners. My last school would have a student sometimes lead a school prayer or bring a minister to do it. I was uncomfortable with that; I felt it was unconstitutional. I felt there was nobody that was going to challenge it, at least not legally. In most public schools there is a lot of freedom to practice one's religion. But

there is also sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle favoring of Christian religions over non-Christian religions. That tends to be present. I wish more administrators would be sensitive to the fact of how problematic that is for their non-Christian students. Some teachers my age grew up in a time where celebrating Christmas in school was considered to be perfectly fine. People don't understand how tough that is on non-Christian students who have all the trappings of Christmas around them when their family doesn't practice or believe in Christmas. At the same time maybe not to have their traditions celebrated.

Lastly, Tiffany, who teaches at a private university, describes that she is unaware of any specific school policies but believes that the school policies may have some subtle Christian values affecting them:

As a Methodist university, I'm sure that there are Christian overtones. However, I believe that as a university professor it is my job to moderate discussion in my classroom without implying that there is a particular thing regarding religion that my students should believe.

#### *Theme V: Differing Opinions on Sharing Beliefs*

There seem to be two differing beliefs on whether or not a teacher can share their religious beliefs with the classroom. As I have mentioned earlier, the majority of the participants felt comfortable talking about their religious beliefs to some degree if their students asked them. However, many participants either believe in subtly trying to show their students their religious beliefs or they believe in strictly keeping their religious beliefs out of the classroom.

Talking about Jesus is so taboo in public schools. I try not to “impose” my views on my students. I do wear a cross necklace from time to time. I talk about going to church when I model writing for the students and we write our “Weekend News” every Monday. I think most parents probably know I have faith. Some families I’ve grown really close to know I’m a Christian and they are cool with talking about Jesus or praying together (Danielle).

Those that believe in keeping their religious beliefs completely out of the classroom give examples of uncomfortable situations they have seen or experienced. The first is Peter who gives an example about having a Christian prayer in school:

I do sincerely think that offering a Christian prayer that ends in, “In Christ’s name, Amen” officially in school is a violation of the Establishment Clause, because it’s favoring one religion over another. I don’t think that logically you can address that by saying, “That’s okay, next time we do a school prayer, we have it led by a Jewish person, and then by a Muslim person” because you’re not going to be able to reach the whole range of religious views that are in the schools. What would you do for Hindi’s? What are you going to do for Buddhists where prayer really isn’t the point? A deity isn’t really the point. I feel that the idea of “Oh it’s okay, we’ll just give all of the religions a turn” is actually reflecting a misunderstanding of how different other religions can be from Christianity. It’s usually a Christian viewpoint saying, “Well it’s okay, we’ll let all the other religions have their version also.” But for many of them, public prayer just doesn’t make sense, it’s not even appropriate. I think that school sponsored public prayers are in violation of the Establishment Clause. I think it’s quite appropriate that that’s not allowed or at least restricted. Now, I do recognize that this view is not endorsed by everyone.

Jason, who went to a public school as a child, discusses some instances where the public school can make students of other religions uncomfortable.

One year our school had a full-blown Christmas play. Not just a cute story with Santa. We included the birth of Jesus and more heavily aligned themes of Christianity. I know the school got in trouble for this as a few of the Jewish students spoke up. I am not one who cares about the “little things” like the difference between merry Christmas and happy holidays. I just don’t care. I will always say happy holidays because I don’t know the faith of the other person. But I am not offended when others say it to me. I am not offended if a school works with the elements of Christianity (I only mention this as I was just talking about Christmas) or any other religion but I do feel others need to be included. Just as we have talked about with multicultural Ed, others ideas and viewpoints need to be heard and celebrated. It’s not enough for a school to have a poster for all of the holidays and then have a large menorah in the school entrance. It’s not an equal representation. It all falls back on how I feel about the golden rule. Everyone deserves to be treated how they want to be treated. So when some voices are muffled, I feel upset.

Tiffany is not completely opposed to discussing religion in her college classroom as much as Peter and Jason are, but she describes an uncomfortable situation her daughter was put in and how upset she had been at the coach for what happened.

