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## In God We Trust: A Multiple Case Study of the Implementation of Religious and Biblical Literacy Courses in Public Charter Schools

Susan M. Goers

Concordia University - Portland, sgoers@gmail.com

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Susan M. Goers

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Concordia University (Portland)

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Susan Marie Goers

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Julie McCann, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Chad Lakies, Ph.D., Content Specialist

JeVon Marshall, Ph.D., Content Reader

ACCEPTED BY

Joe Mannion, Ed.D.

Provost, Concordia University, Portland

Sheryl Reinisch, Ed.D.

Dean, College of Education, Concordia University, Portland

Jerry McGuire, Ph.D.

Director of Doctoral Studies, Concordia University, Portland

IN GOD WE TRUST:  
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF  
RELIGIOUS AND BIBLICAL LITERACY COURSES IN PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Susan Marie Goers, M. Ed.  
Concordia University – Portland  
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in  
Transformational Leadership

Committee Chair, Julie McCann, Ph.D.

Chad Lakies, Ph.D.

JeVon Marshall, Ph.D.

Concordia University Portland

2017

## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with administrators of four charter schools located in the west, the south, and southeast portions of the United States that had courses in religious and biblical literacy in each school's curricula. A multiple case study methodology was employed to describe the experiences of public charter schools implementing religious and biblical literacy courses to discover commonalities to successful implementation. The data was gathered using semi-structured interviews conducted during the summer and fall of 2016. Areas of interest were specific to course descriptions, the fit within the specific charter school vision and mission, teacher training, and resources. The most common factor supporting the implementation of the courses, revealed by all administrators, was the need for teacher training and preparedness before taking on a specific religious or biblical literacy course. The researcher chose schools where the course fit into the mission and vision of the school, as an indicator of purpose, and where teachers used primary source documents in lesson plans. A framework of implementation strategy is provided as well as the implications needing to be addressed by staffing. The research may inform other charter schools looking to implement such coursework and the researcher outlines additional areas of study needed to investigate other specific indicators.

*Keywords:* charter school, bible, religion, implementation, biblical literacy, religious literacy

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who continually inspires and challenges me to do hard things that glorify His name, and secondly to my precious family.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to those who have supported me throughout this journey. My parents, who have always supported my addiction to education, and have been there to encourage me when my dreams seemed unreachable; they have gracefully tolerated me over the years. My husband, Ron, worked without ceasing so that I could have the freedom to fulfill my passions, and constantly encouraged me to move forward without fear.

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Lastly to all of the students I have taught, whether through homeschooling, private school, public school, or charter school – I love you all. With hard work, determination, and steadfast perseverance, you can become all that you are called to be. Don't ever stop learning, don't ever stop dreaming big, don't ever stop challenging yourselves to do more and be more to affect society for your progeny. You will never regret it.

“Never be lacking in zeal [don't be lazy], but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” Romans 12:11-12



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Dissertation**

### **The Problem**

Religious unrest and the effects of intolerance and ignorance highlight our newscasts day in and day out with scenes of shootings taking place in public schools, on military bases, in churches, and in other public forums. Americans have become so desensitized to school shootings in particular that they rarely make headline news unless more than 10 people lose their lives. As a nation we have become desensitized to the violence. Disrespect for each other's differences, ignorance, and unwillingness to accept those that hold to different beliefs and practice different religions may be contributing factors to the increasing violence.

One example was the so-called targeting of Christians in the 2015 school shooting in Oregon (Bailey, 2015). Reports recounted a witness recalling Christopher Mercer asking whether students were Christians before shooting them in the head (Bailey, 2015). He belonged to a social media group called "Doesn't Like Organized Religion" (Bailey, 2015). Another example is Sullivan's (2017) report that Dylann Roof was sentenced to death for his hate crime whereby he killed nine people in a Charleston church. Was he only targeting African-Americans, or did religion play a role? And of course there was the tragedy of the Columbine incident. To this day we still do not have the full story, even though two of the murdered victims have been heralded as martyrs (Graham, 2015). Countless other martyrs have been attributed to many religions; followers who are willing to die while killing others for their cause.

Of course we cannot make an assumption that all shooters are on an anti-religion rampage; however, it appears that religion has played a role on the part of both the shooters and the victims in some of these violent situations. And if this is correct, then it is reasonable to assume that worldview and beliefs have played a part. Nord and Haynes (1998) have noted that

an individual's or a collective's motives are bound up in the belief system or worldview of that particular person or group. History documents violence as an element of all world religions from the Christian crusades to that of radical Islam.

As educators, what is our response to these waves of violence? What is missing in our educational system that has allowed for such anger and animosity to build within the hearts of our youth that they then carry it into their public lives? This problem has been haunting America for at least the past 18 years as school shootings have been substantially increasing. CNN Library (2016) reports that from 1965 to 2000, a 35 year span, there were 40 school shootings throughout the country. However, over a 14 year span from 2000 to 2014 there were 25 shootings, increasing the incidents per year (CNN, 2016; Towers, Gomez-Lievano, Khan, Mubayi & Castillo-Chavez, 2015).

Religious illiteracy may be a significant contributing factor to the growth of intolerance showing up in our schools (New Pew Forum, 2010). Not understanding the belief system or practices of others causes insecurity which can then result in violent out lashes toward others. Religious and biblical literacy courses could help to bridge the gap from uneducated to the understanding of religions and practices, which onward can build compassion in the students of the 21st century (Ghosh, Chan, Manuel & Dilimulati, 2016; Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007; Prothero, 2008). According to Bishop and Nash (2007) the need for religious literacy is no longer an option, but a necessary skill for students to live peacefully among peers. A lack of religious understanding has caused divisions and misunderstandings in American youth, and in many cases has led to violence (Ghosh, et al., 2016). Feinberg, (2014), in his five arguments for teaching religion in public schools, discusses character development and moral growth as a critical component of any public school student. Teaching students about other religions, while

allowing them to develop their own moral code is essential in a civic education (Feinberg, 2014). Ebstyne-King and Furrow (2004) view religion as an avenue to promote positive development in our youth, improving our overall social capital. They collected data on 725 urban youth that resulted in religious involvement having a positive effect on moral behavior and outcomes in terms of how they treated others, and what they planned for their futures (Ebstyne-King & Furrow, 2004). As a community of educators concerned with the welfare of our students, motives for educating students about world religions, while building compassion and empathy for others, may be varied, but will all result in generating adults who are responsible global citizens.

Over the past 50 years, the educational system in America has catered to neutrality groups and stripped the curriculums of critical thinking, so much so that critical thinking skills have now become a Common Core Standard (Rogers, 2011). As well, the understanding and tolerance for others' points of view, and discussion of religion has all but vanished in order to teach the agenda of secularization theory and remain neutral (Kessler, 2000; Prothero, 2008; Rogers, 2011; Waggoner, 2013). Kessler (2000), asserts that in attempting to respect separation of church and state, teachers ignorantly violate the rights of their students to discuss religion. Waggoner (2013), writes at length about the acceptance of relativism and the dangers of neutrality that shut down rigorous debate and critical thinking skills that help us discover truth in the public school classroom. As Prothero (2008) asserted, in the process of allowing for the few, many students have been denied their rights to learn the history behind the founding of our country. War in and of itself has been frequently termed "holy" and students need to be able to understand the religious motivation behind such conflicts. Some would consider the Revolutionary War a holy war, alongside the Civil war, while others categorize them as just wars



(Barton, 2014). Students need to understand the differences between historical wars and extremist acts. We label shooting events as “extremist incidents”, but they are becoming much more common and connected to terrorism and threats of Holy War which can blur the lines for students. Ghosh, et al., (2016) stated:

Those most susceptible to adopting extremist religious ideologies continue to be young people between the ages of 15 and 25 who are at a developmental age where they seek to uncover their own identity, look to bolster self-confidence and are in search of meaning in their lives. This age group is very action oriented and is usually characterized by higher risk-taking. Thus, there is a vital need and urgency to uncover this demographic group’s perception of religious extremism and citizenship engagement, especially as young Canadians and Americans continue to be disengaged from the civic sphere and lack an interest in public affairs (p.3).

Pratchett, Thorp, Wingfield, Lowndes, and Jabbar (2010) conducted studies to determine what best helped young people in terms of not adopting attitudes of religious extremism. Their number one point in their analysis of findings was to work with young people to develop trust and question thinking (Pratchett, et al, 2010). The analysis states:

Personal development and ongoing supported leadership development were strong elements relating to work to challenge ideology and focus on theology through the use of education and training. Key elements in this form of intervention are personal development and leadership development; they allow the training and education of young people, to enable them to challenge ideology and the focus on theology (p. 23).

If these students are truly searching for meaning and group affiliation, educating them on the beliefs of different religious systems, and allowing them to search them out could fill a vital

need. Challenging them to think about their own belief systems and providing opportunities for leadership could be supportive to developing citizenship with religious tolerance.

The wave of Christian and private secular schools in the country has proven no more than a band aid to the topic of educating students on religion and its place in society. Private and Parochial schools have their place, but all students need the knowledge of religious literacy in order to live in our global environment. Private and Parochial schools are not available to all students due to socioeconomics, however, the public charter school movement continues to grow (Carper and Hunt, 2007; NAPCS, 2016). The number of students attending charter schools in the US has grown from 1.29 million in 2007-2008 to 2.57 million in 2013-2014 (NAPCS, 2016). Charter schools may be the perfect place to introduce courses on religious and biblical literacy so that students can gain necessary knowledge on religions.

Rarely is there one primary cause to social issues; however, evidence exists to draw a strong parallel between the removal of religious and biblical literacy courses from the public school system and the increase in school violence across the country (Jeynes, 2014). There are five negative developments that, according to Jeynes, (2014), correlate to removing the study of the Bible from schools in 1963: Lowered academic achievement, increased rate of out-of-wedlock births, increased rate of illegal drug usage, increased rate of juvenile crime, and an overall deterioration of school behavior. While these statistics are documented, the downward spiral cannot solely be attributed to the removal of religion in schools. A correlation does not automatically dictate a cause. However, the Supreme Court's decision to remove religion and prayer from the public schools may be seen as a contributor to the moral and spiritual disintegration in the US (Webb, 2002).

Introducing religious and biblical literacy courses back into the public system, should have a positive effect on students in the 21st century. “Teaching about religious liberty is an especially important form of teaching about religion because it focuses on fundamental human rights and plays a key role in preparing students for effective citizenship in our pluralistic democracy” (Rogers, 2011, p. 42). Charter schools seeking to establish these courses find them essential for the education of well-rounded, empathetic, and knowledgeable students (Feinberg & Layton, 2014). In clarification, this study is looking at religious and biblical literacy courses that span world religions and educate students on the beliefs and practices of other faiths.

This study sought to understand the experiences of public charter schools choosing to implement religious and biblical literacy courses into their curriculums. The first charter schools in the country began opening in the early 90s, after Supreme Court decisions regarding prayer and religion were made. Many proponents of new charter schools claim the addition of religious and biblical literacy courses are a necessary ingredient in building well-rounded young adults capable of handling relationships with people holding different beliefs, and that ultimately, enhanced knowledge in this area could help to curb what is fast becoming a horrific trend of violence.

Over the past 50 years of school reform curriculum committees, principals and boards of education have spent countless hours determining which curriculums and textbooks should constitute the backbone of their learning institutions. Collaborative curriculum and character education is one leading new movement, which aims to promote students working together in groups and accepting each other and different perspectives of peers peacefully (Kamm, 2016). Educators work continually to build curriculum maps where units and objectives for student learning focuses on teaching decency, respect, and responsibility for actions, and yet the problem

of intolerance is increasing, not waning (CNN, 2016; Statement on Religion and Violence, 2016).

Educational research groups depend on the latest studies and the best-selling books on curriculum design and implementation to determine what students should learn. Each particular reform over the years has had something positive to add to the mix; however, one specific element directed at teaching the differences in belief systems has been missing, and our nation is reaping what it has sown (Kessler, 2000; Nord, 1995; Waggoner, 2013). This study specifically examined how charter schools are implementing religious and biblical literacy curriculums that could produce tolerance and acceptance among students and free them from religious prejudice. Charter schools commonly serve a minority or a culturally diverse group, often defined by the parents or group writing the actual charter (NAPCS, 2016). However, as public schools, charter schools allow all students to enroll, while still serving a distinct culture or group. Hillman (2008) observed:

In forming confined communities, charter schools reflect the shift in American public life from all-inclusive, "melting pot" civic institutions to narrower civic institutions bounded by ethnicity, social class, or religion. The widespread failure of urban public schools alongside political change and unprecedented social diversity has fueled acceptance of this shift and experimentation with new forms of public schooling (p. 587).

Therefore, many charter schools have moved to introduce Bible reading in the form of literature and history, a practice that was once common day curriculum in the American public school system from the early 1800s to the early 1900s (Hillman, 2008). Hillman (2008) further asserted that "[c]reating charter schools and other school choice options reflects districts' decisions to meet the needs of different students in different schools, and to abandon a 'one size fits all'

approach” (p. 573). According to Hillman (2008), throughout the 19th Century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, public schools incorporated the King James Bible to teach virtues and values consistent with the times. A resurgence of teaching these same virtues is occurring as some charter schools are working to implement courses rich in the different worldviews of various religions.

### **History, Background, Context**

The very first schools in America included the study of religion and the Bible based on the script of the 1620 Mayflower Compact signed as “[h]aving undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith....furtherance of the ends aforesaid” and laying the foundation for the first pilgrims to teach their sons and daughters the Bible and the Christian faith, which occurred concurrently with the process leading to the founding of the United States (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2015). The Christian faith was the first faith to be addressed in schools because it was the religion practiced by the first pilgrims in America. Indeed, in 1624, the Virginia General Assembly ruled that Native American children were to be gathered and trained in religion and civil living (Barton, 2014). In 1636, Harvard College was founded by a minister as a religious school; many Ivy League schools followed this trajectory. In 1642, the “Old Deluder Satan Law” was passed in Massachusetts to allow children to read their bibles in school, and in 1690, Connecticut passed a law requiring children to learn to read so that they could read the Bible (Barton, 2014).

Most educators today are aware that the New England Primer used Bible verses, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments to teach the alphabet (Barton, 2014). Indeed, by 1781, when Congress stamped approval on funding for Bibles in grade schools, many Ivy League schools had already opened including Yale, Princeton, Queens, Brown, and William and Mary, which ranked as some of the best universities in the country (Barton, 2014). Soon after, as

stated in the third article of the Northwest Ordinance, new territories applying for statehood were required to establish schools to teach “religion, morality, and knowledge” using the Bible as a reference (Northwest Ordinance, 1787). Various religions were already present in the country and spreading during this time. Using the Bible was not deemed inappropriate as many religions recognized it as a valuable resource.

In 1802, Thomas Jefferson required the Bible and the Watts Hymnal to be used in classrooms, and, in 1808, the famous Washington’s Farewell Address was published as one of the most integral founding documents of the country; it became a text used in schools until 1960 (Barton, 2014). Washington (1800) stated:

Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free government (p. 20).

The year 1836 subsequently brought America the McGuffey reader which used Bible verses throughout. By 1870, one room public schoolhouses had been established in the United States (Barton, 2014).

By 1900, however, rumblings began regarding whether or not the Bible should be used in schools. In 1925, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) took a school district to court in the famous Scopes Monkey Trial to defend the teaching of the theory of evolution in public

schools in the state of Tennessee. While lawsuits such as *Scopes* continued, in 1954 the words “One Nation Under God” were added to the Pledge of Allegiance.

In 1961, with close to 1,000 private religious schools operating throughout the United States, due to controversy regarding the teaching of the Bible and religion in public schools, the Supreme Court began ruling on what public school teachers could and could not teach (Carper & Hunt, 2007). By 1962, children were no longer allowed to recite prayer in public schools, and the next year, Bible reading in public schools was banned (Barton, 2014). However, what some may fail to recognize is that the Supreme Court specifically said: “Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as a part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment” (*Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U. S. 203 at 225, 1963, as cited in Feinberg & Layton, 2014, p. 8).

Jump ahead to 1980, when the United States reported the lowest SAT scores ever in the history of the public school system (Blumenfeld, 2011). Eighteen years of decline in scores ran parallel with the ban on school prayer and Bible reading (Jeynes, 2003). Again, correlation does not dictate cause. In that same year, in *Stone vs. Graham* (1980), the Supreme Court ruled that the Ten Commandments could not be posted in classrooms, “For a child might read them, reflect upon them and then obey them” (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2015). Religion was further cut from the curriculum in public schools to the point of not allowing creation theory to be taught alongside evolutionary theory; prayer was also disallowed from public school graduation ceremonies by 1992 (Barton, 2014). It is worthy to note also that the topic of religions in general was to be avoided, not simply Christianity.

In 1999, violence continued with the shooting of eleven students in Littleton, Colorado at Columbine High School. Since the Supreme Court banned the posting of the Ten Commandments in a classroom in 1980, the two students engaging in the killing had gone their entire educational careers without seeing the Ten Commandments in their classrooms– “Thou shalt not kill.” Supreme Court decisions limiting religious teaching, however, did not stop (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2015). In the year 2000, in *Doe vs. Santa Fe*, the Supreme Court ruled that even student-led prayer at sports functions was unconstitutional (Lapu, et al., 2007).

By 2008, the data clearly indicated that students in private and home schools produced higher academic results and procured more scholarships to high end universities than public school students (CAPE, 2008; Barton, 2014; Braun, Jenkins & Grigg, 2006; Jeynes, 2004). The largest of these studies was that of Jeynes (2004) who performed a meta-analysis of 49 studies that were performed from 1970 to 2003 that resulted in religious schooled students outperforming those of secular public schools. This trend continued through 2016, while school shootings also were on the rise. Homeschooled students are overwhelmingly taught virtues, religion, and Bible (Home School Legal Defense Association, 2011). These same trends of higher scores can be found in homeschooled students independent of the particular religion they practice, however religion is fundamental in most homeschool curriculums (HSLDA, 2011; Ray, 2016).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Educating students regarding belief systems and religions of the world needs to be addressed in order to help calm the social ills regarding religion. As our country becomes more global and religiously diverse, students need knowledge to critically analyze their religious choices. The eradication of the presentation of any sort of religious significance or education



(such as the Ten Commandments) in public schools has coincided with an increase in school and societal violence (Statement on Religion and Violence, 2016). The horrific event of September 11, 2001 added another layer of animosity and anger to the lives of American citizens and students (Waggoner, 2013). Ignorance has played a role as students are not regularly taught about world religions and belief systems in our public system (Prothero, 2008). Not having religious awareness leads to assumptions that then promote hate crimes and expand the religious divide of the population, which is affecting the next generation (Ghosh, et al., 2016). How then can we successfully introduce coursework focusing on religions to public charter schools?

In the past decade, a movement to return religious literacy and the teaching of the Bible in public schools has grown (National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools, 2011; The Society of Biblical Literature, 2005). Researchers and mainstream authors such as Feinberg and Layton (2014), Ghosh, et al., (2016), Nord (2010), Pratchett, et al., (2010), Prothero (2008), Waggoner (2013), and Wertheimer (2015), have made strong arguments for the need to bring the study of religions, not the actual practice of them, however, back into the public school system to educate students in a way that dispels the type of ignorance that produces religious intolerance and animosity against those holding different beliefs. In particular, Pratchett, et al. (2010), worked with a number of researchers to determine ways to successfully intervene in radical extremist ideologies. The study was conducted in 2010 as a qualitative study and included 18 case studies with 70 different interventions. The study was cited in Ghosh, et al. (2016) with the following statement:

The study found that the two most successful radicalization interventions with young people were “capacity building or empowering young people” and interventions that “challenged ideology that focused on theology and used education or training.” Education

and training in theology was also found to be successful in preventing violent religious extremism for Muslim women although interventions that allowed women to debate and discuss theological issues were more successful (p.6).

Haynes (2011), and Prothero (2008), also contended that educating students on religions and religious beliefs would both build a responsible citizenry and support healthy debate.

Various organizations have responded to this movement by defending past Supreme Court rulings and arguing in support of the First Amendment Establishment Clause which prohibits the government from making any law “respecting the establishment of religion.” Other groups have rallied and formed organizations to protect the First Amendment rights of those who choose to study and even practice their religion in the public forum, accentuating the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment. These organizations include: the Alliance Defending Freedom, Gateways to Better Education, Free to Pray, the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools, and The Bible Literacy Project. These groups claim that they exist to educate Americans on their constitutional rights and to provide documentation on religious curriculums that are legally allowable in public schools. These organizations represent all world religions. Despite their work, controversy continues about whether or not students should be knowledgeable in the area of religion and whether it should be taught as an element of a student’s public education, sanctioned at the district level.

**Charter schools defined.** It is important to define charter schools and to explain how they operate in the United States and individual states as these schools were the focus of the study. Charter schools are public schools authorized by various organizations which may include a state charter board, a state board of education, or a state university, to name a few (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). Funding for charter schools comes from

tax dollars at the state level. Few districts financially support charter schools; therefore, available funding is not equivalent to that received by non-charter, district public schools nationwide (NAPCS, 2016). Charter schools do not receive funding for facilities outside of earning capital grants.

Because they are public schools, charter schools must implement a curriculum that is non-sectarian, although they can define that curriculum, and they can serve a particular niche in the community where they are located (NAPCS, 2016). The ability to define curriculum is the essential difference between public district schools and public charter schools (NAPCS, 2016). Charter schools are schools of choice; therefore, if the emphasis of the charter school does not appeal to a particular family, attendance is not required. Charter schools throughout the country are founded with emphases that they deem essential to their particular communities (NAPCS, 2016). They can range from prioritizing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) to emphasizing the arts, military protocols, special needs programs, expeditionary learning, alternative learning, or humanities (NAPCS, 2016). They can require more than the stated mandated requirements for graduation in accordance with their specific focus. For example, a charter military academy can require four courses in high school with a military emphasis for graduation (NAPCS, 2016). Charter schools span a variety of instructional forms with different curricular emphases and have freedom to determine their specific curricula within state mandated guidelines (NAPCS, 2016).

Charter schools in the state of Utah may receive waivers from some of the requirements of their district location in lieu of providing superior academic results (UT Admin Code, 2016). The autonomy granted allows administrators and teachers to have more say in how the school is run in return for freedom from certain regulations; they are expected to produce better scores on

mandated exams (UT Admin Code, 2016). In most cases, charter schools have smaller class sizes and provide more one-on-one attention than mainstream public schools, which should produce better results (NAPCS, 2016). Each state housing charter schools mandates their charter contracts differently; however, most are reviewed every 3 to 5 years. If the school is not meeting its contract with the state authorizing agent in charge of its oversight, its charter can be revoked by the authorizing agent, and the school can be shut down (NAPCS, 2016).

Specifically, in terms of the teaching or practice of religion, charter schools are bound to the same rules as district public schools and cannot promote any particular religion over another. They are free to teach “about” religions, but they cannot teach the practice of, or indoctrination into, any particular faith tradition.

The rules and regulations protecting the rights of all citizens in relation to religion are outlined in the Establishment and Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. Specifically the First Amendment states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances (U.S. Const. amend. 1).

Therefore, public school institutions cannot promote any one religion over another, while at the same time they are obligated to allow students to exercise freedom of speech and expression of religious beliefs (Esbeck, 2000). In this vein, charter schools and public schools follow the same protocols.

Interpretation of exactly what promotes a specific religion and what does not has been an issue of concern nationwide (The Society of Biblical Literature, 2005). Organizations such as

the Society of Biblical Literature and the National Council on Bible Curriculum recommend training for all teachers before teaching religious or biblical literacy courses to help them understand what they can and cannot do and say. Nonetheless, courses have been written and vetted that do not cross the lines of demarcation between teaching about religion and teaching indoctrination of religion in public schools.

Private schools, on the other hand, are independently funded and are able to determine their curriculum as they see fit. Private institutions of learning can offer coursework focused on religions, and even more so, specific indoctrination courses for specific religions. Designated religion courses can even be required for graduation in privately funded schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine schools that have implemented courses in religion or biblical literacy and to understand what led to successful implementation of the courses in other public charter schools throughout the nation. This information will add to the body of information in the field of education transforming both school leadership and school culture by reintroducing the beliefs of different religions and the influence the Bible has had throughout history.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question was: How are schools implementing religious and biblical literacy courses into their academic curriculum? Further examination is carried out through the following questions:

- How are implementation steps executed in literacy programs?
  - How are curriculums chosen, what elements are considered?
  - How are curriculums integrated into the current academic structures?

- What specific roles do administrators and teachers play in implementation of programs?
- How does administrator/teacher training affect implementation, and what role does it play for new teachers teaching these courses?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

Based on the conceptual framework of implementation theory, specific elements surface in the literature as essential to implementing courses and programs in education. These include: teacher training, teacher buy-in, class sizes, data analysis, administrator support, parental support, and time and resources (Fallon, McCarthy, and Sanetti, 2014; Jeynes, 2011). The rationale behind this study is to examine how schools are implementing religion and biblical literacy courses and what, if any, of these elements are considered in their planning and implementation experiences. Results of the study may provide a resource for charters looking to add religious and biblical literacy courses to their offerings.

The study is particularly relevant and significant because, currently in the state of Utah there are few religious or biblical literacy courses offered, none of which are in charter schools. Charter School leaders are looking to add courses such as these to curriculum menus. Charter schools in Utah, which can define curriculum fairly independently as long as they adhere to federal guidelines, are growing at a rate of 14 percent (Headlee, 2015) with Utah state currently housing 108 charter schools (Beagley, 2015). On average, five to six charters open each year in Utah (Beagley, 2015). As charters look to differentiate themselves with their offerings, religious literacy courses may become of interest.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Religious literacy.** “The ability to understand and use in one’s day to day life the basic building blocks of religious traditions – the key terms, symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, characters, metaphors, and narratives” (Prothero, 2008. p.15).

**Biblical literacy.** Having an understanding of the role of the Bible throughout history and in literature.

**Classical education.** A movement advocating for education based in the traditions of Western culture, with a particular focus on the education as understood and taught in classical antiquity and the Middle Ages.

**Establishment clause.** The clause in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that prohibits the establishment of a national religion by Congress.

**Free exercise clause.** The clause in the First Amendment of the Constitution that provides the right for citizens to exercise their religion of choice.

**First Amendment.** Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

**Indoctrination.** Teaching a person or group of people to accept a set of beliefs uncritically; to teach or instruct someone how to practice a systematic belief system.

**Non-sectarian.** Not involving or relating to a specific religious sect or political group.

## **Limitations, Delimitations**

The study is limited in that, as a multiple case study the investigator focused on four schools only. The study is limited to public charter schools and their districts, not all public

schools. Because the focus of the study is how public charter schools are implementing these courses and what their experiences have been, it is essential to limit the scope to this subgroup of charter schools.

## **Summary**

Offering, or even requiring, as is the case in Modesto, CA, courses in religious and biblical literacy in secondary education is gaining attention and momentum throughout the United States. With the clear understanding that the Establishment Clause does not prevent students from learning about religion, or even restrict them from expressing their religion in the public school system, districts and administrators are looking at options to bring in courses to educate students and provide them with the knowledge they need to have a broad understanding of world religions and be successful in a global environment. Religious and biblical literacy courses could offer the knowledge to help turn the tide of ignorance and calm the threat of religious violence.

Charter schools are at an advantage when it comes to offering religious and biblical literacy courses due to their freedom to define curriculum within the charter itself, in accordance with federal standards. As long as the curriculum and method of instruction abides to the state and federal law, charter schools may emphasize any course of study they wish (Center for Public Education, 2016; NAPCS, 2016).



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Educators who are passionate about learning and educating students for leadership and excellence constantly seek effective change in and refinement of the art of teaching (Farber, Lencioni & Kelly, 2009). Exploring methodologies and pedagogical approaches that have worked in the past, or that have proved positive in other regions of the world, is characteristic of well-informed educators. Research has revealed that the quality of education and achievement standards in the United States have declined significantly in the 21st Century (DeSilver, 2015). Education reform in the United States over the past 30 years has not effectively bolstered the position of the country's academic standing in the global arena. Within this scope, American religious literacy is also sorely lacking when compared globally (New Pew Forum, 2010). As Prothero (2008) documented, Americans are indeed quite ignorant about world religions, including elected representatives and political leaders, which puts our country in a dire situation globally. Scholarly literature has documented a positive relationship between religiosity/spirituality, parental religiosity, religious and biblical literacy and academic achievement (College Board, 2015; Francis, 2002; Jeynes, 2009, Jeynes, 2011, Markstrom, 1999; McKune & Hoffman, 2009; Regnerus, 2003; Regnerus & Elder, 2003).

Despite recognition of the pressing need to educate students to compete worldwide, the United States fell in the midrange in preparing students for futures in many professions (DeSilver, 2015). According to the 2015 Pew Research Center Report, the United States rose slightly in math scores from 1995 to 2012, but for the most part, still lags behind in the world in the Program for International Student Assessment, or the PISA test (DeSilver, 2015).

Likewise, when it comes to religiousness and the teaching of world religions, there has been an ever growing void over the past 30 years (Nord & Haynes, 1998), and the United States

is falling short in developing social capital both in academia in general and specifically in regards to religious literacy (New Pew Forum, 2010).

Religious literacy was defined in Chapter 1 of this dissertation as “the ability to understand and use in one’s day to day life the basic building blocks of religious traditions – the key terms, symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, characters, metaphors, and narratives” (Prothero, 2008. p. 15). With violent incidents linked to religious zealotry on the rise globally, and considering the diversity of faiths represented in the United States, the need for religious literacy has become more than a discussion of simple tolerance; it has become a discussion of necessity (Bishop & Nash, 2007). The Pew Research Center (2014) has listed the United States in the moderate category for social hostility involving religion.

Overall in the United States, Americans have limited knowledge of world religions and often know very little about the faith of their own heritage, assuming they practice a religion (New Pew Forum, 2010; Prothero, 2008). Citizens who understand their nation’s religious history as well as the diversity of different religions practiced in their society can live more respectfully in a civil society together (Haynes, 2010). Religious illiteracy may be a contributing cause to some of the violent incidents occurring in our public school settings (Haynes, 2011; New Pew Forum, 2010). According to Haynes, (2011), “Religious illiteracy may be a contributing factor to the rising intolerance in the United States, including the growing number of hate crimes motivated by anti-Semitism and Islamophobia”(p.8). Religious literacy courses can help to bridge gaps in religious understanding (Prothero, 2008). Learning about religions in the public school setting allows students to be educated in global cultures and religious practices, providing them with perspectives that can help shape their understanding of others, of history, and of the history of their country and other nations and societies (Haynes, 2011). This broad

and inclusive perspective can help students make informed and tolerant decisions and provide them with an understanding that will enfranchise them to determine the best path for the nation's future generations (Haynes, 2010; Haynes, 2011; Regnerus, 2000). Regnerus (2000) discussed the importance of religious socialization in order to further student success and that it often operated apart from a single belief system while it promoted social values and integration, – both played a part in achievement. Haynes (2011) extrapolated upon the public school system curriculums falling short of what was needed to be taught to ensure religious liberty was preserved.

Within the confines of the law, public school teachers cannot overtly practice or demand that students practice any religion in a school setting or beyond (Webb, 2002). However, not allowing students to practice their religion, refer to their religion, or use it as a basis for their ideas in education, in essence can promote an anti-religious perspective, something schools are also not allowed to do (Kessler, 2000; Webb, 2002). Public schools are not encouraged to exclude religious literacy course materials from curricula, since knowledge of such religions exists in core standards (Douglass, 2002). They simply cannot require religious practice during the school day (Nord, 2010; Webb, 2002).

If the difference between learning “about” religion and indoctrination is a clear cut matter, then why are there more issues with implementing religious and biblical literacy courses than implementing a math, or a science course? The confusion seems to lie in the differences of opinion of what is truly sectarian and non-sectarian (Chancey, 2007). Since there is a fine line between respecting and assuring the rights of students to exercise their religion, and what some deem indoctrination, the debate continues as to whether religious and biblical literacy courses have a place in public education (Chancey, 2007).

Chancey (2007) reported on data collected from the Texas Freedom Network (TFN), which asked all 1,031 Texas school districts in 2005—2006 whether or not they offered religious or biblical literacy courses in the previous five year period; 33 districts responded. Of those that answered affirmatively, they were to supply TFN with “syllabi, lesson plans, lists of teacher and student resources, tests, quizzes, handouts, and descriptions of the teacher qualifications” (Chancey, 2007, p. 722). Chancey (2007) sorted through all the materials and found only three school districts that were, in his opinion, truly teaching the courses in a non-sectarian manner. Other data collected provided some insight for the study in regards to implementation. All the courses were taught as electives mostly in grades 11 and 12, but some in 9 and 10, the courses were offered as either history or English electives and the school districts varied in size from small rural to large city districts (Chancey, 2007). In 20 of the school districts that Chancey (2007) studied, regular teachers taught the courses, with only five having had any higher education courses in religion, not to mention they had all taken their courses in various schools. The conclusion was implementing the courses was problematic due to the lack of training and teacher qualifications to present the material. Eleven of the districts used the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools text, *The Bible in History and Literature*, while a number of other districts were incorporating textbooks, workbooks, and handbooks that were written locally by religious publishers (Chancey, 2007). Those that were written locally posed problems due to their religious bend and protestant flavor (Chancey, 2007). One of the school districts utilized The Bible Literacy Project text, *The Bible and its Influence* and it was found to fit the non-sectarian bill more appropriately due to its non-sectarian presentation of societies and civilizations around the world (Chancey, 2007). Chancey (2007) continued to discuss the different versions of the Bible that were used in other districts as well as Bible commentaries that

were provided to teachers. With all of this attention to implementing a religious or biblical literacy course, it becomes clearer why these courses may be avoided by some school districts.

Therefore, it is important to understand how public charter schools are implementing curriculum on biblical or religious literacy to balance these the teaching about religion and not the teaching of religion to avoid the secularization of education against all discussion of religion. It is essential to know: How are these public charter schools choosing the texts they use, if any? What are the training procedures for teachers and how are administrators defining the teaching of religions integrated throughout the curriculum of the humanities in public charter schools? Are the courses counted as History or English or some other elective credit? How much training and certification do teachers need in order to teach these courses? Do they understand the difference between indoctrination and non-sectarian implementation? In what grades are these courses offered or required? Is it mandatory for the administration to provide a school culture that welcomes religious and biblical literacy courses? Considering Chancey's (2007), study of Texas public schools took place in the year 2007, a more current study of what was happening in public charter schools almost ten years later was helpful. The answers to these questions would provide guidance for future public charter school administrators looking to implement courses across the country.

### **Conceptual Framework – Theory of Curriculum Implementation**

The theory of implementation itself is rather complex and originally developed out of the public policy field; it can, however, provide important insights for implementing effective programs in other fields and settings (Sabatier, 1986). Implementation theory spans leadership models including top/down, bottom/up, and a mixed practice of implementation better known as the advocacy coalition framework, a policymaking design (Sabatier, 1986). In a school setting,

the leadership model employed by administration has a significant impact on determining how a curriculum is implemented; therefore, using a theory that deals specifically with implementation approaches is an effective choice for this study.

Top/down models of management are used for various reasons in educational institutions. If administrators are looking to have specific control over a program and its implementation, the top/down model would be the model of choice (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979). Specific indicators cited in the literature are slated to determine the success of a top/down model, including: remaining clear with objectives, an established reason to implement, overseers help put the program in place, and support from those individuals implementing the program (Gunn, 1978). Some school cultures lend themselves to a top/down model of administration accepted by all stakeholders (military academy), whereas other educational institutions are founded on a more democratic model including stakeholders in decisionmaking (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979).

Bottom/up models are used to put program initiatives in place at the request of those needing to implement a program; in this case, teachers (Sabatier, 1986). When a program has been developed from individuals in relatively subordinate positions and steps are being taken towards implementation, those in subordinate positions who take a program to the administration and get approval are practicing a bottom/up model of implementation. This approach is helpful in many cases where the administration is removed from the daily processes of the organization (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979). One benefit of the bottom up model in an educational setting is that teachers have discretion regarding how to implement the program which provides them with a substantial degree of autonomy (Sabatier, 1986). This model correlates with a high level of

teacher participation and buy-in, since the teachers themselves have developed the implementation plan and strategies.

Logic tends to lean towards a balance of the two models to achieve a team approach to implementing a program. This is where the advocacy coalition framework comes into play to shape successful, balanced implementation. The theory is based on particular key components described by Cairney (2013) including: beliefs, advocacy coalition, policy learning, an advocate or broker who can make decisions, time, and an enlightenment or final conclusion that the implementation was profitable. When using this model to design and implement policies or to change policies to include certain courses in a public school, the system must be constantly tweaked, reviewed, monitored and reflected upon by those carrying out the implementation (Cairney, 2013).

Usually individuals in administrative roles are responsible for the task of determining the importance of specific curriculums and directing implementation of those programs (Hislop, 2013). In small schools, incorporating either committees or the entire teaching faculty to gather input for implementation allows the administration to consider necessary elements of the proposed changes that are critical for teacher participation (Hislop, 2013; Schmuck, Bell, & Bell, 2012). The unfolding of the process of finding that median between top-down direction and bottom-up participation while at the same time making strides in moving forward to implement new curriculums, was information sought after in this study. How have religious and biblical literacy courses been added to existing schools? Research has established that successful implementation of programs existed on a continuum between an exclusive dictator-like approach of top/down, and complete autonomy of those implementing (Gunn, 1978). By exploring the experiences of a wide gamut of individuals involved in implementation, this study examined how

courses evolved at charter schools and how administrators garnered support from boards of directors, other administrators, and teachers, by examining individual experiences.

As with implementation of any program, the receptivity of teachers to teaching the material is a variable that must be considered (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979). Teacher buy-in was crucial to implementing curricula, as teachers who were passionate about a given body of knowledge worked diligently to teach it to their students (Waugh & Godfrey, 1993). In their study, Waugh and Godfrey (1993) defined certain dependent variables used to measure teacher receptivity. The variables were: attitudes about the curriculum, personal feelings about the material, and behavioral intentions regarding approaches to teaching the material. The independent variables related to the dependent variables were: considerations of whether there was benefit (non-monetary) to teachers for implementing the curriculum, whether teachers felt the implementation was practical for their classrooms, whether they had a say in the program, and whether there was administrative support (Waugh & Godfrey, 1993).

Roehrig, Kruse, and Kern (2007) completed a study on the influences of implementation of a new science curriculum in a large district and found that teachers' beliefs played a substantial role and that it could take up to three years with rigorous one-on-one professional development to change preconceived notions on curriculum and science education. Practices and beliefs heavily influence the implementation of those enacting the curriculum (Roehrig et al., 2007). These issues, along with other elements of implementation are discussed in the literature review.

Although implementation theory offers some elements worthy of investigation, this researcher analyzed trends that did not neatly fit into available models of implementation. Describing the data allowed the investigator to inductively determine the strongest elements of



implementation in the four schools studied. Through interviewing and data analysis, the investigator sought to “develop a theory of process or action” (Creswell, 2013, p. 85) and to gain an understanding of the experiences of administrators to determine trends and patterns characterizing the implementation process in public charter schools.