I remember when my oldest daughter was a cheerleader, and the coach said they had to get in a circle and pray. There were 10 girls, and three of them didn’t believe in what they were being told to pray, so they just stepped out of the circle. How uncomfortable is that? Why would you do that to kids? I think it’s bad precedent to make people uncomfortable. I’m not saying discussion doesn’t make

people uncomfortable, it certainly can. That's different. When it's not being dictated by somebody who has power over you, that's when it's hard. If my students want to pray before a test, they certainly can. But I'm not going to tell any student what to do, that they have to pray. I think it's really different when you are someone in authority. Student's need to do what's right for them. The majority is going to push their way on people, and the teachers need to make sure other students don't feel uncomfortable or that they are being forced to do something.

## **Discussion**

As we've seen from the results above, there is great tension over the idea of religion in the classroom. Though none of the teachers I interviewed pressure their students to believe in a particular religion, they still hold their own viewpoint on whether to completely eradicate personal religious beliefs on the part of the teacher, or to subtly show what they believe. However, no matter what the side or belief, it is never acceptable to pressure a student to believe in your own religion. Gwen, a participant from Nelson's (2010) study makes a clear argument for how she believes

her religion, and her God, would feel about pressuring people to believe in their religion,

Number one, I'm a very strong believer that in a pluralistic society you do respect other people's choices of religion, and that's primary. I mean, I feel so strongly about that because I feel that God does not coerce us, and when you have an environment like in a public school where people have to go, people have to go there, it's not a religious choice there. We have all different religions, so at an assembly with parents, we've got a lot of Muslim parents, you know. We have a lot of variety of religions. So, I feel that if you're going to sing religious songs that you need to make an attempt to be inclusive about it and you need to show respect for everyone. And if you only focus on Christian songs, as much as I am Christian, I feel that that creates a coercive environment that is not very Christian. I mean, I'm not going around saying, "Well I'm a Christian, and you better be." Or just "I'm better than you and I really am gonna pressure you into becoming a Christian. If that's the only atmosphere that there is, I feel that that's an abomination to God and that that's really anti-Christian." That is not the way Jesus taught and that's not the way God works with us (Nelson, 2010, p. 345).

In the following section, I will be discussing the results from each theme that was listed in the results section.

### *Theme I: Behavior Similar, Reasons Not*

We know that religion has played a fundamental role in developing the ethics and morals that govern our society. I interviewed strong and caring educators who want the best for their students. They have all gone through college to earn a degree in their field and have learned what a

great teacher looks like. Many of them mirror the example of a great teacher. Teacher education programs teach about caring for the students you teach, how to best teach them, how to improve your craft, and various other aspects. They teach qualities like respect, kindness, fairness, patience, and equality. Moreover, these qualities are taught in most religions. If then, we are taught the same qualities that are found in the traits that make a good teacher as well as the qualities that make a good religious believer, it would be expected that the participants interviewed would behave and make similar decisions. The disparity only lies in the reason for the behavior, attributing it to God or education and experiences.

*Theme II: No Direct Religious Teaching, Mostly Question Answering*

As described in *A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools*, when asked by students what their religious beliefs are, teachers may sometimes prefer to not answer because they feel it is inappropriate for a teacher to share something that personal. Others may answer the question straightforwardly to promote an open and honest classroom environment. Neither of these is right or wrong. Rather, teachers must consider the age group of the students they teach and how well they will be able to understand. Though it is important that students are able to distinguish

between a personal view and one that is held by the whole school, there is a power difference between the teacher, who is in charge, and his or her students. Teachers must recognize this power, the strong influence they have over their students, and not use it to accomplish their own religious agenda. As a teacher, there is an authority given to you over your students. Each student recognizes this power and authority which may cause them to feel pressured to please you as the teacher. This pressure is beneficial when trying to push a student to excel in learning, but using the pressure of authority to attempt to sway the individual beliefs of the child is unacceptable. Even if the teacher is just trying to make their students more knowledgeable about religion, the students must have the capacity to understand that the religions being taught are not necessarily followed by the school and that they are under no obligations to believe in any of the religions being taught. Younger children do not have the capacity to understand the many dimensions and influences of religion, so only a simple, basic, statement of religious belief would be acceptable.