### **Religious and Biblical Literacy**

The importance of understanding the significance of how world religions shape societies was outlined throughout the literature on religious and biblical literacy. Learning about religions, or becoming religiously literate, built students’ ability to be compassionate, understanding, and critically logical in given situations (Bishop and Nash, 2007; Nord, 2010; Prothero, 2008). Prothero (2008), documented that religious literacy has declined in the United States in the last decade (1997 – 2007), with disheartening effects. Most of this decline resulted from fear of breaking specific laws, with teachers and administrators largely ignorant to what their rights were constitutionally in the realm of teaching religious and biblical literacy courses (Haynes, 2011; Kessler, 2000). This ignorance was not limited to the school setting, but pervaded the broader society where knowledge of the major religions shaping American society and culture was deficient; many people did not acquaint or engage with those who practice other faiths (Rosenblith & Bailey, 2008). This ignorance drove minority religions to the outskirts of communities. Teachers whose aim it was to engage students with others who may hold different belief systems, were challenged to determine how to encourage religious literacy in educational curricula and practice (Rosenblith & Bailey, 2008).

Some schools nationwide were beginning to include coursework teaching about the Bible and other religions beyond Christianity to teach to the souls of children and build community (Kessler, 2000). Even without specific curriculum, teachers were guided through steps to

incorporate knowledge of world religions and spirituality into the current curriculum, opening space for students to discuss these “big questions” and to feel free to share their own insights regarding religion or spirituality (Kessler, 2000). This pursuit included teaching about the religious practices and principles that contributed to the founding of the United States.

Studying world religions allowed students to seek answers to complex questions in life (Jeynes, 2011) and to acquire skills and knowledge of world religions to negotiate a diverse global context. It was also difficult to effectively participate in a democracy without religious knowledge because our democracy allows us to worship as we see fit, allowing for many faiths to practice freely (Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007). To participate in democratic discussion of religious practices demanded knowledge of what those practices were (Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007).

Several questions presented themselves: How did schools incorporate religious and biblical literacy courses broadly that move beyond cultivating tolerance to provide a fundamental understanding of global religious practices and beliefs? In a public school setting, how are administrators and teachers making certain that students are educated on the religious aspects of society, without violating constitutional limits to advocating for or practicing religion in public schools? What are the experiences of administrators implementing programs across the country that aim to educate students about the cultural, social, historical, and spiritual differences of a variety of religious traditions?

## **Review of the Research**

**Barriers and facilitators in implementation of curriculums and programs.** While scant literature exists on the topic of implementing specific religious and Biblical literacy programs within schools, some organizations have suggested ways in which schools

implemented these programs (Gateways to Better Education, 2015). The literature has also tracked barriers to and elements of facilitation implementation, for example, the well-known positive behavior programs that have sprung up throughout the United States (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). Literature has also addressed the challenges of implementing an International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum into schools; the different challenges in curriculum and structure of these programs were also worth considering. Currently, another set of literature discusses the complexities of implementing the Common Core as administrators and teachers grappled with that challenge nationwide.

Scholars have documented some issues that arose in the effective implementation of new programs including: consistency of training, buy-in of teachers, difficulty collecting and using data, time, resources, administrative support, lack of parent involvement, class size inhibitors, staff turnover, reward systems, alignment (both horizontal and vertical), overall program design, and student attitudes (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; Fallon et al., 2014; Jeynes, 2011; Kinkaid, Childs, Blase, and Wallace, 2007). These issues can provide a starting point for studying the implementation of religious and biblical literacy courses in public charter schools, as well as uncover other issues that may be directly associated with the coursework itself.

Regarding biblical literacy and world religions courses, The Society of Biblical Literature has gathered information and has documented problems that arose from how the material was being taught and presented to students, indicating that the teachers were not biblical scholars and did not know the material well enough to teach it (Chancey, 2015). As the largest professional society of Bible scholars, the organization's leaders have asserted that it can potentially help reduce implementation problems by encouraging proper teaching of the material (culturally),

collaborating with schools to train teachers (workshops), and by providing better resources for diverse audiences (publishing lesson plans) (Chancey, 2015).

Training issues presented challenges for teachers, administrators, and school districts. To address these challenges, The Society of Biblical Literature produced a guide for schools that included pointers on how to hire teachers to teach Bible courses; it also offered scholars assistance to guide teachers through implementing the coursework (The Society of Biblical Literature, 2015). The website also housed a number of resources, but the literature remained scant on how implementation was best exercised and what schools have done specifically to be successful in delivering religious and biblical literacy courses.

**Training.** Challenges and limitations arising with the training of staff and faculty in the teaching and implementation of this curriculum were commonly cited in the literature, particularly in regards to implementing new programs and training staff and faculty. Jeynes (2012) presented a persuasive argument on the need to train instructors properly to teach the Bible as literature in the public schools. Haynes (2011) and Jeynes (2012) both strongly asserted that Christian universities and colleges needed to supply their public high school teachers with training that assisted them in appropriately teaching the Bible as literature in their future job positions; a cursory knowledge of the Bible was not sufficient to handle the material in an objective and scholarly way (Haynes, 2011; Jeynes, 2011). Anticipating the growth of courses throughout the country in the coming years, with nine states currently offering biblical and religious literacy courses statewide, and 345 school districts in 42 other states offering courses, Jeynes (2011) urged universities to start training teachers how to properly deliver the course material in a public school and exhorted educators to become lead teachers in the public realm for the courses that will follow. As for how to specifically train these teachers, Jeynes (2011)

suggested that specific curriculum designs ought to provide training strategies to assist teachers in learning how to present the material.

Kinkaïd, Childs, Blase, and Wallace (2007) examined the same issue of teacher training when identifying barriers to implementation of programs for positive behavior support. Having surveyed a number of teachers present at a teacher training event held in a forum in Orlando, Florida in spring of 2004, using a seven point scale, team level and school-wide training proved to be a significant barrier to implementation of the Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support program (Kincaid et al., 2007). Not surprisingly, the training identified teacher buy-in as an element that was essential for a program to be successful. Fallon et al. (2014) also analyzed implementation and effectiveness of the Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) initiative, indicating that a lack of teacher training seriously hindered the effectiveness of the program. The authors focused on a group of Connecticut schools, surveying personnel to discover challenges common to implementation; one of which was training for teachers (Fallon et al., 2014).

Chitiyo and Wheeler (2009), meanwhile, also studied the dynamics of SWPBS, interviewing 21 teachers in southern Illinois. These teachers widely reported that the training received was not specific enough to give them tools to handle multiple circumstances in the classroom. Ackerman et al. (2010), studying the same program in Delaware schools and interviewing teacher and student focus groups, found that specific and implicit training in the program was mandatory and that it helped teachers to properly implement the program. It is interesting to note that the results concerning the importance of training remained consistent even when different methods of study were used.

Training, or the lack of, was also a concern in an article presented by Hallinger, Lee, and Walker (2011) examining the process of transitioning students from a middle school to high school IB program. In this case, teachers were not able to vertically align the curriculum due to insufficient training in the program's protocol; as a result, they reported that the program was not benefiting the students to the fullest (Hallinger et al., 2011). The teachers felt that the gap between middle and high school material was too difficult to bridge with the material they had been given (Hallinger, et al., 2011). The authors offered recommendations for addressing the transition problems throughout similar programs after conducting a global survey of IB coordinators (Hallinger et.al, 2011). Evaluating what was required for a successful IB education, Wells (2011) pointed to the need for teachers to teach much more than skills and applications. In a study of the values and attitudes of students graduating from the IB program, Wells (2011) critically determined that not all students were prepared in the way the program's vision depicted and that incorporating an IB program, with its very specific curriculum, was extremely challenging especially because the Common Core requirements had to also be met.

In an overview of the challenges states faced in implementing the Common Core Standards, Robelen (2013) reported that most states were incorporating specific trainings for teachers to help them design lessons around the standards. Unless teachers were able to take the time to learn the standards well, and understand the depth of knowledge that students needed to retain, Robelen (2013) determined that the standards would not be taught effectively in the classroom. Consequently, Gewertz (2014) in a similar study found that if teachers did not have sufficient and appropriate resources, texts, and classroom materials, as well as training, implementation became inadequate and highly stressful.

In response to the high needs for professional development on the Common Core, Mayville (2013) looked at various organizations offering training. The National Education Association (NEA) along with various other professional groups regularly compiled resources and lessons to help transition teachers into the new formats directly linked to the standards (Better Lesson, 2015). This training was integral to the success of the incorporation of the standards for both new and seasoned teachers.

Training often laid the groundwork for teachers to properly implement a program, and without proper training, a high risk existed that teachers would not be able to regain the time spent improperly implementing a program. Hislop (2013), along with Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012), discussed the importance of motivation and perceptions on the part of the individual and the group when implementing any kind of organizational development change. Specifically, on the individual level, the teacher, or educator needed to experience affiliation with the group and have had input regarding the process of implementation of a specific program (Hislop, 2013; Schmuck et al., 2012). Affiliation, input, and achievement could be influenced heavily by an organizational development facilitator, and this professional could affect how the program was initially presented to educators (Schmuck et al., 2012). If teachers contended that training for a particular program was worth their time it contributed to the whole vision and mission of the organization, and it was easily instituted in the classroom, then chances were higher that they would participate in the training and apply it in the classrooms setting more effectively (Schmuck et al., 2012). Training success had a strong influence over teacher buy-in to a program. Buy-in was consistently cited as a powerful barrier to successful program implementation (Ackerman et al., 2010, Fallon et al., 2014).

**Teacher buy-in.** Most of the literature identified a lack of teacher buy-in as a considerable barrier to program implementation. Ackerman et al. (2010) ranked teacher buy-in as the primary barrier to implementing the Positive Behavior Support program in Delaware. Teachers on the staff did not agree with the methods espoused by the program, and therefore, they chose to not implement them in their classrooms which resulted in a lack of consistency school-wide (Ackerman et al., 2010). One of the coaches in the study explained: “There are still considerable people, teachers and staff, who are resistant, and that clearly affects how well they are able to implement. There are some naysayers that clearly don’t want to be onboard” (Ackerman et al., 2010, p. 5).

Once teachers were trained and able to see the value of a program, they were more apt to buy-in to what the organization was trying to achieve through implementation. Chitiyo and Wheeler (2009) also indicated that buy-in was a major issue at the school in Illinois; researchers described that certain teachers were not into “bribing” students in order to promote specific behavior. The reward system tended to be a point of controversy in all of the schools where implementation was studied, in part because many of the veteran teachers disagreed with that approach (Ackerman et al., 2010; Fallon et al., 2014; Kincaid et al., 2007).

A number of other indicators prompted teachers to not want to buy-in to programs, including time constraints, training and data collection, parent participation and student attitudes. Ackerman et al. (2010) and Hallinger et al. (2011) specifically addressed the problem of student attitudes and expectations with both the positive behavior program and the IB program, indicating that students had poor attitudes of entitlement (they believed they already understood the material), which then resulted in teachers also not wanting to buy-in to the teaching the IB programs.



Implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) nationwide has confronted a series of issues nationwide in the area of teacher buy-in because, in many cases, seasoned teachers were not willing to learn the new pedagogy currently required or recommended for effective integration of the standards (Robelen, 2013). Koning, Houghtby, Izard, and Schuler (2014) found that, even in the early adoption programs for CCSS, teachers were overwhelmed by and scared of the steep learning curve and the additional expectations placed upon their workload. Fear and anxiety were related to the unknown, and higher expectations led to feelings of resentment and nonconformity (Fullan, 2001).

Schmuck et al. (2012), along with Fullan (2001), and Northouse (2013) agreed that teacher buy-in to a program was contingent on the leadership style and the culture that was in place at the time of implementation. Northouse (2013), defined culture as: “the learned beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and traditions common to a group of people” (p. 384). A culture that was supported throughout the organization and was shared among all the constituents, that was open to change for the betterment of the whole, would encourage teacher buy-in in normal situations (Fullan, 2001). A servant style of leadership, where the leader put others first, was sensitive to their needs, was ethical, and worked to empower everyone in the organization created value for the entire community, teachers, parents, and students alike (Northouse, 2013). However, skeptics of the implementation of new programs will always persevere, and they will need to be convinced of the program themselves prior to buying into it (Fullan, 2001).

Teacher buy-in also evolved through teambuilding within the organization (Schmuck et al., 2012). Unlike the traditional top-down model, a high performing team had input from many actors representing diverse points of view that all worked together so that program designs were not dictated to them, but rather they were part of the overall implementation procedures of the

school (Schmuck et al., 2012). Engaging staff in setting goals, exploring pedagogies, and comparing their data with other teachers allowed for ownership of the program and would eventually result in buy-in once the program proved itself profitable (Schmuck et al., 2012). Once this buy-in had been achieved, it morphed into a facilitator, supporting and encouraging the entire staff of a school instead of constituting a barrier that inhibited forward movement. One element mentioned to gain teacher buy-in for new programs was reducing class sizes to allow space for teachers to effectively learn how to implement new strategies (Ackerman, et al., 2010).

**Class size barriers.** Literature examining the implementation of positive behavior systems emphasized large class sizes as a specific barrier that made carrying out programs difficult, such as keeping records in behavior trackers, or tallying negative comments (Ackerman et al., 2010; Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; Fallon et al., 2014). In a class of more than 25 students, teachers were challenged to provide the individual attention needed to students whose behavior required constructive intervention (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). Being able to take students out of the classroom and have moments of interaction and intervention often left the rest of the class waiting for the teacher to return to the material; whereas, teachers could incorporate positive reinforcements seamlessly while still keeping up with the lesson and discussion (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). Douglas and Parkhurst, as quoted in Chingos (2013) noted that the “most important outcomes of teaching, such as character development and appreciations, cannot be acquired by pupils in large classes as readily as in small classes” (p. 432).

Chingos, (2013), also emphasized the importance of smaller class sizes to the proper implementation of the SWPBS; class sizes of over 25 were identified as a barrier; smaller classes qualified as facilitating variables to implementation. Class size reduction was an important element of effective school implementation of programs for years, and avid discussions about its

importance continued in public schools (Chingos, 2013). With fewer students, teachers collected and analyzed data on the fly. They had greater flexibility to alter lessons to better serve students. Smaller teacher to student ratio was one area where charter schools had an advantage over public schools because class sizes were normally much smaller (NAPCS, 2016).

**Data collection, analysis, implementation based on results.** Data driven curriculum was another prevailing topic discussed in both public mainstream and charter schools in the United States as administrators and teachers attempted to use the information gained from the standardized tests required by the states to inform policy decisions (NAPCS, 2016). Formative assessment, once used quarterly, now could occur weekly, and in some classes daily, with the goal of accurately assessing whether or not students were absorbing the material (Dyer, 2015). While many teachers were able to give quick formative assessments, or exit tickets, a majority were not necessarily prepared to then take that information and make enough sense of it to change methodologies in the classroom (Ackerman, et al., 2010). Space for reflecting back on teacher training and having consistently updated skills to assess quickly and then change a lesson midstream were components that require skill from teachers and that can create barriers for teachers attempting to effectively use the information acquired through constant formative assessments (Fallon, et al., 2014).

Chitiyo and Wheeler (2009), Ackerman et al., (2010), and Fallon et al. (2014) all identified training in data collection and compilation of results as significant barriers to achievement in implementation. They expanded upon the difficulty in collecting data, interpreting data, reporting results, and then carrying through on monitoring, based on those results (Ackerman et al., 2010; Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). Many teachers had not been

sufficiently trained to keep constant records of assessments; they then struggled with modifying lessons and with differentiation, as well as with data-based decision making.

Kincaid et al. (2007) identified the “use of data” as both a barrier to and facilitator of implementation. Those teachers who had training and were comfortable with data-driven design found it to be a facilitator in implementing the behavior program, while teachers who were uncomfortable, because of either a lack of buy-in, or a lack of formative assessment, found the use of data in general to be a barrier to program success. The authors recommended that a broad and robust set of implementation supports be put in place to assure teacher success in any given program (Kincaid et al., 2007).

Fallon et al., (2014) found the data systems that were in place to monitor students discipline referral rates determined a large percentage of success. Not only was the collection, and monitoring of the data deemed important, but the authors found the use of data, once it was collected, determined whether or not the data itself constituted a barrier or a facilitator in implementing a new program. Administrative support of teachers while they learned to use data effectively in the classroom was also integral to successful program implementation.

**Administrative and parental support.** Administrative and parental support was considered crucial to the successful implementation of new programs. With the positive behavior program, teachers particularly noted that they would work on the behavior of students all day, only to have them go home and have their results reversed overnight (Ackerman et al., 2010). Those same teachers expressed frustration when their administrators did not back them up on the methods used in the classrooms; support, therefore, became a rather high barrier indicator for the program (Ackerman et al., 2010).

Chitiyo and Wheeler (2009), however, found support from administration regarding how the program was carried out in the classrooms, bolstered by printed information sent home to parents, facilitated program implementation. Buy-in from parents helped make the program work both at school and in the home setting. While the study was small and based on only one district with 40 completed surveys, it offered important insights into what helps drive a program forward (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009).

Implementing the CCSS also required a great deal of administrative and parental support (Gewertz, 2014). Administrators consistently came up against opposition from parents and the public who once approved of the standards, but then these constituencies subsequently opposed them. This inconsistency put more pressure on teachers (Gewertz, 2014). Administrators were in a difficult position because they needed to support teachers and parents and simultaneously meet the complex and rigorous requirements states passed down to public schools.

Supporting the teaching staff helped facilitate the implementation of new programs. A supportive leader was not only friendly and approachable, but would go out of his or her way to help teachers to learn and implement new strategies (Northouse, 2013). As a supportive achievement-oriented leader, the administrator challenged the staff to perform to their highest standards and to implement new programs through a fine balance of challenge and acceptance of learning, while motivating both groups and individuals (Northouse, 2013). An administrator's emotional intelligence also played a major role in supporting teaching staff as he or she attended to the needs of the implementation process (Fullan, 2001). A successful administrator worked on the emotional development of each member of the staff to attain the sustainable improvement or implementation of a program (Fullan, 2001).

Sharing the vision, goals, and directions of a program helps to build parental buy-in and cooperation (Dantley, 2003; Schmuck et al., 2012). Adept administrators are able to walk the fine line of balance between support for teaching staff and dedication to parental education so that all three elements can work together and produce the best learning environment for students in a style of purpose driven leadership (Bilgin-Aksu, Aksu, & Polat, 2015; Dantley, 2003; Fullan, 2001). The web of connection between students, parents, teachers, and administration allows individuals to be connected to the work to serve the greater good (Dantley, 2003; Fullan, 2001). If relationships were fostered, teachers and administrators felt more supported and would be more apt to carry out programs in their intended ways (Bilgin-Aksu, et al., 2015; Dantley, 2003; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Fullan, 2001). Research has linked the importance of relationship, vision, and goals between the leadership and the teachers to be of vital importance for successful course implementation (Bilgin-Aksu et al., 2015; Dantley, 2003; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). Fairman and Mackenzie (2015), specifically interviewed 40 teacher leaders on their roles and how they defined leadership responsibilities. Researchers found a high instance of teachers partnering with administrative leadership during implementation for the greater good of the students (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). Therefore, understanding why charter schools choose to implement courses on religious and biblical literacy is just as important as understanding the content of the curriculum. Without the fostered relationships that keep staff committed to a particular educational organization, staff turnover will be high which introduces other barriers to effective programs implementation.

**Staff turnover and horizontal/vertical alignment.** When new programs were being implemented by a school and the investment in training was underway, administrators expressed that they hoped their teachers would choose to remain on board with the new program and not

leave their position resulting in a gap in trained teachers. However, as the literature has documented, administrators were well aware that teacher retention year after year is challenging, due to many variables that were out of administrative control (Ackerman et al., 2010; Hallinger et al., 2011; Kincaid et al., 2007). Researchers have identified turnover of staff as a barrier to the implementation of both the IB and the SWPBS programs (Ackerman et al., 2010; Hallinger et al., 2011; Kincaid et al., 2007).

Kincaid et al. (2007) revealed that staff and student turnover was a strong barrier for the implementation of the positive behavior interventions for the schools surveyed. If teachers came in without having the same training, or if they felt they were less prepared to carry out the program than teachers already integrated into the implementation process, confidence levels descended, followed by a lower rate of implementation in the classrooms (Kincaid et al., 2007). Again, teacher buy-in greatly determined the extent to which teachers employed the practices individually (Ackerman et al., 2010; Kincaid et al., 2007). Ackerman et al. (2010) concluded that much of the discontinuity in carrying out the system of implementation of the new program was due to different understandings of teachers who thought differently about how the program should have been implemented. Results regarding inconsistent implementation were found to be higher between teachers who had been comfortable with the program and those who were new to it (Ackerman et al., 2010). Also noted by Ackerman et al. (2010) was the inconsistency between horizontal and vertical alignment. This lack of alignment was particularly notable in the IB program, where teachers found that transitions became more difficult when moving students from the elementary to the middle school programs due to the actual program deficiencies which were compounded by the teachers' lack of understanding or their insufficient ability to equip students to move to the next level (Hallinger et al., 2011). The seamless movement from one

section of the IB program to the next was not as smooth as expected, and left students with gaping holes in both academia and behavioral development (Hallinger et al., 2011).

The study of religions, however, has been laid out in the K—8 years in *Core Knowledge*, by E. D. Hirsch (2015) and aligned from year to year so that there was no overlap. Rather, it helped students to understand the history and literature that they were studying. Without understanding what was happening in the Church of England, for example, it was difficult to really get a grasp of the United States Revolution (Feinberg & Layton, 2013; Hirsch, 2015; Prothero, 2008). Likewise, in understanding the French Revolution, a comprehension of the social classes and the church was knowledge fundamental to grasping the significance of the event (Feinberg & Layton, 2013; Hirsch, 2015; Prothero, 2008). However, the Core Knowledge curriculum only covers grades k – 8 which is problematic when discussing high school religious and biblical literacy courses.

Implementing the common core has also confronted alignment challenges. The majority of the written curriculum, especially in the areas of math and science, was not written to respond to the Core and therefore alignment was weak, which caused issues for teachers aiming to incorporate the standards effectively (Robelen, 2013). Although many efforts were underway to produce lessons addressing the standards, the textbook industry was just starting to catch up to the new requirements, rewriting the scope and sequence of subjects to align with the Core (Singapore\_math, 2014). Web programs and resources were being utilized to provide teachers with substantial lessons that align to the Core, especially for those teachers with limited access to textual resources (Better Lesson, 2015).

The positive behavior program literature noted the same issues as students moved from one grade to the next, or even from one teacher to the next in the same grade (Ackerman et al.,



2010). Students indicated varying degrees of implementation and expectations for behavioral development from teachers and administrators (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). Defining and teaching universal behavioral expectations was determined as essential to effective program implementation (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). This was a component emphasized in a number of studies that asserted, along with extensive teacher training, alignment among and between grades must be succinct and clearly defined for both students and teachers to succeed (Fallon et al., 2014; Hallinger et al., 2011; Kincaid et al., 2007; Robelen, 2013).

Along with these significant elements that could be both barriers and facilitators to implementing programs in the public school system, there were a number of miscellaneous issues that appeared throughout the literature. Among them were time and resources.

**Time/resources.** Unfortunately, not having enough time or resources to implement programs is not a new challenge for educational organizations. Administrators and staff needed to work together to establish a balance to determine positive use of resources and time when trying to implement the positive behavior practices (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). It is easy to see why coursework of a religious nature has taken a back seat to the current schooling requirements under implementation nationwide. However, evidence suggests that time spent teaching religious and Bible coursework will benefit students' overall educational experience, not hinder it (Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007; Nord, 2010).

While attempting to implement the positive behavior program, teachers noted that they did not have enough time to add in the documentation and recording of specific students' behaviors while in class, and, by the end of the day, they would forget to do so (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; Fallon et al., 2014). This is a common issue teachers deal with nationwide; the issue of time as a resource as well as the material supplies required for the lessons.

Administrators and teachers implementing the CCSS emphasized the need for appropriate materials to effectively teach the lessons required by the standards (Robelen, 2013). Many of the schools surveyed by Robelen (2013) did not have sufficient resources to produce quality lessons; therefore, teachers said they felt they were incapable of closely following CCSS requirements (Gewertz, 2014; Robelen, 2013). Not only were they not able to produce the quality lessons due to a lack of supplies; many were not able to deliver the required testing due to a lack of technology and time (Gewertz, 2014). Similarly, many schools opt out of offering IB courses specifically due to the cost. IB courses cost thousands of dollars more than the regular required curriculum courses for regularly tracked students (International Baccalaureate, 2015).

### **What Could Adding Religious and Biblical Literacy Courses Offer?**

**Religious and biblical literacy.** Scholarly literature has documented the positive effect of both biblical literacy and biblical literacy courses on student performance and behavior in the U.S. public school system (Bishop & Nash, 2007; Ebstye King & Furrow, 2004; Francis 2000, 2002; Jeynes, 2009; Markstrom, 1999). In the Ebstye, et al., (2004), referenced earlier, the emphasis was to moral outcomes via information collected from 735 urban youth. The study looked at all activities of the youth involved inside and outside of school, and their levels of religiosity (Ebstye, et al., 2004). A positive correlation was found between religious knowledge, academic achievement and religiosity. Bishop and Nash (2007) discussed the necessity for building the knowledge of middle schoolers with religious literacy since the middle school years are when students are seeking to discover what they truly believe about religion. The relationship between biblical literacy and academic achievement is significant; familiarity with the Scriptures and texts that many religions incorporate has been shown to contribute to students' overall cultural understanding (Bishop & Nash, 2007; Rosenblith & Bailey, 2007; Prothero, 2008).

**Academic achievement.** Research demonstrated that students who studied the difficult text of the Bible in both historical and literary applications scored better on standardized exams in both private and public schools (Jeynes, 2009; Jeynes, 2011; College Board, 2015). Through a series of meta-analysis gatherings of 11 studies on this topic, academic achievement was defined in terms of GPA, teacher ratings, class rankings, and test scores (Jeynes, 2009). The results demonstrated a positive relationship between biblical literacy and academic scores. The students were more willing to dig into assigned class readings to find meaning, they understood more, and therefore achieved better GPAs and standardized test scores (Jeynes, 2009; Park, 2009; Regnerus, 2000). Reasons stated in studies for why the relationship between biblical literacy and higher academic scores were shown positive ranged from the idea of a religious work ethic that transcends differences in race and nationality (Regnerus, 2000), to the fact that the Bible encourages abstinence from behaviors found to be negatively associated with success (Park, 2009), and that reading the Bible requires a higher degree of reading skill (Jeynes, 2009). The type of problem solving associated with biblical literacy studies, searching out vocabulary and historical facts, builds resilience in students that may well serve them later in life (Jeynes, 2009). The research demonstrated that the outcomes of being involved in religious activities of all religions, having religious parents, and studying the Bible were positive for students (Park & Bonner, 2008; Park, 2009; Regnerus, 2000). Incorporating religious and biblical literacy courses into public charter schools may provide positive outcomes in direct opposition to the religious hostility American schools experience while also providing students with a well-rounded civic and liberal education.

Both the Bible Literacy Project, which published *The Bible and its Influence* (2011), and The National Council on Bible Curriculum, which published *The Bible in History and Literature*

(2011), studied student outcomes as a reason to engage in biblical and religious coursework. These organizations along with the social scientists mentioned above have studied the correlation between biblical and religious literacy with academic outcomes. Positive relationships have been in part attributed to the intellectual sophistication of the Bible. Studies allow students to understand texts like the great books and Shakespeare or other literary works that cite or allude to the Bible; biblical and religious studies help students mature, and, students grasp literary and historical trends and events in history (Jeynes, 2009; Manzo, 2005; Park, 2009; Regnerus, 2000). An article written by Manzo (2005) reports the feedback from a number of teachers in the K—12 arena who found the lack of Bible knowledge disconcerting. In speaking with other teachers about the levels of knowledge witnessed in the classroom Manzo (2005), shared:

“The Bible is the common currency of the English language,” argued Marie Wachlin, a former high school English teacher who supervises teacher workshops on teaching about the Bible at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, which is affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. “If you want to understand our best works of literature, any complex works, contemporary [or historical] speech or writing, you need to know the Bible (p.5).

Evans, (2007) looked specifically at six student teachers learning to teach about religion at Harvard Divinity School. Documenting the challenges of these teachers and what resources helped most, challenges were associated with monitoring diverse groups of students and keeping them on track; teachers feeling as though they had enough knowledge to actually teach the material and answer questions; and the insecurity and risk nature of working with collaborative groups (Evans, 2007). However, the cohort was very positive in regards to their mentors and thought they were extremely helpful not only in pedagogical skills, but in understanding the

ethos of the classrooms (Evans, 2007). One of the more specific desires of the group was to come away with more specific activities and to document more of the conversational guidelines to set the precedent in their own individual classrooms (Evans, 2007).

It would stand to reason that if these teachers were trained well and confident in the material they could then go into the secondary classrooms and prepare students for exams such as the AP European or AP Literature exams, both of which include material that would fall under the religious literacy heading. However, teachers experienced the dearth of religious and biblical literacy knowledge as they prepare students to take standardized exams (National Council of the Social Studies, 2014). When taking a look at the guidelines to prepare for these exams, we find the AP European History 2016 scoring guidelines repeatedly referenced the Bible, the Vulgate and the European population's knowledge of it (College Board, 2015). Citing the Bible contributed evidence in answering essay questions included in the test on the history of the Reformation. There was an expectation that students would be familiar with the King James I Bible translation as well as with the effects of religion on the populace after the Reformation (College Board, 2015). The College Board website (2015) section on exam preparation provided sample short answer comparative questions that included religious references such as: "Briefly explain one important similarity between the wars of religion in France and the English Civil War" or "Briefly explain one important difference between the wars of religion in France and the English Civil War" (College Board, 2015). These questions assume that students have a strong foundation in the wars of religion and what they encompass and that they have acquired core knowledge of the role of European religions in history (College Board, 2015).

It is important for students to understand the literary devices used in the Bible and the history of its influence on Western thought and development (Beauregard, 2001; College Board,

2015; Warshaw, 1964). According to the College Board website (2015) the Advanced English Literature Exam noted the relevance of studying the Bible to ensure high scores. Cited as essential in the Teachers Guide are specific Bible and mythology resources and a list of significant Bible characters; also emphasized is the importance of referring to the Bible to demonstrate an understanding of history and culture (College Board, 2015). Teachers expected to teach AP courses may need training in covering topics that would fall into religious literacy in order to prepare students for the exams. Discovering whether or not AP teachers are teaching this material in the public charter schools and how they present it to prepare students for AP European and AP Literature would prove profitable for this study.

Park (2009) examined the correlation between religiousness and academic performance and found a statistically significant positive association between religious variables (knowledge, participation, belief systems) and academic achievement, for all ethnicities. Previously studies indicated a correlation for specific ethnic groups such as Hispanics and African Americans (Jeynes, 2003). However, Park's (2009) study, based on North East Linguistic Society (NELS) data, looked at Asian Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and European Americans. The Park (2009) study revealed a significant correlation with religiousness and locus of control, affecting test scores positively. The study did not break out particular belief systems such as Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism, but measured religiousness as a whole in relation to academic performance.

Azizi and Zamaniyan (2013) also performed a study examining the correlation between spiritual intelligence and vocabulary learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Iran. Defining spiritual intelligence as a person's capacity to express spiritual resources, values, and properties to improve their everyday performance, the study showed through

multiple regressions that there was a significant correlation between having spiritual intelligence and building vocabulary.

Antrop-Gonzalez, Velez, and Garrett (2010), meanwhile, sought to identify why certain urban youth of color performed well in school, while others did not. With the majority of the studies performed on a macro level, the authors analyzed the trajectories of 10 poor Puerto Rican high school students and interviewed them regarding what forces they felt had an impact on their academic achievement. All credited their religiosity as having a positive impact in both their academic and personal lives (Antrop-Gonzalez, et al., 2010).

**A global society.** When discussing building a healthy society and a pluralistic democratic state, Rosenblith and Bailey (2008) asserted that scholars should have a handle on the various belief systems represented in our country and world in order to live peacefully with others and understand the perspectives of others in a global society. Religious literacy courses provide a global picture of religions of the world and belief systems in a non-sectarian way so that students can gain the bigger picture of the world, beyond their own neighborhoods.

Bishop and Nash (2007) discussed the American-Muslim struggle that is primarily based in a misunderstanding and generalization of both the Christian and Muslim religions. They concluded that, since the Bible is common ground for both religions, discussions and mature conversations can be initiated between the groups at the biblical level (Bishop & Nash, 2007). An understanding of world religions would foster civil discourse for Christian and Muslim students alike. The moral themes interwoven throughout the Bible allow students to investigate with freedom their own shared values and find commonality between belief systems, something that is necessary in the United States if responsible citizens are to emerge from public institutions (Bishop & Nash, 2007). Studying the Bible allows for a natural character education system

whereby students learn the consequences of actions via Biblical characters and where students can generate and share positive attitudes and then practice them in their daily lives.

Lastly, studying the Bible as literature and history provides a framework for students to broaden their knowledge in both areas and to intelligently contribute to the conversation of world events observed daily. Ignorance about specific religious beliefs and practices can lead to frustration and violence on the part of youth. Studying the religious world through history in a respectful academic environment broadens students' understandings of each individual religion (Jeynes, 2009).

The incorporation of Bible reading through literature and history positively affects literacy scores and is allowed in public schools in the United States under federally approved curriculums (Jeynes, 2011; Bishop & Nash, 2007). Biblical literacy is integral to K—12 education because reading the Bible can have more than one positive effect. As documented, reading Scripture encourages stronger vocabulary development and can contribute to understanding Biblical history and its connections to the founding of the United States (Webb, 2002). Grounding American students in the founding of the country, as well providing an educated understanding of the religions practiced throughout the United States, is not only fitting for 21st Century education, but is required in the standards (Douglass, 2002).

The full-year and semester-long curricula from the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS) entitled *The Bible in History and Literature* (2011) has been incorporated into public school districts throughout the country in 39 states and 2,683 high schools (NCBCPS, 2011). The student text covers units on the introduction to the Bible, the history of the Bible, translations, the beginnings, Old Testament books, Hebrew law, literature of Job and Psalms, the kings and prophets, archeological finds, the apocrypha, New Testament



books, and the connection of the Bible to the U.S. Constitution and American History. The curriculum designers also placed the First Amendment and Establishment and Free Exercise Clause in the front of the text so that students, teachers, parents, and administrators could clarify what the amendment addressed in terms of practicing or promoting a specific religion.

Another popular program, The Bible Literacy Project, has produced and vetted a curriculum entitled *The Bible's Influence* which is also being incorporated in schools throughout the country (Chancey, 2007; Schippe & Stetson, 2011). The project's website offers some commentary from users, but it provides no indication of how principals and teachers are implementing the materials into classes. The 362-page text can be broken into two courses or taught over the span of a middle school or high school year. Units are broken out into Genesis, Exodus and the Land of Promise, Kingdom and Exile, the Prophets, Writings and Wisdom, and Narratives of Commitment, which encompass the study of the Old Testament. The New Testament units include Another Covenant, The Four Gospels, The Early Christian Community, The Letters of Paul, Other Letters, and Revelations. Along with the complete student text, the curriculum designers included a teacher's guide, a resource CD, and an assessment program. The program is also available in a digital format. Finally, the mission of the company *Essentials in Education* is to provide educational resources that enrich the lives of students and to produce other resources in the area of biblical literacy related to marriage and family, leadership, and founding documents (Essentials in Education, 201).

How specifically these materials are being taught in public schools is relatively unexplored, and little is known about how well teachers are prepared to present the materials to students. Thousands of schools around the country are implementing programs that support religious literacy, but each needs to be examined independently to determine best practices and

to contribute to the literature on the successful incorporation of these elements into the public school setting. Some schools are using these texts as base texts and then adding information on religions that are not in the curricula, including faiths outside of the dominant world religions.

Feinberg (2014), offered advice regarding how to add religious literacy courses to humanities curriculum in the public sector, including guidelines for engaging students and their points of view. He spoke specifically about the art of negotiating conversation so that the teacher remains neutral in discussion (Feinberg, 2014). Also, in his article he spoke to the necessity of educational legitimacy based on respect and how teachers were obligated to maintain that atmosphere throughout the teaching experience (Feinberg, 2014). Some schools are incorporating these elective courses to no avail, as students are not registering to take them. Still, other schools and districts are choosing to form their own curriculum around the topic of world religions, making the courses mandatory, as in the case of the Modesto School District in California (Killman, 2007). Modesto is an entire school district; charter schools are their own LEA (Local Educational Authority) and considered districts. Discovering whether any charter schools are requiring courses for graduation, as is Modesto, would be profitable information for this study.

While other schools offer elective courses on world religions, Modesto requires all ninth graders to take an extended course as part of their “safe schools” policy (Lester & Roberts, 2006). A report completed in 2006 detailed the specific reasons why learning about religions promotes tolerance and open discussion (Lester & Roberts, 2006). Results indicated that the course was integral to the levels of respect for First Amendment rights and the rights of religious liberty (Lester & Roberts, 2006). When the students’ sense of threat was measured after the course, it had decreased from 17% to 13% based on a query regarding “whether they thought

they or their families would likely be a victim of a terrorist attack within the next six months” (Lester & Roberts, 2006, p. 38). Students stated in interviews that they thought the course would help them with their careers and social lives outside of school, and the majority of the students said the course was a positive experience (Lester & Roberts, 2006).

Professional development trainings were available for teachers from a number of organizations, however, information was lacking regarding the effects of the training on the ground in the schools. Also absent were studies on how principals implemented these programs, how teachers taught them, as well as the successes and challenges that come along with incorporating religious material into the curriculum. Gathering this information from public charter school administrators would be valuable to this study.

Gallagher (2009) discussed elements that should be included in the design of religion and biblical literacy courses for college students. He used guidelines from Prothero (2007) as the premise for providing students with general knowledge of world religions. Gallagher (2009) outlined some of the challenges involved in teaching the material as an elective course at the college level. He concluded that, due to the nature of general studies courses, the majority of students would only take one course, so courses need to be designed in such a way that they are conclusive rather than pre-requisites for other courses. He further suggested that a simple goal, such as helping students to develop an understanding of the plethora of religions practiced the United States, would serve in anchoring the design of a course (Gallagher, 2009). These main points may also be valuable when offering courses on a high school level.

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

Many of the studies outlined in this literature review employed questionnaires and surveys which were either self-reported, or director-reported (Ackerman et al., 2010; Chitiyo &

Wheeler, 2009; Fallon et al., 2014; Hallinger et al., 2011; Kincaid et al., 2007). Fallon et al. (2014) sent their survey to principals who then forwarded it to staff members. Of that total group of participants, one principal in particular chose to send the survey only to his SWPBS team, which accounted for 10 surveys (Fallon et al., 2014). Of the total 702 staff who received the materials sent by principals, only 171 (24.4%) responded (Fallon et al., 2014).

Chancey (2007) studied the implementation of specific religious and biblical literacy courses and engaged information from the Texas Freedom Network, (TFN), an Austin based group who set themselves up to counter the right wing religious front. TFN took it upon themselves to collect the information employing the Public Information Act (Chancey, 2007) and the researcher then analyzed the data that 33 school districts supplied (Chancey, 2007).