As for the research data noted above in the results section, the atheist teachers were the most reluctant to have a conversation about religious beliefs in their classroom, which can be considered a result of not believing in religion. Furthermore, traditional religious backgrounds such

as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam may often promote and encourage the idea of sharing one's religious beliefs and convictions with others, including "non-believers," even in a setting where it is prohibited such as the public school system. The emotion and thought that goes into sharing something as personal as religion with another human being could take continuous practice. Even simply knowing that one should be sharing their religion with other people would keep it fixed in one's mind, across many situations, including teaching. This may make it easier, and possibly include more pressure, for public teachers with religious backgrounds to see and think about ways they can express and share their faith subtly in their school building. Atheists, who have always been atheist, may not have the practice in thinking about how they could share their beliefs in multiple situations. Atheists like Peter, who came from a different religion and then switched to atheism, left for a reason, which could possibly include negative experiences they had with their previous religion or non-religion. Peter states that he left simply because he felt he could no longer believe in his religion with "intellectual honesty." Peter explains that his values have been partially shaped by his religious journey:

As a Christian, and particularly the Calvinist tradition, which I was in for a little while, the assumption drawing from the book of Romans is that humans are fundamentally inclined towards sin and we need a redeemer. It does affect how you see

students in your classroom. Since I no longer believe that, I no longer tend to think that children are naturally inclined to do wrong. Instead, I actually assume the opposite. I assume that children are inclined to please, that they want to do the right thing, that they are not inclined in any way to doing wrong. The way I handle classroom management makes that assumption about people. I think Christianity in some ways would interfere with that, specific parts of Christianity. I don't think liberal Christianity would, but certainly Calvinist Christianity would.

When Peter was a Calvinist Christian, he saw it as his mission to save his students from sin and consequently hell. Since he felt that children were more likely to do bad things than good, he had a negative view. None of the other Christian teachers I interviewed had this same viewpoint. They all mentioned positive and uplifting views of their students. The view of children as sinners that need to be redeemed is not necessarily a belief that Christian teachers interviewed don't hold, but they did not express any form of that belief during their interviews. Peter clearly felt pressured to "save" his students, but he couldn't cope with the negative viewpoint he felt his religion had for them. Peter's aversion to sharing his current religious viewpoints may come from his past experiences and the fact that he has been affiliated with more than one religion/non-religion. Since he has a double perspective, one from his previous Calvinist Christian beliefs and one from his current atheist beliefs, he may not want to attempt to sway

any students simply because he has not stayed loyal to the belief in one religion.

### *Theme III: The Sundry Facets That Make up a Person*

No researcher will ever be able to completely separate all the influences and reasons why someone makes a particular decision. There are countless facets of life and past experience that make each person who they are. Everything about them is intertwined and connected. It is impossible to completely separate or pinpoint the reasons why people do or say what particular things. This research study required participants to attempt to single out one part of themselves, namely their religious or non-religious side, and focus on how that part of themselves may have impacted some of the decisions they make as a teacher. There is no way to know completely how much one part of a person influences their decisions more or less than another part. Some participants may have shown how religion truly impacted parts of their decisions as educators, but we must acknowledge that there are additional influences on these teachers that can likewise impact their decisions. Jada, from Nelson's (2010) case study states:

The first thing that comes to me is African American, and it's funny because your brain's going, I know I'm supposed to say

Christian first,' but. . . it always feels like that, like some people would say that, 'Well, if you're a Christian, that's the first thing you're supposed to say: I'm a Christian!' But really, for me everything is intertwined.

*Theme IV: Unaware Influences, How Decisions are Formed, and School Policies*

As a pre-service teacher myself, I have often wondered how to mediate my own personal religious identity and my identity as a teacher, especially if I were to teach in a public school. I personally had no formal training on how to handle religion in the classroom. No guidelines or principles were given to me, not even a list of do's and don'ts. This was a common theme found among my own participants. When asked, many stated they did not know what their school policies were, but some would still try to guess. The only participants that seemed aware of their school policies were the private Christian and Jewish school teachers. Hannah even went as far to state their policies clearly.

Overall, there seems to be confusion, a lack of communication from the public schools to their teachers in regards to religion. Nelson (2010) found the same problem with his own participants:

Regardless of their current approaches to dealing with religious identity (their own and others'), a recurring theme with both

Jada and Gwen is that they did not feel prepared to deal with religious identity as teachers when they entered the profession and their responses to it have been on an ad hoc basis. They did not know much about the law relating to religion and teaching, other than vague generalities connected to the First Amendment. They felt they could only guess at school policy around religion. It was not that they were ignorant of building or district policy, but they saw other teachers in their schools simply doing as they thought best, and they were left to guess at how to fill the gaps when it came to religion. They described no real guidance from mentors, from policy, or from their pre-service training. As experienced teachers now, they have found themselves in a place to advise new teachers and give them personal advice; not definitive, guidelines but rather their best guesses and suggestions based on their own trial and error, their experience and expertise, and (more cynically) their insight into what a teacher could get away with.

In the results section above, I discussed how the “more religious” participants who are actively involved in their religious practices were able to give more definite and clear answers to how their religious beliefs affect different parts of their educational decisions as a teacher. People who actively follow a particular religion and its practices such as praying, reading the literature (such as the Torah, Koran, and Bible) and going to Temple, Mosque, or Church, will often be required, often indirectly, by their religion to consistently self-evaluate themselves. Believers of various religions must consistently evaluate themselves to see if there is any impurity in them, anything wrong that they need to fix, or as a Christian might say, “sin that needs fixing.” For the Protestant Christian, the only

way to get rid of sin is through accepting Jesus Christ. The act of checking oneself for “sin,” is to see if their Christian works are producing fruit (in the biblical sense, not actual fruit). Doing good works (doing good things) by no means earns salvation (a way into heaven), rather it shows the change, the transformation that has occurred within from accepting Jesus. I cannot comment on the practice of self-evaluating in other religions outside of Christianity since I am not of that faith, but I am sure that they also self-evaluate and try to “do better” and “be better.” However, I do know that numerous religions believe in doing good deeds. Because of this, someone who is non-religious, or does not actively practice their religion may not think as often metacognitively, reflecting on their identity and their religious beliefs. Teachers of certain religions, or those who follow more closely and actively with their personal religion, may reflect more and therefore reflect more on how their religious beliefs affect their teaching, providing more in-depth, reflective answers to the interview questions.

### *Theme V: Differing Opinions on Sharing Beliefs*

Teachers have a widely varied opinion about how much discussion about religion is acceptable in the classroom. The First Amendment Center acknowledges this dichotomy when it states:

For most of our history, extremes have shaped much of the debate. On one end of the spectrum are those who advocate promotion of religion (usually their own) in school practices and policies. On the other end are those who view public schools as religion-free zones. Neither of these approaches is consistent with the guiding principles of the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment (p. 1).

A comfortable balance must be found between the two, and schools must try to bridge the gap, helping students feel comfortable discussing their religion in school, feeling free of judgment.

## **Conclusion**

In general, teachers either believe in completely taking any form of religion out of their teaching or they believe in using biblical or religious examples to further make a point when teaching a lesson. However, of all the teachers in previous studies I have read about as well as my own participants, the public school teachers never directly and formally taught about their own religion, let alone other religions. It was clear to see that there were many areas in their teaching where public school teacher's decisions were influenced in some way by their religious beliefs. Overall, the private school teachers expressed their beliefs in the classroom much more openly (which was to be expected), while the public school teachers still found ways to express their religious beliefs in subtle, indirect ways.

### Limitations

Since this is a qualitative study, I was looking at select case-studies of individual teachers. It was not a random sample, and not every religion, grade level, gender of each religion, or school type was represented. Only participants that have or currently are teaching in Ohio were chosen for this research.

I know that in my own life, many decisions I make are strongly influenced by my faith. This is what drove me to this research topic. I was

seeking to find how other teachers handle that, especially in public schools where they are not supposed to invoke any form of bias on the students they are teaching. I wanted to know how they balanced this. Because of my strong personal reasons for going into this study, there is a chance that when listening to participants and while writing this paper, I may have been looking for anything that supports my hypothesis that religious beliefs can affect a teacher's classroom choices. However, I tried to be as open and free to other findings as possible and felt that I was able to be an objective outsider while researching.

During the interviews, I encouraged my participants to share more by being a friendly, non-judgmental face. However, some of my participants do know me and potentially my religious beliefs which may have affected exactly how they answered. Nonetheless, even while listening to and reading the interviews of my two atheist participants, it seemed that they did not hold anything back. They didn't seem to feel judged at all, which I am happy about. I wanted them to feel free to share as much as they wanted. I simply wanted to know the truth, which is why during the interviews, I would say "In what ways or NOT does your religious affiliation and beliefs affect..." For those questions I would stress that they could say that their religious beliefs had nothing to do with some of their teaching

choices. I wanted them to provide the truth and not just an answer they thought I wanted to hear. There is still a possibility, however, that some participants did give an answer they thought I wanted to hear or one that would simply make them look better in their own eyes. I can only hope they gave me the utmost truth in how they consciously view their choices as educators.