Hallinger et al., (2011) achieved a much higher response rate when surveying IB schools. The authors' survey went to IB coordinators working in 175 schools with returned questionnaires resulting in a 98.8% response rate (Hallinger et al., 2011). Since the aim of that study was to identify challenges to implementation, and then recommend suggestions for improvement, there was sufficient reason for IB coordinators to participate to contribute to and subsequently obtain knowledge of the data analysis (Hallinger et al., 2011).

Many of the questionnaires used in the literature reviewed in this chapter were based on Likert scales and then coded to generate quantitative data, which is more easily measured than qualitative data. Questionnaires and surveys were administered to students and staff during the school day in some instances, and others were generated by email, particularly where mega-studies were concerned. Once the surveys and questionnaires were coded, researchers used various methods of analysis.

Kincaid et al., (2007) conducted case studies via focus groups and coded thematic groupings of statements. They employed a nominal group process to facilitate structured face-to-face interaction, brainstorming, and coding. Hallinger, et al., (2011) meanwhile, employed a worldwide survey that was able to be completed whenever the participant chose, and wherever the participant chose to complete it.

Ackerman et al., (2010) also employed a multiple case study design that included data collection for participating schools in terms of suspension and expulsion rates derived from state sources. A comparison was then made between schools implementing the program, and those that were not implementing the program in order to determine effectiveness (Ackerman et al., 2010). Critics identified conceptual flaws in the design of the study that could have skewed the final data analysis (Ackerman, et al., 2010).

In discussing the implementation of Common Core, Koning et al., (2014) chose discussion conversational approach via email to address early implementation of a program of lessons and to document how the teachers adjusted to and accepted the transition. The program involved a strong component of teacher training, which was a slow process that spanned the early implementation year, which resulted in positive feedback and acceptance of the program and simultaneous movement to Common Core Standards (Koning et al., 2014).

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

The literature reviewed indicated various elements can serve as both barriers to and facilitators of programs that aim to incorporate religious and biblical literacy courses into public school curricula. Literature also indicated there are different elements at play than simply those found in the implementation of other high school or middle school courses (Chancey, 2007). Key indicators of acceptance/rejection, and of success/failure overwhelmingly included teacher

participation and proper training (Ackerman et al., 2010; Kincaid et al., 2007; Koning et al., 2014). These two elements seem to either make or break a program's successful implementation.

Indicators emerging from the literature that can serve as both facilitators and barriers, such as class size or time and resources, fell into categories of more important and less important as preliminary data was coded via responses from participants (Ackerman et al., 2010).

### **Summary**

There were many elements to consider when implementing any new coursework into a middle school and/or high school environment. Although many of these elements related to implementing religious and biblical literacy courses, as was seen by the literature, other elements were crucial to implementing this type of coursework. The emphasis of this study was to determine what the most important elements were and how they affected implementation as either facilitators or barriers to the courses. Keeping in mind the elements of the theory of implementation, this researcher identified specific themes and embarked upon comparing elements from the multiple case study data analysis. The analysis then identified common themes and issues of greatest concern arising from document review and interviews with participants.

### **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

Charter schools that taught religious and biblical literacy courses had certain elements in place to foster positive feedback and continuation of the coursework (Chancey, 2007). Particular questions came to mind in relation to the most important elements of implementation such as the specific impact of teacher buy-in and teacher training. Understanding how to successfully implement religious and biblical literacy courses into public charter schools in the United States has not been thoroughly documented over the past 25 years. Multiple case study analysis allowed the researcher to address this gap through purposeful, targeted interviewing and document analysis to determine the most important elements of successful, continuous implementation, and how to execute it. The study sought to determine the degree of importance of teacher buy-in as an integral element in getting the coursework taught in charter schools. The study also sought to explore teacher training and overall school culture to determine their importance to program implementation. Schools chosen to participate had a positive response to the coursework and were actively teaching religious and biblical courses when the study was conducted in 2016.

Building a model of what elements are not only advantageous, but essential to successful implementation of these programs would serve members of the educational community planning to implement these courses in public charter schools, more specifically, the state of Utah where there were no charter schools offering religious or biblical literacy courses of this nature.

Questions explored in the study were derived from the theory of implementation that determined profitable implementation of programs based on the management style used and on particular variables of participation and intentions of those in charge of implementation (Gunn, 1978; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979; Waugh & Godfrey, 1993).

## **Research Questions**

The overarching question of the research was: How are public charter schools successfully implementing religious and biblical literacy courses? Studying those schools currently instituting programs, additional questions included:

- How are implementation steps executed in literacy programs?
  - How are curriculums chosen?
  - Are curriculums suggested by boards of directors, parents, teachers or a mix?
- What specific roles do administrators and teachers play in implementation of programs?
- How does teacher training affect implementation, and what role does it play for new teachers teaching these courses?

By gathering case studies of schools implementing these courses to answer these questions, the goal of this study was to provide guidance for public charter schools looking to include programs such as these in their curriculum design.

## **Purpose and Design of Study**

This study aimed to make a contribution to research on the literature of Implementation Theory by studying implementation processes at schools teaching religious and biblical literacy courses, thus providing data that was specific to these particular courses and that should be considered. The goal of the research was to identify which elements of implementation theory led to success in integrating a curriculum including biblical or religious literacy. The results of the study would benefit administrators and educational providers by making them aware of



particular elements they would have to consider if looking to implement such courses successfully into public charter schools.

The study collected and analyzed information on the experiences of administrators who had implemented religious or biblical literacy courses. The experiences of administrators were documented and coded. The purpose was to provide initial insights for others looking to implement such courses into their existing curricula. Identifying barriers and facilitators to successful implementation constituted the primary contribution.

An abundance of literature existed on how to implement various types of coursework in public schools, including language programs, sex education programs, or complex math programs. However, literature was scarce that addressed how to successfully implement religious and biblical literacy programs, beyond a few suggestive guides available from curriculum manufacturers (GTBE, 2016). With the state of current political affairs in the world, it is vitally important that students are taught about world religions including the influence that the Bible has had throughout history and still has in contemporary societies. Many of the so called “Holy Wars” throughout the world are better addressed when the beliefs of a particular religious culture are understood (Prothero, 2007).

In the literature cited in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the majority of implementation studies used case study, narrative, and survey methodological approaches. The multiple case study method was appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to identify and document holistically the benefits of following a school’s implementation plan as well as the process itself of implementation; reflective data analysis generated powerful insights and strategies for those looking to implement coursework. A multiple case study specifically allowed the researcher to describe the conditions under which schools added religious and

biblical history courses and how administrators evaluated them (Creswell, 2013). Information on the specific curriculums chosen, the administration's involvement, and teacher receptivity and responses to the courses was collected.

Kinkaid et al. (2007) employed a survey method to identify barriers and facilitators in reference to the Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (SPBS) program. Fallon et al., (2014) also used surveys to question personnel on the elements of implementation of the same program in Connecticut schools. Chitiyo and Wheeler (2009) incorporated interviews to examine implementation of SPBS in Illinois, while Ackerman et al. (2010) chose to employ focus groups as part of a case study approach.

For the purposes of this study, multiple case study interviews engaging administrators, and a review of curricular documents and other texts provided a holistic picture of what helped and what hindered implementation of these courses in the public charter school arena. Creswell has asserted that that two to three case studies can generate effective information to provide a thorough analysis of procedures (Creswell, 2013). In total, the researcher selected four sites to conduct multiple case studies to fulfill this requirement. To understand the procedures and protocols at each school, the multiple case study proved a viable methodology since in the case of implementing religious and biblical literacy courses there is a desire to understand the systems in place at each school (Yin, 2014). The variables influencing administration, teachers, and their understanding of the establishment and free exercise clauses in reference to these types of courses being viable and worthy of inclusion in the public school regimen constituted a complex phenomenon due to the biases of teachers. Employing multiple case studies also provided the necessary relationship between the theory of implementation and the analysis of the elements essential to the successful implementation of these particular courses in public schools.

The design of the case studies was descriptive in nature; the data collection and analysis aimed to describe and map how schools have practiced implementation—specifically how they recruited teachers, certified them, and provided training. The design also aimed to identify what barriers surfaced along the way. In defining the case, the unit of analysis was determined to be the public charter schools participating in the study (Yin, 2014). In order to bind or fence in what was studied, the researcher followed Merriam (1988) and chose the administrators to serve as key delimiters. The study was particularistic in that it focused on a particular program of study in the public charter school, religious and biblical literacy courses (Merriam, 1988). The particular courses highlighted in the study were *The Bible and Its Influence*, and *The Bible in History and Literature*, discussed in Chapter 2, as well as a *World Religions* course created independently by a school and a *Sociology and Comparative Religions* course.

As a form of research, case studies answer questions of “how” and “why” (Yin, 2014). When research questions are rich with variables, the case study method allows the investigator to collect information without excessive control over the variables. Investigating the phenomena of implementation of coursework with administrators by viewing documents and artifacts and by conducting in-depth interviews provided depth to the study and led to the construction of a rich narrative (Yin, 2014). Merriam (1988) complemented this definition by stating that the case study focuses on an in depth study of a bound system that can then be analyzed, which indeed characterized this dissertation.

According to Creswell (2013), case studies in particular have certain defining features that are characteristic of a good qualitative study. First was the identification of the case, which as previously stated, was the charter schools teaching this curriculum. Second was the intent of the study. In this case the researcher sought to understand specific elements of implementation;

therefore, this study qualified as an instrumental case (Creswell, 2013). Schools were chosen that were best able to provide answers to the questions posed. Third, according to Creswell (2013), acquiring an in-depth understanding of each case was essential, and this was achieved by relying on multiple sources of data collection which provided triangulation utilizing interviews, documents and audio visual materials must be considered to know a case well (Creswell, 2013). These sources aligned well with Stake's (2005) claim that knowledge from a case study is vivid and concrete, and rooted in context because of how it is collected. For the purposes of this study, spending time in teleconference with the key players in each school allowed for reading body language, as well as building relationship. Studying course descriptions, syllabi, textbooks, enrollment numbers and websites permitted the researcher to build the context of each particular case.

A case study approach was also appropriate for this study because many intersecting elements were at play in the actual implementation of the coursework. Yin (2014) clarified that this methodology can serve a niche where a contemporary, natural set of events is happening and where the researcher has little or no control over the activity. Since the situations in each charter school were unique, probing interview questions about the natural environment permitted themes to surface during the interviews and document review. Interviewing administrators and collecting specific documentation of course descriptions helped construct a more complete picture of implementation for each school.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

Programs facilitating the teaching of religious and biblical literacy in public schools existed, but they were spread all over the country. Various organizations were capable of training both administrators and teachers on their rights, and the rights of their students, in the

area of religious and biblical literacy education. With these resources available to public schools, it was interesting to note that not many who were using these programs wanted to be put in the limelight or have attention drawn to the fact that they were teaching the Bible in coursework. For example, the researcher contacted the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools; however, the organization was not willing to provide data on specific schools using their curriculum. In a way this seemed understandable, but it was also a bit disconcerting given that it was a constitutional right for students to learn about religions in public schools. The organization did, however, provide the names of districts and states where those districts resided that had approved the curriculum; those charter schools were contacted and are the focus of this dissertation.

The primary investigator had to locate specific schools for participation in this study, and conducted case studies of four schools that were successful in implementation of the curriculum. The findings from those case studies are presented in Chapter 4.

Administrators in four public charter institutions that were teaching either *The Bible and Its Influence*, or *The Bible in History and Literature*, or another course that fell under religious or biblical literacy education, such as a comparative World Religions course, constituted the cases for this study. The initial two courses were chosen due to their common use in research and search ability on the internet. However, once the schools were interviewed, world religions and sociology courses came to the surface. Particularly interesting were administrators serving in schools of 6 – 8 grade students (middle school) and 9—12 grade students (high school) since the specific coursework employed was designated for these age groups. It assumed that the depth of the material required a maturity level that younger students had not yet gained. It was anticipated that two or three schools would agree to be a part of the study; four actually participated. The

academies were located in four different states throughout the US. The schools and districts were identified through the curriculum manufacturer's clientele listings. Once the schools were identified, the researcher contacted them and informed the administrators of the details of the study to determine their interest and request participation in the study.

Four administrators (Principal/Director/Headmaster/Superintendent) were interviewed. Purposeful sampling was achieved using criterion sampling (public charter schools teaching religious or Bible literacy courses), maximum variation (different parts of the country), and homogenous grouping (the schools were teaching one of the two courses previously mentioned, or a similar course) (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Criterion sampling identified public charter schools teaching the particular courses previously stated. Not limiting the types of schools would have produced too many variables; private schools throughout the country also taught these courses without the same restrictions that public charter schools were obliged to follow. By studying cases from varying regions of the country, commonalities surfaced that proved informative in states where no religious or biblical literacy courses were being taught. Homogenous grouping facilitated researching a particular group of administrators offering specific courses. Narrowing the courses to the few determined and mentioned earlier, and others with a concise focus on religious and biblical literacy, provided common elements for analysis. With each case, the researcher aimed to collect data to understand these schools in depth, including how the courses were chosen, how the teachers were trained, and how administrators gained buy-in, syllabi from the courses, course descriptions, textbooks, and enrollments and studying their website; these were the common phenomena studied at each case study site (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Using a non-probability sampling procedure, common in qualitative studies, enabled the researcher to generate ideas and collect feedback from the schools that were teaching the courses at the time the study was conducted (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling is common in qualitative research due to the availability and characteristics of the specific individuals chosen, or of the sites chosen, “to inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Narrowing the study to public behavior such as websites, syllabi, course descriptions, and interview questions allowed easier access and a more detailed study of the autonomy of school administrators. Once a listing of charter schools offering the courses was acquired, contacts were sent to all schools with the goal of identifying a geographically differentiated choice of schools not all located in one region of the country.

While generalizing the results had its limitations, the study provided helpful insights for many administrators nationwide considering implementation strategies for religious and biblical coursework. One school in each geographic location cannot speak for all charter schools; however, the in-depth case studies did provide some generalized information.

### **Instrumentation**

Interviewing was essential to the development of a comprehensive case study (Yin, 2014). As a part of an entire matrix of the study, structured interviewing allowed the researcher to gather specific information from each school administrator. Based on an interview protocol that was standard for all of the case study sites, a collaborative discussion between the administrator and the researcher framed data collection, and open ended questions built the narrative portion of the study (Creswell, 2013). The logical sequence of questioning, transcribing, and analyzing the data was reasonably responsive to the particularities of each site. Once interviewees were identified based on their knowledge and capacity to respond to the

research questions (purposeful sampling), face-to-face interviewing via join.me took place. Face-to-face (teleconference) was preferred to phone interviews because it allowed for a greater degree of informal communication such as body language to be observed and captured. Join.me allowed for video conferencing during the interviews. Recording procedures included the audio recording of the session and notetaking by the researcher which served to answer the questions on the interview protocol sheets. The join.me interview was scheduled at a time convenient for the participant. All interviewees completed consent forms. The identities of the participants and the names of the schools have been kept anonymous in the writing of this dissertation.

Interviewing a common set of individuals in four case studies provided answers to specific questions regarding implementation of coursework. Exploring the length of time of implementation, the history of the coursework in the school, whether or not the imperative was imposed on the school or suggested by parents, and whether or not the courses were required of all students, constituted elements that contributed to the data analysis to provide an overview in each case of the implementation of the coursework through closed-ended interview questions. Open ended questions, meanwhile, provided broader and more complex data on the history, context, attributes, activities and outputs of the programs under implementation.

Documentation of the course outlines and detailed descriptions of implementation were provided by the schools. Student enrollments in the classes were provided for each school. These documents were then reviewed to identify common elements such as to which grades the courses were offered, what texts were being used, and what wording was included in the course descriptions, and requirements in the syllabi.

Documentation plays a vital role in case study research; in this study, it provided concrete evidence of how the courses were implemented on-the-ground (Creswell, 2013). The researcher



identified that course descriptions had the potential to either attract students or deter them from enrollment, thus reviewing these was essential. The researcher also studied the syllabus for each course, what the assignment requirements were, and the enrollments for each course.

Documentation along with interview transcripts provided a picture for the research.

Each case included a summarizing passage in Chapter 4 of the dissertation, and the results are further discussed in a cross case analysis with sections devoted to each of the resulting issues or themes that surfaced in the study in Chapter 5 (Yin, 2014). The compositional structure of the report is thematic in nature.

### **Data Collection**

In the preliminary stages of the research project, contact emails were sent to administrators in charter schools who taught the proposed coursework. Once contact and interest was determined, appointments were made for the join.me teleconference and consent forms were sent, signed, and returned. The researcher confirmed the appointment with the administrator the day before the interview and also sent a second email the morning of the interview with a link to the join.me teleconference. Each administrator was interviewed for approximately 90 minutes, and they sent their course descriptions electronically prior to the interview.

Interviewing took place using a specific interview protocol sheet with the researcher documenting answers. Recording the interviews was done as part of the join.me.com session. The recording feature in the program is confidential and password protected. Questions began with icebreakers to establish rapport, then the researcher proceeded to ask open ended questions that allowed the interviewee to speak freely about the history of implementation and the general context in which it occurred. The goal was to not have the interviews exceed a one-hour time frame; however, a couple of the administrators were very enthusiastic and provided information

beyond the planned hour. The researcher had prepared for this, blocking out plenty of time for extended interviews and to listen to the recording for preliminary review immediately afterward.

Following the interview, the administrator was immediately sent a pass worded link to the audio recording to review. Member checking was employed to decrease the chance of misrepresentation of the information shared. To assure that the experiences of the administrators were correctly interpreted, each participant received copies of the transcribed responses to the protocol questions via a Google doc which they were asked to read, edit, and approve. The document itself was a verbatim transcription of the conversation, with pertinent information needed for the study. Once the final approval for the document was received, I sent each participant a small edible arrangement to thank them for participating in the study.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Through the course of interviewing and examining course descriptions, common terms surfaced and were coded. Responses from interview questions were coded according to themes that surfaced from the answers to the research questions. The researcher differentiated data from administrators through the following designations: length of time courses had been taught, whether or not they were required or elective, how many were offered and to what grades, and when they were offered (semester, quarter, etc.). Accordingly, data pertaining to teachers was analyzed in alignment with how long the teacher taught the course, whether or not he or she had access to professional development and what resources/texts were being used for the course. All interview protocols involved open ended questions to generate rich feedback (Butin, 2010).

When discussing the course itself, administrators were questioned regarding: how they felt the course fit into the mission and vision of the school, what they thought was the most important element of the course being taught, and the perceived challenges and benefits of the

courses. Teacher training and expectations were explored as well as whether there were requirements such as an English or History endorsement.

Coding took place once the descriptive and reflective information had been recorded and the discussions had been transcribed. Choosing common descriptors served as a starting point for analyzing the data which was aggregated down to Creswell's (2013) suggested 25 – 30 categories. Reducing and combining like descriptors allowed the categories to grow into five or six themes that were used to write the narrative in the conclusive Chapter 5 of this dissertation (Creswell, 2013). The codes were emergent and not pre-existing, and many codes aggregated together provided common ideas and themes (Creswell, 2013).

In the case of the implementation of religious and biblical literacy courses in public charter schools, I focused on: (a) the process of implementation with the result of (b) describing each school's methods and process through (c) memoing, (d) interviewing, and (e) data analysis using patterns and coding (Creswell, 2013). This particular study fell into the systematic type of descriptive case study in that I was seeking to understand and describe a process (Creswell, 2013). During the final stages of the coding process, based on the three major categories of causal conditions, strategies, and intervening conditions, I used selective coding to interrelate the categories and assemble the story or narrative statement that became the conclusion of the study (Creswell, 2013).

Pattern matching logic was determined ahead of time with predictions made about teacher training, administrator support, and course offerings (Yin, 2014). A couple of the patterns found in the fieldwork were similar to the predictions, which made the case study stronger analytically (Yin, 2014). Patterns for coursework were determined based on the literature of implementation theory described in the literature review of Chapter 2. Key

components were assumed to be just as integral, if not more so, for religious and biblical literacy courses, and it was predicted they would match a particular pattern. If the patterns were similar, then a consistent case could be built (Yin, 2014).

The approach to analysis allowed descriptive statements to answer the “what” questions of what was happening at particular sites, as well as the “how” questions of implementation (Creswell, 2013). The narrower units of analysis in the first round of coding were linked to significant statements during the interviews that then allowed broader units to be discovered during analysis to help define the phenomena observed (Creswell, 2013). Using the coding procedures discussed, a composite description was written of what the sites had in common, and what they did not share in each implementation model and experience.

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

The most obvious limitation was the assumption that generalizations could not be derived from single or even multiple case studies. However, context dependent knowledge could prove insightful, generating and testing specific hypotheses (Merriam, 2009). Flyvberg (2006), citing the experiments of Galileo, Newton, Einstein, Bohr, Darwin, Marx, and Freud, asserted that both natural and human sciences could be advanced by the use of a single case study. However, the issue of generalizability of the results of single and multiple case studies still represented a limiting factor.

Quantitative studies that can be easily duplicated and result in the same conclusions are easier to generalize. They can be used to make conclusive statements in regards to the study itself. With a case study, it is more difficult to generalize the information, even when citing more than one case, due to the fact that there are so few cases, and by coding and finding

recurring themes, much of the analysis becomes subjective rather than objective (Creswell, 2013).

The cost, in time, can also constitute a limitation in case study research. Having the time to write extensive notes and meticulously summarize data can be daunting. (Merriam, 2009).

The resulting reports can be too lengthy for other researchers to consume quickly, and decisions as to what to include and not include in the final reporting may present challenges.

Stake (2005) listed concerns in regards to reporting case study data including:

- 1) How much to make the report a story; 2) How much to compare with other cases; 3) How much to formalize generalizations or leave such generalizing to readers; 4) How much description of the researcher to include in the report; and, 5) Whether or not and how much to protect anonymity (p. 460).

Decisions were made by the researcher to provide consistency in data collection and reporting and to assure confidentiality.

Case studies can be limited due to the possible subjectivity and bias of the researcher. Every researcher comes to a study with some bias that cannot be fully bracketed; therefore, information collected needs to be triangulated properly to assure credibility and validity of the data. Researcher subjectivity or assumed presumptions can contribute to bias and may skew the data (Yin, 2014). For example, my own opinion of whether or not religious and biblical literacy courses should be taught in public charter schools could influence the final data analysis. However, whether or not the courses were taught was not the focus of this study. The study rather aimed to investigate the implementation process and experiences integrating the coursework into public charter school curricula.

## **Validation**

**Credibility and dependability.** Triangulation was conducted by reviewing the literature and collecting other data from documents to determine whether or not the data found confirmed or contradicted the literature in terms of implementing other courses and programs at public charter schools. Data from the interviews and documents was coded to provide better overall analysis of the information.

Triangulation and member checking were crucial for the work to be both credible and dependable. Thick and rich description added to the credibility. Guba's model (Lietz & Zayas, 2010) is based on four aspects of qualitative research that relate to trustworthiness. Those elements are (a) truth value, (b) applicability, (c) consistency, and (d) neutrality.

Truth value involved the confidence level of the researcher in relation to the findings based on the design, informants, and context of the actual work (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Truth value was further elucidated as increasing internal validity based on the researcher's beginning assumptions having been replaced by the actual circumstance and realities of individuals represented in context (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). A qualitative study can be deemed credible when it presents such accurate description or interpretation of daily experiences that people can quickly identify with the experiences and relate to them (Lietz & Zayas, 2010).

Applicability to other groups, contexts, or settings also generated confidence in the research. Guba, as cited in Kreftin (1991), and Lietz and Zayas (2010), proposed the fittingness or transferability of criterion was more applicable to qualitative work since it was unique based on the context of each of the informants. In the case of implementation of coursework, it would prove fitting if the indicators of effectiveness of religious and biblical literacy courses were consistent with the indicators for implementation of various types of coursework in high schools

across the country. Lietz and Zayas (2010) emphasized that transferability is the job of the consumer of the research, not necessarily of the original researcher, as long as there is sufficient thick and rich description to compare contexts.

Consistency was essential to building trustworthiness in the research (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). The overall goal of qualitative work was to learn from those informing the data, not to control the responses in any set way. If this was the goal, consistency was integral to the questions asked in the interviews across different schools. I remained consistent when moving through the protocol sheet with the participants but also gave them the chance to discuss anything they had not had the chance to say, or were even afraid to say, during the more formal questioning process (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Consistency manifested when neutrality was the standard of the research data.

Neutrality in qualitative research is found within the confines of the data, and not necessarily in the researchers and informants, since the value of qualitative work lies in closing the distance and building a relationship between the researcher and the informant (Kreftin, 1991). Lincoln and Guba (1985), cited in Lietz & Zayas (2010), used the term “prolonged engagement” to suggest extended periods of time with informants permits recurring common themes to be established across and between informants. As relationships build, so do the chances that informants will share their true assessment of the courses and their value (Creswell, 2013). This became more apparent as participants emailed me with specifics they thought of after the interview concluded and they wanted to add to their account. Participants also added to the Google docs when they reviewed their conversations. All four participants were very accommodating.

## **Expected findings**

It was expected that teacher participation and teacher training would constitute the most integral elements in the implementation of biblical and religious literacy courses as part of public charter school curricula, based on the literature review. As with any course, the teacher played a vital role, but learning how administrators got courses mandated or institutionalized at their schools provided valuable information.

It was also assumed that the four administrators had a similar degree of authority over the curriculum and that they could significantly either discourage or promote which courses were offered to students. Whether or not administrators were directed to include the coursework by parents or boards of directors was also expected to play a role, although it was anticipated that direction would come to administrators from boards through parental involvement and influence, since charters have a high level of parental participation compared to a standard public institution.

It was also expected that there would be some parental, faculty, or community pushback as to whether the courses were of any value to students. Organizations such as The Freedom from Religion Foundation, a non-profit organization based on non-theism existed to defend the separation of church and state and in educating members in non-theism. The group purposely targeted organizations with any religious imagery or verbiage and shared a list on the website of who they were challenging. There were public schools on that list. The group also actively sued any organization partnered with a faith based initiative and promoted its secular charity Nonbelief Relief (Nonbelief Relief, Inc., 2016). It was expected that at least one school would have had problems with pushback.



## **Ethical Issues**

To protect the study from conflicts of interest, the schools contacted for participation in the study were provided full disclosure regarding the methods of information gathering, interviewing, and documentation, and administrators received full information regarding the purpose and goals of data collection and analysis. None of the schools were institutions where the researcher had previously been employed (Butin, 2010). No administrators were coerced to participate or offered incentives. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

The researcher informed the participant of the aim to discover which elements were imperative in implementing types of courses into the curriculum of a public charter school. Because the researcher aimed to gain information on how to implement coursework of this nature into the public charter schools, the researcher remained fully open to what the data revealed and had few or no preconceived ideas other than what the literature review had demonstrated. However, there was a goal of implementing these courses in a school setting one day and was looking for the key experiences that positively or negatively influence implementation.

Guidelines for protecting the personal identities of administrators were followed along with required ethical informed consent. All of the interviews took place via join.me and all of the schools were located outside of the state of Utah where I work and reside, to avoid ethical issues such as relationships with participants, insider bias, and impact from negative findings (Butin, 2010).

## **Summary**

Identifying facilitators and barriers to implementation of religious and biblical literacy courses and the experiences of public charter schools was the intent of the research. Employing a case study methodology enabled rich, deep information gathering within the context of interviews with charter school administrators. Interviewing administrators provided insight into what does and does not help to implement the courses successfully. Documentation from course listings, syllabi, textbooks, class sizes, and to whom and when courses were offered was also collected and analyzed.

## **Chapter 4 – Data Analysis and Results**

This study investigated the implementation of religious and biblical literacy courses in charter schools across the United States. It sought to understand the stories of how these schools determined importance of the coursework, chose the courses, offered the coursework, and what the outcomes were for students attending the courses. This multi case study attempted to bring important points to the surface that would serve charter schools well in their decision-making processes if and when they chose to offer coursework of this nature to students. As an investigator, the researcher interviewed administrators at charter schools, asking them to share their stories about how they engaged students in religious and biblical literacy coursework. The case studies were collected to provide the data for analysis and comparison to implementation theory in order to discover specific elements related to the implementation of religious and biblical literacy courses.

The interviews with four administrators took place during the summer and fall of 2016 in four different charter schools located the United States via join.me and online conferencing and recording service. They will be identified as schools One, Two, Three, and Four and administrator names are purely fictitious for purposes of confidentiality.

Table 1

*Schools/Administrators Interviewed*

School indicator	Administrator	Years of Experience (Years at case school)
Case One Charter School	Ms. Smith	18 (18)
Case Two Charter School	Mr. Murphy	19 (19)
Case Three Charter School	Mr. Jones	12 (3)
Case Four Charter School	Ms. Anderson	16 (10)

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*Note.* Administrators had cumulative experience of 65 years; 52 years included coursework

The following questions guided the interview process:

How was the coursework chosen for the particular school? In particular, was it determined needed by parents? Faculty? Administration? In relation to the particular religious or biblical literacy course, who made up the committee that selected the particular course? Was it written into the charter as a mandatory course? Finally, how does the coursework fit into the mission/vision of the school and what were the expected outcomes?

Information requested regarding the actual course the charter school offered covered a number of course elements. Titles and descriptions of the courses were reviewed as well as the format of the textbook, online, or whether the school chose an electronic copy of the text. If electronic copies were used, did the students have accessibility inside and outside of school? The researcher also inquired: Were the course(s) elective or required and in what timeframes did they occur? Were they offered on a quarterly, semester schedule, or for an entire year? How was credit earned-as English, history, or elective credit? And lastly, how were teachers prepared to teach the material? Did they need a specific certification or endorsement or were they simply certified in English or history? Was professional development offered and if so what was it in particular? Who provided professional development and how was it accessed?

The researcher aimed to identify and understand the perceived benefits and challenges of the particular course not only for students, but for the entire community as a whole. Thus, additional interview questions included: What are the perceived benefits from the coursework? How did the administrators feel the coursework offered to their students would benefit students' overall education? Were there challenges experienced in offering the courses for students? If so, where did they see those challenges and what was being done to overcome those barriers?

### **Description of the Sample**

In collecting information from different areas of the country, it was hoped that consistencies discovered would cross the boundaries of location. Eighteen charter schools were identified as teaching one of the two courses that were specifically listed as *The Bible and Its Influence* or *The Bible in History and Literature*. All of the schools were invited to participate in the study without researching them prior to invitation. Participation responses were limited and the search for schools remained in the charter school arena; however, the course selection expanded to schools that offered either a world religions or world perspectives class. The broader definition beyond the two textbooks allowed for more participants as the name of the courses varied throughout the country.

Lists of potential participating institutions were first generated from the text manufacturers and then via word of mouth from those schools. Each school administrator was contacted via email and invited to participate. The administrators were then telephoned to determine an appointment time. The participants were subsequently sent a consent form to sign and return. The interviews took place by accessing [join.me.com](https://join.me.com) for a teleconference. Each high school administrator interviewed offered his or her perspective on the coursework as we moved through the interview protocol sheets. I spoke with four administrators from four different

schools. After the phone interview, each participant received a link to the recording for their review. I then transcribed verbatim each conversation and participants each received access to a Google Doc for member checking their responses. The participants were able to change any of the information that was transcribed before approving the document.

**Charter school one – “Ms. Smith”.** Charter school one consisted of four campuses, three of which served grades K – 8 and one high school, with approximately 1,500 students in total. The campuses were in close proximity to one another so that events shared by the entire school were easily attended at the high school. They were all located within the confines of a rather large urban environment. Ms. Smith stated, “There is a deep school spirit among the students and families that attend; they truly love and respect each other.”

Charter School One had been operating for over 17 years with Ms. Smith as director and superintendent. Ms. Smith’s father actually wrote and founded the charter due to what he found to be a “lack of excellent education founded on the liberties of the nation.” Serving as a Pastor in two different states and then as a missionary overseas, he traveled to over 30 countries and observed educational models. Upon returning to the United States, he taught in area public schools and longed to see a school that provided students with a “future and a hope.” Ms. Smith said he was concerned that students had nothing to look forward to in the education system in the area of the nation where they were located. He wanted them to look forward to adulthood with hope that they could change their situations and environments for the better. According to Ms. Smith, her father then founded the charter school with the help of his family and friends. The entire family was involved in the school from the start, and everyone was rather passionate about the vision and mission. In part due to that passion, the superintendent (Ms. Smith) had been in

her position since the founding of the school. Ms. Smith holds a Master of Education in leadership.

As we discussed the school and its managerial structures, Ms. Smith's passion for not only classical education, but for graduating responsible adults came through in statements like: "We are staying here as long as we are able to be sure that students get a solid, patriotic education and leave here passionate about their liberties." Ms. Smith said the board of directors, as well as the administrative team, felt strongly that the history of the nation is not being instilled into students' education in a way that makes them want to protect their own country. She said she felt students needed an education grounded in the U.S. Constitution and its liberties so they would become committed to protecting the nation and preserving its founding principles. The charter school emphasized teaching the U.S. Constitution in all grades.

Ms. Smith was educated in a classical model herself and was determined that it was her duty to "keep the family tradition going strong." The year prior to the interview, she had been offered another budget expansion to establish another elementary school, and she decided to wait another year before taking on more students. Ms. Smith also held degrees in elementary education and administration.

Ms. Smith's charter school required the course *The Bible in History and Literature* (NCBCPS, 2011), which had been a state approved course for seven years at the time of the interview. The course ran year long. The school also required a course entitled *Drive Thru History America* (Stotts, 2006). This course was only one semester long. Both courses were required in the junior and senior year of high school, were for credit, and were offered in the history and *English* blocks. The coursework was not specifically written into the charter since the state where the school was located had approved and recommended courses for religious

literacy. However, the courses supported the vision and mission of the school which was described on the school's website as "Challenging students to establish the foundation of knowledge that created 'One Nation Under God' through the study of unabridged American history and the Bible in History and Literature."

In choosing the coursework, Ms. Smith's school employed a top down model in that the founders of the school determined the courses would be mandated and taught as part of the school's graduation requirements (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979). Ms. Smith shared that her father deemed this coursework crucial for students to "...understand where they came from and determine where they are going."

Ms. Smith emphasized that the administration considered teacher training extremely important, with the charter school mandating training every year for teachers and staff. Every other year it was held face-to-face; in alternate years, it was delivered via online webinars. Since teachers had not been prepared on how to teach religious or biblical literacy courses in teacher preparation programs, the administration of this charter school mandated the training. Training was provided by two separate agencies—Gateways to Better Education and outside consultants whose training focused on religious liberties and the history in the United States. The consultants were involved with the creation of *Drive Thru History America* (Stotts, 2006). Teachers earned professional development hours for the required trainings. Ms. Smith said she had reached out to other area schools and invited them to share in the professional development trainings.

Ms. Smith stated that students and parents were attracted to the school when they became aware of the required coursework. She said parents called to ask specifically what Bible courses the school offered and when students "get to take them." Ms. Smith also said she was aware of



area churches that referred families to her school due to the courses offered. She further stated, “We get people walking in here daily asking about the Bible classes and where they can sign up!” The school sponsored and hosted training programs for parents and interested adults in the community so that families could be aware of the laws surrounding the teaching of religion. The administrative team shared the curriculum with families prior to them registering at the school. They had handouts in their lobby from the First Amendment Center directed towards educating parents on the role of religion in the public schools, and teachers and administrators openly discussed this with parents. Ms. Smith worked with staff to prepare them to answer the questions posed by parents who were confused about charter schools; many thought that the school was private and charged tuition. Ms. Smith said, “It is just as necessary to teach parents as it is to teach students.”

Teacher quality was a major concern for Ms. Smith. She spoke at length about trying to refine front-end human resources when it came to hiring teachers for these courses. With a sense of frustration in her voice, Ms. Smith expressed how she found it difficult to find the perfect fit for these courses due to teacher buy-in and attitudes regarding the appropriateness of teaching other world religions and histories. Ms. Smith stated “some teachers are rather bigoted in reference to what they want to teach” and that it was “hard to break them out of their fixed mindsets”. Beyond that, she said, “it’s difficult to unearth those attitudes through a resume and one interview.” When asked how the school chose to move forward in this area, Ms. Smith said they were changing their interview questions to incorporate more of their vision, mission, and values. Most of the teachers came from nearby universities where instruction was not necessarily aligned with the views of the charter school. To address this, Ms. Smith said school officials had considered hosting recruiting events at colleges in the area where instruction was

more in sync with the charter school's vision and mission statements. Finally, Ms. Smith shared that beginning with the 2016 – 2017 academic year, the school would appoint a separate administrator to oversee both *The Bible in History and Literature* and *Drive Thru History; American History* coursework. This individual would also be tasked with supporting the teachers, communicating the importance of the coursework to students and parents, offering trainings, and assisting teachers with resources other than the texts such as forums with other teachers throughout the country offering these same courses. Ms. Smith said she hoped that providing this additional support would both help the teachers understand the significance of what they were teaching and help them be more intentional about teaching all of the material without bias influencing the instruction.

When discussing the benefits and challenges of offering the coursework, Ms. Smith became passionate about the vision and mission of the school and why students “need to know their own liberties and be able to exercise their rights in a free nation.” She said the school's administrative team, including the board of directors, were deeply concerned with the “quality of students being turned out of public high schools in this country,” and school's bylaws stated that the Board of Directors was committed to assuring that students would be “equipped to know how to use the constitution and engage in civil debate on issues affecting Americans.” In the particular geographic area where this charter was located, Ms. Smith said the administration felt students could not engage in civil debates because the views of the students themselves were so heavily biased against certain other religious views. She also said the board of directors believed that the student body was not well equipped with the knowledge of civil liberties for all and that it was the duty of the school to educate students for the good of all society.

The documentation examined for this particular school included the course descriptions, textbooks, DVD's, course syllabi, and the school website. The courses were described in the school's course catalogue as follows:

*The Bible in History and Literature* will provide the student with a fundamental understanding of the important literary forms contained in the Bible, as well as the Biblical figures and symbols often referred to in literature, art, and music. You will study the influence of the Bible on history, law, literature, American Community life and culture as well as consider how the Bible influenced the views of our founding fathers when it came to human rights. You will study Middle Eastern history, geography, religion, and politics and investigate the importance of the Bible in world and national history. This course is a yearlong course and is required for graduation.

The syllabus for the course included 17 units to be spread over the course of a year. The units studied were broken out into a calendar on a curriculum map. Students were responsible for four oral and written reports during the course of the year.

The second course had the following course description:

*Drive Thru History: American History* will have you traveling through the places where our founding fathers risked their lives to shape this great nation. We will discover together the story of the United States of America, and determine our place in the story as modern day adventurers. You will understand fully the background of the Puritans and the Separatists as well as the role of the church in politics. This course is a semester long and is required for graduation.

The syllabus for this course included 12 episodes of DVD material that spanned 21 weeks of class time. It included an outline as the video and discussion guides. Every other week students would present orally to the class. Students were also required to analyze statements of our statesmen, such as Benjamin Franklin's quote, "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God".