### Future Research

This research and topic is one that can be greatly built upon. It is a starting place for future research in this area. One way to build off of this study would be to interview teachers of a Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindi faith. There are many religions that can be studied to see further into how each religion may be represented in the classroom differently. Studies could also be done in other states in the U.S. besides just Ohio. Mostly urban and suburban teachers were interviewed, so further research could be done on rural teachers. Research could then move to looking at the differences between teachers in public v. private schools. I was able to touch on this a little, but not into great extent.

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## Interview Questions

1. What religion or non-religion do you believe in/follow/are a part of/affiliated with? Examples: Christian, Muslim, atheist, Jewish, Agnostic, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.
2. If applicable, what denomination of that religion are you involved with?
3. What was your religious background/upbringing and does it match the religion you follow today?
4. What brought you to teaching? Why did you decide to become a teacher?
5. What subject and grade level do you teach?
6. What type of school do you teach at (suburban, urban, rural, public, private, etc.)?
7. How many years have you been a teacher?
8. What do you believe the purpose of a teacher is?
9. Why do you believe schools were created?
10. How might a teacher's religion and beliefs affect a classroom?
11. Have you ever read about or seen anything in the media about conflicting viewpoints on teachers imposing their religious beliefs on students?
12. If so, explain what you read/saw and your reaction to it.
13. In what ways or not does your religious affiliation and beliefs affect...
  - a. The way you talk to students?
  - b. The way you handle classroom managements?
  - c. Your thoughts about your students?
  - d. The way you plan and implement lessons?
  - e. The way you handle problems with parents or colleagues?
  - f. The way you go about your daily day at work?
  - g. The way you discipline students?
  - h. Your overall attitude during the school day?
14. Is your teaching style more affected by societal norms and morality or by your religious beliefs, and how? You could also say neither or both.
15. What are your school policies regarding religion? What freedoms or restrictions do you have when it comes to expressing your faith in the classroom?

16. Do you feel comfortable talking about any part of your religion with your students? If so, in what ways/when do you?

**Informed Consent Form**  
(Project Involving No More than Minimal Risk)

The Department of Education at Otterbein University supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are interested in studying how a teacher's religion may influence their classroom. You will be participating in one interview session that will involve filling out a consent form and talking with the researcher. It is estimated that this will take no more than two hours of your time. Although it is not likely, there is a chance that you might feel slightly uncomfortable with some of the more personal questions such as your religious affiliation. Although participation will not directly benefit you, we believe that the information will be useful in evaluating how a teacher's religious beliefs may impact a classroom.

Your participation is solicited although strictly voluntary. We assure you that your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. The information will be identified only by a code number and pseudonym.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is complete, please feel free to contact me by phone or mail.

Sincerely,

Sarah Wadsworth, Principal Investigator  
Sarah.wadsworth@otterbein.edu  
(513)476-1453

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Signature of subject agreeing to participate  
With my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age.

## Informational Participant Fact Chart

<b>Name</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Grade Levels Taught</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>Type of Schools Taught At</b>
Danielle	Christian	Non-Denomin.	ELA	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	12	Public, Suburban
Aaron	Christian	Grace Brethren	ELA	6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup>	18	Private, Christian, Suburban
Ashley	Christian	Evangelical	ESL	6 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	14	Public, Urban
Rebecca	Christian	Protestant	Science & Social Studies	6 <sup>th</sup>	32	Private, Christian, Suburban
Hannah	Christian	Evangelical	ELA	6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , 9 <sup>th</sup> , 12 <sup>th</sup>	23	Private, Christian, Suburban, Homeschool
Peter	Atheist	N/A	Science	High School & College	24	Private, Catholic, Suburban, Public
Jason	Atheist	N/A	Math & Science	Middle Grades	0- Finishing Degree	Suburban, Public, Private
Carrie	Judaism	Reform	N/A	K	13	Independent, Private, Jewish
Tiffany	Judaism	Reform	Special Needs	College	37	College