The website for this particular school stated the mission and the vision of the school. The setting of the page included blue backgrounds with American flags and eagles in the corners. The history of the school's founding, along with the desire to "raise modern day patriots" was present in the homepage. Course descriptions were available as well as requirements for graduation.

**Charter school two – "Mr. Murphy".** Charter school two was located in a K—12 single campus classical school with approximately 400 students. The school was situated in a suburban town. Mr. Murphy was a pleasure to speak with due to his sense of humor and understanding of "our age group" as he called it. He was the director/administrator of the school, and he and his wife actually authored the founding charter. He had been in the "driver's seat" for 18 years at the time of the interview and intended to stay until someone with the "vision for classical education and excellence" came forward or "rises out of their midst." Mr. Murphy held a PhD in Education and Leadership. His passion for education was evidenced by how he elaborated on the questions and used inflection and laughter.

Mr. Murphy shared that the mission of the school was to develop "thoughtful, articulate young adults" and that they were a college preparatory school, based on the foundational model of being grounded and knowledgeable of the State of the Union and its history. Mr. Murphy said it was imperative for me to know that his school earned an A rating from the state and has had a 100% graduation rate as well as a 100% acceptance rate at universities of choice since the institution opened in 1998. He stated that the pressure to stay on top was both good and bad—

“good in that it keeps the school focused on our mission, vision, and delivery of education” but bad in that “it’s stressful to have to be the example.”

This charter offered a World Religions course written specifically for the school under the auspices of a university professor who came onboard specifically to teach that subject. This teacher also taught Logic I, Logic II and Rhetoric. This was important to note since the teacher designed the religion course with a strong grounding in logic, making it very non-sectarian. At the time of the interview, the teacher had been a part of the school community for four years. Mr. Murphy was pleased with the teacher’s knowledge base and with the fact that he had taught philosophy prior to coming to this charter school.

During the interview, Mr. Murphy was quick to note that the World Religions teacher had taught a class of sophomore students Logic I. During that course the students concluded that all of the necessary elements of a strong and valuable education were in place at their own school, except a class in world religions. They discussed this lack of knowledge, or more so lack of exposure to this knowledge in their Logic I class, and as a result, the professor drafted a course syllabus, presented it to the administration, and then had it approved by the Trivium Department of the school. Many classical schools make use of a Trivium department, akin to a curriculum department, to ensure that coursework fits the vision and mission of the school and the educational model. *Trivium* is a Latin term used to describe the three levels of growth stages in students; the grammar stage, the logic stage, and the rhetorical stage. Mr. Murphy was excited about the actions and willingness of students to take the initiative and suggest the course. He was also impressed by the professor’s enthusiasm to design the curriculum which then prompted the birth of the course the following year. The inaugural year began with the class of students that had requested it the year before. Mr. Murphy expressed strong pride in his student body:

I could not have been prouder of those kids. They took it upon themselves to be the catalyst of change! They weren't afraid to talk to the teacher and the teacher wasn't afraid to talk to me or the Trivium Department. This is every principal's dream, to get the students to love learning so much that they actually ask for it! I am hoping that with the incoming classes, we will have another class with this same sort of drive. I was just ecstatic about their wanting to get more education and I was more than happy to accommodate them.

This World Religions course took the form of a bottom-up model in that recipients of the coursework were the first to propose it, and the teacher designed the syllabus for the administration to approve (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979). The course was not inscribed in the school's charter, nor was it vetted by the state. Since the administration deemed the course an essential offering in line with the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric), and quadrivium (mathematical arts of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music), the course was approved.

The course had approximately 25 enrollees the first year, and students studied mostly primary source documents. The course was only offered to junior and senior students as an elective, but it was not being offered for the 2016—2017 school year. When questioned about why that was so, Mr. Murphy indicated that the teacher of the course was concerned about the maturity level of the incoming group of students. He commented:

Observations are made of the classes as whole as they work their way through Logic I coursework. Decisions are then made as to whether or not the group as a whole has a maturity level to support not only the required reading and studying for the course, but a cultural literacy level high enough to serve as a foundation for deeper learning. We can't

have students making immature and hurtful comments in class that would offend someone of another belief system; they have to practice respect.

Both teacher and Mr. Murphy felt that the incoming class was not yet prepared for this level of academic rigor and discussion due to their “daily interactions with one another.” Mr. Murphy noted that the administration struggled with this decision since so many students from the year before had talked about the course; however, they said they concurred that it was in the best interest of the group as a whole to not run the course that year.

As a school rooted in the classics and “standing on the shoulders of the giants,” as Mr. Murphy stated, “Teachers are given a budget yearly to determine on what and where they would like to spend it.” Very few professional development sessions were mandated, however, as Mr. Murphy stated, “Standing on the shoulders of giants assumes teachers are skilled in classical writings. As a staff, we read together Plato’s Republic and analyze it against the current trends in education.” “After the culture was set,” Mr. Murphy said, “teachers were free to choose professional development that was in line with not only what they taught, but the vision and mission of the school.” As I prodded further, Mr. Murphy explained what he meant by “culture.” The school was a classical school: therefore, by and large, students studied the classics and learned life lessons from the “giants.” Mr. Murphy expected his teachers to “know as much, if not more than the student body.” This meant that all of the teachers were “well versed in Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Shakespeare, and the like.” He said all of his teachers understood the elements of the trivium’s grammar (elementary), logic (middle), and rhetoric (high school) phases as well as the quadrivium, which encompassed math and science; all were able to run an intelligent Socratic Seminar for their students to explore ideas and create new ones. These basics of classical education were fundamental throughout the school. Mr. Murphy also stated:

In order to deliver a true classical education, students are going to come up against world religions. They need to understand everything from what the Greeks and Romans believed, right down to modern day religious practices in order to understand the global society.

Mr. Murphy also stated that he was not running a “religious” school at all, he was simply providing a well-rounded education to students based on their needs.

As far as additional professional development, each new teacher was assigned a mentor on staff person to direct him or her in understanding the culture of the school and classical education. “Even beginning teachers need help understanding how pedagogy such as Bloom’s Taxonomy is employed in classical education,” Mr. Murphy shared, adding that:

Socratic Seminar training is provided to teachers who have not practiced it before. It’s of major importance when we discuss religions because of the ground rules of discussion and allowing for students to draw their own conclusions. Some teachers have trouble with that!

Mr. Murphy said the teachers and parents all believed that the World Religions course was of benefit as students prepared to begin their college careers. He explained that “students are taught to reason through their logic courses and then are able to prepare a syllogism of their understanding as young adults, one of the expected outcomes of the education provided at this school.” He shared that the school received positive feedback from the parents and the student body stating that students “just loved taking this course from [teacher] since he made it interesting and fun, but not too scary.” Mr. Murphy said he strongly believed that “ridding students of biases” was reason enough to offer the course.



Mr. Murphy was committed to making sure that all components of the curriculum were non-sectarian and that, in a World Religions course, all major world cultures were represented. He added, “We don’t want to leave anyone out!” The course was described in the course catalogue as follows:

Throughout time and space in this home we call Earth, mankind has developed numerous unique communities and cultures. Unique as they might be, one would be hard pressed to find even one of these cultures where religion did not greatly play some way into the education, technology, laws, and virtually all aspects of the daily lives of its people. Indeed, in a very meaningful way, man can be described as a religious being. It is the goal of this course to examine the history and teachings of some of the world’s major religions.

Mr. Murphy explained that the course teacher was fully aware that religion is a sensitive and deeply personal topic for many people. He said the goal was not to evangelize or sway anyone to or from a certain religious belief; instead, the course aimed to help the students grow in their understanding of the religious teachings of certain groups.

The syllabus for the course listed students’ expectations, such as course readings of primary texts. The texts used in this course are the primary documents of the *Bible* and the *Qur’an* and *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis (2001). The Bible provided was the King James Bible. The Qur’an was an electronic copy that was downloadable and Mere Christianity was provided as a paperback book.

The website for the school attributed their vision and mission to the classical traditions of the trivium and quadrivium. The mission statement included the desire to graduate thoughtful, articulate students prepared for college and citizenship. The emblem of the school incorporated a

common classical theme and hosted a photo of the graduating class from the prior year. Course descriptions and requirements for graduation were easily found.

**Charter school three – “Mr. Jones”.** Charter school three consisted of two campuses, one that hosted grades K–6 and another that hosted grades 7–12. In operation since 1995, the school was located in a fairly wealthy suburban area, and the campuses were within walking distance of each other. Mr. Jones indicated that the school offered a face-to-face program as well as an online blended program of learning. The blended program offered some work online that was then woven into the components offered in the physical classroom. The course offered was *The Bible and its Influence*, an elective course for students in grades 9–12.

Mr. Jones had been at the charter school for three years at the time of the interview, and the teacher of the course *The Bible and Its Influence* was a third year English teacher. Mr. Jones indicated he felt rather “uneducated on the purposes of religion classes in public schools” and that he was looking to learn more as the leader of this charter. He shared, “I honestly just depend on the teacher of the course to take the helm; I know very little about the course itself or why or how it got into the course rotation.” As an administrator, Mr. Jones identified a gap in his knowledge:

I need to get more information together, not only on the course itself, but on what’s available for teachers as far as resources and trainings. I have heard about the Face to Faith Tony Blair group, but I haven’t had time to really learn what it has to offer. I believe other schools in the area are using that to teach religions.

The course was part of the curriculum of the school prior to both Mr. Jones’ and the teacher’s appointments. An English teacher taught the course during the 2015—2016 academic year and was slated to teach it again in 2017—2018. The school chose to rotate their electives for

students, therefore *The Bible and its Influence* was only offered every other academic year. Mr. Jones stated:

The course was offered as a fill for the English teacher. She needed another course and took it up. There is no past history to access in regards to how the course was originally chosen and implemented in the school; however, we do know that it was taught as an elective then also, and the English teacher (now retired) taught the course.

Mr. Jones stated that the English teacher had found the course was rather “dry” and before it was taught again “...the school will look for more ancillary resources to make the course more engaging and interesting.” It was also noted that “it was difficult to cover all of the material in one year, and the students would prefer it be made into a two year course.” Mr. Jones said he planned to look into the options of splitting the course over two years before offering it again in 2017.

There were 27 students in the class during the 2015—2016 academic year. Mr. Jones indicated that this was the first time this particular teacher taught the *The Bible and Its Influence*, and as far as guidance, there was little provided from administration. Mr. Jones offered this course to fill the English teacher’s schedule, and it was accepted. It was the first biblical literacy course taught by this particular teacher, and to Mr. Jones’ knowledge, the only course of this nature that had ever been offered at the school.

The course fit with the vision and mission of the school to graduate students who “participate fully as well-informed and active participants in their communities and make informed choices to fulfill civic duties.” The school was situated in an area of strong religious diversity and, by offering the course, Mr. Jones said the school was able to educate students on how the Bible influenced Western civilization as a whole, and not just Christian religious

denominations. Mr. Jones was familiar with the College Board AP exams and their suggestions for preparing students. He noted that the Bible was used in literature, especially Shakespeare, and was assured by his English teacher that helping students acquire knowledge of it would help them score higher on exams. Mr. Jones did not have information on the particular 27 students and their current ACT or SAT scores.

Preparing to teach the course, the instructor was not provided with any specific professional development. Agreeing to teach the course to fill a gap in her schedule, the teacher began taking the course ahead of the students and self-taught the material as she read through the text and completed the activities. Mr. Jones was unfamiliar with the course and stated that the next time around there would be more “awareness” of what was going on in the classroom. Mr. Jones stated that “a preparatory course would be beneficial since most English and history teachers did not learn this material in school themselves.” He did state that “...ultimately the school desires all students to be knowledgeable about world belief systems; however, there may not be many students interested in the course next year due to the teacher’s lack of training and learning time with the materials.” A student survey from the course indicated that the teacher had disclosed that she was learning right alongside the students. Mr. Jones noted that “...with the combination of the teacher’s preparedness being insufficient, and students’ word of mouth to each other about course, there may not be as much interest moving forward.”

The course was described in the course catalogue as follows:

Bible and Its Influence Grade: 9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup>, Prerequisite: None, Credits: 5 Description: This course covers the content of Genesis to Revelation. It will incorporate some of the world’s most famous art, as well as sidebar features on how the Bible has influenced literature, poetry, music, art, history, public rhetoric, and Western civilization. This will

include Abraham Lincoln and the Bible, Handel s Messiah, The Bible and Emancipation, Shakespeare and the Bible, plus much more.

The textbook for the course, by the same name, *The Bible and Its Influence* was a 358 page hardcover full color text. It was complete with a glossary of terms and included many of the most famous religious pieces of artwork from around the world. The preface of the book addressed the Establishment Clause and how the course is to be taught academically, not devotionally. It also indicated that this text provided an opportunity for students to expand their horizons and learn about the world around them.

The website for this particular school was easily assessable. The mission statement indicated the use of classical curriculum, partnering with parents to provide the materials, expertise, and opportunities needed to become a productive citizen and lifelong learner. The vision statement emphasized one-on-one and small class size settings and the use of high end resources.

**Charter school four – “Ms. Anderson”.** Charter school four was situated in a quiet suburban area with approximately 1,400 students in grades 9 – 12, all housed on one campus. The school was an international charter school with a diverse student body that was roughly one-third Jewish, one-third Hispanic, and one-third other mixed races/ethnicities. I had the pleasure of speaking with Ms. Anderson at length. She was more than willing to share information with me, and the interview lasted well over an hour. She continued to offer more information via email after the interview.

Ms. Anderson, the administrator at the fourth charter school, had served both as a teacher and an administrator at the institution. She was the first to teach the course, *Sociology and Comparative Religions* 10 years prior to the interview for this study, and she had served as the

department chair for history. She was very excited to discuss the course and why she felt it belonged at the school since she had been a “fighting force” to include it “way back when.” Ms. Anderson held a Master of Education in History and was working on completing a PhD in Leadership.

The school offered a course entitled *Sociology and Comparative Religions* which was open to junior and senior students. It was an elective course in the high school that served grades 9–12. The course was split between semesters, with the first semester focusing on sociology and the second semester focusing on religion. The chair of the history department (Ms. Anderson at that time), had designed the course in 2006 after school officials identified that “students were missing an important element in their education.” It fit within the school’s vision and mission to offer a course exploring religious cultures and equipping students with knowledge and tolerance concerning religions around the world. Ms. Anderson explained, “It just makes sense to offer this course in an international school. Without it, we would be ignoring an entire part of who these kids really are!”

The department chair first started the course solely using the 9th edition of *Religions of the World* (Hopfe & Woodward, 2004). The department chose this text due to its inclusion of primary source documents, and, while decision-makers were aware that a newer edition existed, due to the cost of textbooks they chose instead to augment and update course readings appropriately. Ms. Anderson stated that “textbooks are so expensive these days, and we continually look at the new editions, but if the material is basically the same, we will augment without buying a new text.”

As an experienced teacher of AP European and World History, the teacher (Ms. Anderson) was given autonomy in creating the course and then presented it to administration for

approval. This represented an example of a bottom-up management style, accommodating the needs of the student body via teaching staff (Sabatier, 1986). The teacher initiated training by presenting to the administration an opportunity for a summer intensive study in New York City. Upon approval, the teacher attended the training for the Humanities (NEH). Ms. Anderson was the teacher for the course at the time and noted that the intensive NEH training was “life changing,” and, upon returning to the school, she made several additions and improvements to the course. These changes included adding texts and other materials from [teachingtolerance.org](http://teachingtolerance.org), as well as incorporating a creative section to the course where students wrote novels with an emphasis on religion. These modifications brought a depth of knowledge and engagement to the coursework that had been lacking. Soon afterwards, this teacher moved to an administrative position and, at the time of the interview, was not teaching the course. Ms. Anderson expressed her desire to once again teach the course herself because she “...got to know the hearts and minds of her students through the study of religion.” She shared that, “Students open up more when they know they won’t be judged for their beliefs, and we set up rules for communication that allowed for them to share openly and safely.”

Ms. Anderson’s school also offered the IB program. However, she noted that IB only allowed the “elite” students to study, and she said school officials felt it was necessary for all students to have access to the *Sociology and Comparative Religions* course; therefore, they were not offering the IB World Religions course even though Ms. Anderson said the IB course was rich and offered many other ways to engage students with world religions. When discussing the students slated for enrollment in the course, Ms. Anderson mentioned that an element of maturity was needed for students to study the material well. Therefore, she elected to only offer the course to juniors and seniors.

The school had offered the course for a decade with a range of five sections to two sections; each section housed up to 35 students. Ms. Anderson noted that the addition of *AP Psychology* to the offerings had lowered enrollments in *Sociology and World Religions* and because only one teacher in the school who could teach both courses. Ms. Anderson shared that other than the NEH training eight years prior, no additional professional development had been provided for the course. Ms. Anderson said she was thoroughly confident that the teacher possessed the required expertise in history and had sufficient knowledge to make any necessary changes to the coursework year by year. She did note, however, that the school requires history trainings for the entire department annually.

The course was described in the course catalogue as follows:

Sociology is the scientific study of human social interaction. Students will use current readings and class discussions to explore such topics as social groups; social institutions- family, education, religion, economy and government; social stratification and inequality; deviance; collective behavior and social change. Comparative Religions is a semester course that examines the major world religions and philosophies including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students will examine the origins, development, beliefs, practices, and rituals of each of these religions. Students will study the impact of religion on world culture as well as the universalities among and within various world religions. At the completion of the course students will be able to interact with members of various religions from around the world in a tolerant and well educated manner. Prerequisite: Juniors/Seniors.

The text, published in 2004, *Religions of the World*, was a full color, 576 page softcover book. It addressed many world religions beyond the common ones, such as Baha'i and Sikhism.



It also included sections on Native Americans and African religions. It had a comparative calendar of each religion's holy days and the meanings behind each day.

The website for this particular school was simple to navigate and stated in the mission and vision statement that the goal was to prepare students to be compassionate global citizens. The site further states that students need to be contributing citizens to their nation and their world as an International Baccalaureate World School.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

This project was a multi-case study to examine the implementation of religious and biblical literacy courses in various schools. It was determined in Chapter 1 of this dissertation that a case study approach would allow specific information to be brought to the surface through open ended interview questions. Comparing data with that of implementation theory, I employed in depth interviews and documentation of course syllabi, course descriptions, school websites (to determine more about school culture), and enrollment data.

I produced a question protocol to use during the interviews with administrators (Appendix B). I then sorted, coded, and categorized the data to find emerging themes. I used the protocol questions and gleaned information from the four administrators.

During the interviews, I followed the protocol sheet and probed for more information when if an administrator began to share an experience that directly affected implementation. I used open ended questions but directed the conversation to be sure I was covering the items included on the protocol sheet. I took extensive notes and also recorded the conversations. After the recordings were complete, I transcribed the conversations verbatim, employing my own Transcription Buddy software and pedal on my PC, so I could search the specific documents for specific words to sort and code. Open coding began with terms that were most prominent.

The transcription files were then analyzed for key words taken from the protocol questions, and I searched each of the transcriptions for those specific terms as a means of selective coding. The initial terms on the list included: *required, elective, offering, mission, vision, benefit, challenge, conflict, controversy, enrollment, training, professional development, history, English, resources, textbooks, staffing, buy-in, maturity, churches, synagogues, mosques, class size, parents, students, and staff.*

Recursive qualitative coding was employed based on particular categories that revealed themselves after each additional interview. Qualitative data analysis includes the three parts of noticing, collecting, and thinking about each addition of information (Creswell, 2013). Using such an iterative and progressive process allowed me to identify emergent themes. In the noticing phase, I re-read transcripts and field notes to determine what to code and what to merge together. As the coding continued, I took note of the specific terms and the information provided for each to see if any were consistent across all schools.

As I sorted the information, I also analyzed data from the particular course descriptions, syllabi, textbooks, enrollment numbers, and websites for the schools. Those pieces of information were collected and set aside to be further analyzed. I then looked at the teachers' length of teaching, length of teaching a particular course, how long the course was offered, how it fit within the school's mission and vision, and what administrators found as beneficial and what they found to be challenging. I sorted and collected the informational pieces with reference to professional development training that had occurred and that was suggested; I also analyzed data regarding suggestions on how to choose teachers for these particular courses. This process allowed me to summarize, sort, and begin to categorize the information collected. I performed this reiterative process by using the transcripts, searching for terms with the "find" feature, and

then recording the information on 3 x 5 cards for categorization purposes. If cards contained the same topic, such as teacher training, they were grouped together in a category.

Once the categorizing of the interviews was completed, I followed the same process to categorize the information gleaned from the course descriptions, syllabi, the textbooks, and the websites for each school. I then moved onto looking for patterns and relationships between information in the collections and across the collections. To make specific discoveries about the information in general, it was necessary to compare and contrast my findings and engage in the thinking phase. In an effort to find similarities and differences and to describe and compare findings to implementation theory, I looked to build typologies.

It is important to mention at this point that the sorting, coding, and categorizing of the data, though necessary, did not detract from the impact of the interviewees' stories as a whole. During the process of taking apart the data, the whole interviews were also referred to for clarification. The goal was to keep the phenomena of each case autonomous while collecting and categorizing what they had in common.

As sorting, coding, and categorizing continued, specific themes and core theoretical concepts began to appear. Referring back to implementation theory, discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, teacher preparedness and buy-in appeared to be strong points in all of the interviews with administrators, even Mr. Jones, who stated that he was learning more about the courses and wanted his teachers to be trained in content. The vision and mission of each particular school played a substantive role as well, as did resources and texts containing primary source documents for student review, and being explicative in regards to expected outcomes for students. There were several themes that emerged through the iterations of re-reading the transcripts.

Of interest was the amount of time particular administrators had served at schools. Could there be a correlation between the time of service and the courses offered? This question arose as three of the four charter schools had longer standing administrators 10 – 19 years, and had courses that were continually offered and attended by students.

Memoing was also employed throughout the analysis of the data which generated some specific questions beyond the study. Another theme that memoing brought to the surface was the locations of the schools and whether or not there was a possible correlation to numbers of students taking courses based on where they lived. Regional, and local community norms may have some effect on whether or not students choose to take courses of this nature.

The significance of vetted curriculum by local school boards, and whether or not the administrators felt it necessary to have approval by the Board of Directors was also of interest since none of these administrators had Board approval before adding the courses. Local Educational Authorities (LEA's) which most charter schools fall under, make their own regulations on how course are to be added or taken from their offerings. Some choose to leave that to the daily management of the school, whereas others form curriculum committees, often including the school principal, to study the coursework first and determine its contribution to the school as a whole.

One last note that memoing brought to the surface was the fact that SNR (spiritual but not religious) was not mentioned by any of the interviewees in relation to their student body make up. Ms. Anderson even broke down the totals of Jewish students in the school, but gave no mention as to the number of SNR students in the school.

## Summary of Findings

Interviews along with informal conversations and email with administrators provided the most substantive data for this project as qualitative primary source information that was analyzed as a whole. The qualitative data derived from the interview transcripts, alongside the documentation collected and analyzed informed the case study to determine the most important elements. Informal conversations and emails continued after the initial interviews. Thick and rich description of the dynamics occurring at the schools, along with course documentation was built primarily from: the four significant interviews, each school's documentation, clarification discussions and emails, and informal conversations and visitations. These elements served to inform the discussions and conclusions in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. In all, the four interviews and transcribing involved 21 hours of talking, transcribing, and noting. Beyond the initial interviews and documentation there was an estimated 22 hours of continuous conversation via phone and email, including a two-day visit to one of the schools. With over 15,000 words to analyze in just the interviews, I began the iterative coding process described earlier in this chapter.

The analysis revealed themes consistently discussed among all administrators. Those themes centered on teacher training, the vision and mission of the school, the use of primary source documents, and the benefit of graduating seniors that were knowledgeable of other belief systems and tolerant of difference. Document analysis supported the use of primary documents and the need for clear course description defining expected outcomes.

**Teacher training/preparation.** All four school administrators emphasized that teacher training and consequently buy-in were essential for the success of the courses. Ms. Smith, Mr. Murphy, and Ms. Anderson had students requesting the course and continual enrollment. Mr.

Jones, who was in the process of learning more about the course indicated that students may not even desire the course due to the teacher's lack of training. Since the courses were not required by any of the states where the schools included in the study were located, administrators enjoyed the freedom to determine requirements for both the teachers and the courses, such as English or history endorsements, or background courses in religions. All but one of the schools invested in some training for the teachers and all of the administrators agreed that teachers should minimally have some training in the U.S. Constitution before teaching a course in the category of biblical or religious literacy. The one school that did not require training at the time of the interviews was committed to reviewing available professional development opportunities for the upcoming school year. The school had already made the decision to start examining opportunities prior to this study taking place. Mr. Jones explained that the teacher had recently taken over the course load from the prior instructor and had just begun to assimilate the course into her teaching repertoire.

Ms. Smith spoke to the need for better human resources assistance in hiring teachers for these courses and expressed a desire for clear requirements and a set of questions that could hone in on the teacher's motivations to teach such a course. Ms. Smith said they had not been able to find specific standards to follow when hiring faculty to teach a religious literacy course. This particular school made the decision to assign a separate one-on-one administrator to work with the teachers in charge of the courses for the 2016—2017 academic year. Ms. Smith said she hoped that providing mentorship to these teachers and sharing time in the classroom would empower them not only to teach the material, but also to understand the limitations they faced regarding what they can and cannot say and do within the confines of the course.

**Vision/mission of the school.** The vision and mission statements of the schools included in this study ranged from classical in nature, requiring students to “master rhetoric and logic,” to standard public school curriculums “producing productive citizens and lifelong learners,” to an international emphasis that prepared students to become “compassionate global citizens” by engaging parents and communities. Each school had a specific reason for offering the course and assured the researcher that it fit with the vision and mission of their school.

All of the schools were located in diverse communities within their states and all considered it crucial that their students build an attitude of respect and tolerance towards people different from them. Specifically, all four of the participants mentioned understanding religious diversity as an aspect of grasping the dynamics of the global economy and acquiring global literacy, since religion is prominent in current global daily news. Whether or not students could determine if information delivered in class was biased or not was also mentioned by Mr. Murphy and Ms. Anderson. They deemed it important to equip students with critical analytical skills and broad access to information to discern truth for themselves.

**Primary source documents.** Each of the schools chose the texts for the courses based on the prominence of primary source documents, or, in the case of one school, teachers led students to access primary sources via the web. Giving students access to primary sources was a shared concern among all of the administrators, largely because of the sensitive nature of some of the material. Mr. Murphy expressed that using primary sources lowered the chance that teachers would impose their own bias, which could occur more easily through the use of third party writings. The administrators, especially Ms. Anderson agreed that primary source documents allowed students to draw their own conclusions, speculate, and research more as they were intrigued by what they read. The textbooks used by some of the schools included primary source

documents within them. Schools that complemented a particular text with additional materials overwhelmingly attempted to stay as close as possible to the original documents when choosing complementary resources such as the King James Bible for the Jewish creation story, or the Babylonian account found in *Marduk Creates the World from the Spoils of Battle* from Alexander Heidel (1952), both incorporated at Mr. Murphy's charter school.

Ms. Anderson and Ms. Smith also indicated that primary source documents, such as the Bible or Qur'an, served the purpose of encouraging students to study—rather than practice—a religion. A fine line delineates the difference between studying the practice—such as the holidays, rituals, and ceremonies of religions—and actually participating in them during the school day. Mr. Murphy's school offered credit to students who attended the worship services of a religion other than their own to gain experiential knowledge. These visits were voluntary, and a parent or guardian had to attend with the student. The teacher at the school promoting this activity identified the exercise as an opportunity for students to experience another religion “first hand and not tainted by the bias of classmates”.

**Perceived benefits/challenges.** Hand in hand with building tolerance was the understanding by administrators that religion, in and of itself, is a force shaping culture that needs to be addressed. Representatives from all four schools mentioned this component at least once during the interview process. The benefit of offering the courses to students, in Mr. Murphy's opinion, “far outweighs the cost of not taking other coursework” due to the fact that the student will have gained life skills in building relationships with others who are not of the same belief system. Ms. Anderson shared that “students were amazed when they realized that most religions appreciate the same things,” and the exercise of actually learning what certain religions believe was wholly beneficial to the students' overall worldviews.



The study produced results that were partly consistent with implementation theory and the literature discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation—most specifically teacher preparedness and buy-in. Teacher training and buy-in tended to be the most important factor of success for all the administrators combined. Following that, the reasoning behind including the courses weighed heavily as part of the mission and vision of the school, as well as using primary source documents to teach the material; the benefit of producing well informed and intellectual students was the culminating result that schools were seeking when implementing courses.

### **Presentation of Data and Results**

In a cross case synthesis of the data, the following information was gathered: Four administrators representing four different charter high schools participated in the study. The schools they led were located in the south, southeast, and western states. The length of service for the administrators interviewed ranged from three to 19 years; their knowledge of the coursework ranged from very little knowledge on how the course was implemented or should have been taught to in-depth comprehension. None of the schools referred to their state boards of education as having any say in implementing the programs, and all administrators had authority to either add or eliminate the courses.

Three of the four schools implemented the course based on a specific textbook, even if they complemented readings with other resources. Two of the texts were hardcover, one softcover and the school that required two courses also employed a DVD course. Only one school wrote and vetted its own course, using only primary source documents. Three of the schools granted credit in either history or English, while a fourth used the course as strictly a local elective credit.

The course descriptions for the four schools resulted in three of them explicitly mentioning the outcomes intended at the conclusion of the course. From students gaining fundamental understandings of religions, to students being able to interact with members of differing religions, three were precise in expected outcomes. Two of the descriptions mentioned specifically the literature, art, and music of Western Civilization and how it was influenced, while three descriptions noted politics or law and how students would study history and politics as influenced by the Bible and the church. One description indicated a study of how education and technology were affected by religions of the world.

The syllabi for all four schools required work beyond simply reading the text and answering questions. One school required a visit to a house of worship, another required writing a short novel with religion as a theme. One required quarterly collaborative presentations while another required one report on Shakespeare's use of Bible references.

The websites for all four schools indicated serious study of history and the liberal arts. The classical schools reiterated the trivium and quadrivium, while the international school emphasized the need for global learners. The sites were able to be navigated easily to find course descriptions and graduation requirements.

Relationships spawned by the research grew to collegial friendships which resulted in spending two days in Texas observing one of the schools I interviewed. Many emails and phone calls followed the initial interviews along with invitations to visit two of the other three schools. I anticipate visiting them both in the spring of 2017. The estimated amount of time spent with each administrator, as of November, 2016 is indicated as follows:

Table 2

*Estimates of Time Spent with Each Administrator*

School indicator	Initial Interview	Post interview email, phone, visitations
Case One Charter School	90 minutes	16 hours (2 day visit)
Case Two Charter School	75 minutes	1.5 hours (phone and email)
Case Three Charter School	45 minutes	3 hours (phone and email)
Case Four Charter School	150 minutes	1.5 hour (emails)

*Note.* Communications spanned over the course of 8 months in total.

All administrators were in charge of the high schools even when the school spanned K–12. In total, the number of students taking the courses ranged from 25 in one school to over 100 in another (it was a required course). The total number of students taking coursework thus far in all schools interviewed totaled 1,507 students in a breakout as follows:

Table 3

*Students Enrolled in Religious and Biblical Literacy Courses*

School indicator	Accommodating	Students in course so far
Case One Charter School	Up to 40 per year	300 to date
Case Two Charter School	Up to 25 per year	25 to date
Case Three Charter School	Up to 30 per year	27 to date
Case Four Charter School	Up to 175 per year	1155 to date

*Note.* Case One school *requires* seniors to take the coursework.

On the topic of professional development, all but one school had it in place for their teachers, expecting them to be trained in the sensitivity of the material and to address their own personal biases to avoid exhibiting them in the classroom. The one school that had not offered professional development planned to do so in the next school year (2017—2018). Professional development spanned from what was provided by the text manufacturer, to coursework taken on scholarship through the National Endowment for the Humanities, to courses provided by Gateways to Better Education (2016). All four school administrators mentioned the need to be

able to vet particular teachers, regardless of whether they were English, history, psychology or sociology credentialed, primarily because no specific guidelines existed for teaching religious and biblical history or for hiring instructors in this field.

## **Summary**

This chapter presented the data gleaned from interviews with the participants and from document review at the charter schools currently implementing religious and biblical literacy courses. Interviews enlightened the researcher about how each school implemented the coursework within the scope of institutional mission and vision. Documentation confirmed information from the interviews and provided information on school culture. No two schools were using the same course design or materials.

In summary, the themes that emerged most obviously and consistently from the interviews were the need for excellent teachers to teach these courses, as well as availability of training and resources from which teachers could glean acceptable information and methods of instruction. All administrators said they believed that the teacher in charge of the course would either allow it to be a beneficial course or a course where issues regarding biases arose. All administrators identified professional development as a significant factor in the success of how the courses are implemented and tracked from year to year; they all stated that professional development in this area should be mandatory.

In addition to providing a thick and rich description of the implementation dynamics occurring at each school, I was able to describe the qualitative coding process used to analyze the data from transcription to sorting, coding, and categorizing. The analyses revealed that, beyond teacher preparation and buy-in for the courses offered, the focus of the administrators when implementing courses was grounded in whether or not the course fit the vision and mission of the

school. If a course was proposed that fit the vision, then administrators were able to explain the basis for the course to the board of directors and have it accepted into the school's curriculum offerings. Schools offering a classical curriculum, or having a particular international emphasis, were more accommodating in offering the courses because they easily fit into the overall mission and vision. Describing clearly what the course outcomes would be within the course description was also deemed important.

The majority of the participants were familiar with the course offered, and they were also familiar with the shortcomings involved in implementation. Many were aware they needed to make modifications to offer a more robust course. All of the administrators, however, supported the use of primary source documents so that students could probe and analyze original materials themselves, lessening the propensity that they would be influenced by the particular biases of the instructors. Primary source documents were readily available and easily accessed through public domains so schools could download and even print them. All four administrators also frequently concurred in their identification of perceived benefits and challenges.

Challenges identified by administrators were mostly found in the area of human resources. Due to the nature of the coursework and the sensitivity required to teach the subject matter, having the right teacher in charge of the course was of vital importance; finding those teachers, however, often proved challenging. Other challenges mentioned included educating parents and students alike on the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause; however, once outreach occurred to explain the importance of these constitutional tenets, administrators reported that the courses ran smoothly.

Graduating students with a non-biased understanding of global religious beliefs and how to accept one another and practice religious tolerance was a perceived benefit identified by all

four administrators. Some mentioned the importance of learning Bible passages for testing reasons (AP and IB), but for the most part, the overarching quality of not being religiously ignorant appeared to be most important.

Documentation examined for each school's course(s) included course descriptions, course syllabi, textbooks and the school's website. The textbooks chosen reflected the course descriptions for each school.

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this final chapter is twofold. First is to summarize, analyze, and discuss the reviewed data. Second, this chapter will discuss the findings and important elements that resulted from the interpretation of the data and the connections made within the data collected in the course of the study. It addresses the research questions and what the data revealed or added to knowledge on the study of implementation of biblical and religious literacy courses. The chapter then examines the implications of the results and provides recommendations for further research.

### **Summary of Results**

Each participant was asked all of the questions on the Administrator Protocol (Appendix B) and was prompted to add their own personal story about how the coursework was implemented at their particular school. Some interviews lasted only an hour, where others went well over the hour as administrators spoke at length about their experiences with implementation of coursework. The follow up conversations, emails, and visit took place from August, 2016 to November, 2016.

The interview questions included the following:

**Q1:** Can you please state in what region of the country your charter school exists?

Based on the data from the participating administrators, the schools were located in the South, the Southeast, and the Western regions of the United States.

**Q2:** How long have you been an administrator in this particular school?

Mr. Murphy and Ms. Smith had been at their school positions for 19 and 18 years respectively. Ms. Anderson was with her school for 10 years and Mr. Jones for 3 years.

**Q3:** Prior to this position, what was your background in education?

All administrators had been in the field of education for over 10 years serving as teachers and administrators in various positions. All held master's degrees; Mr. Murphy had earned a PhD.

**Q4:** How many courses focusing on religious and biblical literacy is your charter currently implementing?

All four schools were offering a minimum of one course, and one school required two courses for graduation. Of all four schools, only one, charter school 1 required the courses.

**Q5:** Is (are) this (these) course(s) required or elective? More than one?

Three of the schools offered coursework as an elective; at one it was as required coursework.

**Q6:** Have students requested more courses of this nature? Why do you believe this is so?

Three of the administrators shared that the students enjoyed the coursework, and Mr. Murphy shared that the students actually drove the course into existence. The administrators said they believed students wanted to learn more so they could engage in intelligent conversations in regards to the religious beliefs of others. They also mentioned that students were unaware that the study of religion and the Bible was actually allowed in public schools and that the Common Core required that they study this material. All administrators said they believed students enjoyed this coursework because it allowed them to discuss something real and pertinent to their everyday lives as well as their belief systems. They all expressed that, in their opinion, students needed an outlet to, according to Ms. Anderson, "discuss elements of their lives not otherwise shared in school."



**Q7:** How was the course introduced to the school?

Mr. Murphy indicated the students drove the course development. Mr. Jones, the administrator at charter school 3 shared the course had been offered in the past and therefore it remained part of their elective offerings. The course had been included at schools 1 and 4 as a result of the decisions of the administration and teaching staff. None of the administrators interviewed had written into their charter agreement or contract that they would be offering these courses. None of them stated the coursework was parent requested or directed.

**Q8:** Has this course always been offered?

None of the administrators interviewed were aware of the inclusion of religious and Bible literacy courses as part of the founding curriculum from the very beginning of their charters. They all added the coursework and explained they had been open to the idea for a number of years. Mr. Jones, at charter school 3 did not know how long the course had been offered, but the other three schools shared-implementation ranged from 3—8 years.

**Q9:** How long have the courses been offered under your administration?

Ms. Smith, Mr. Murphy, and Ms. Anderson had responsibility for full course implementation while they were leading their schools. Only Mr. Jones directed a school that already had a religious or biblical literacy course in place.

**Q10:** How does offering this course fit into the mission and vision of your school?

Administrators at all four schools explained how the coursework fit into their institutions' vision and mission. They said producing patriotic responsible citizens was a mandatory part of a quality education and that it was a disservice to not teach students about the religions that surround them on a daily basis. The country, they said, was founded on the premise of religious freedoms, and they noted that the First Amendment protected the freedom of exercising that

right. Students needed to access the Constitution and understand the amendments. Ms. Anderson emphasized the mission as an international school, and Mr. Murphy noted a classical education emphasis.

**Q11:** Can you tell me the story of who chose the curriculum, and how they did so?

As stated, two schools (Ms. Smith, Ms. Anderson) employed a top down model: Mr. Jones was not aware of how the coursework was enacted; at Mr. Murphy's school implementation was a result of a bottom up model. Mr. Murphy shared:

When we wrote our charter we wrote to at least 50 colleges back in '97—'98 and said, "What are the kind of courses you would like to see on a high school transcript that would make this student from a charter school a top candidate at your school?" and we got some really interesting responses. You know we were already thinking and talking about a classical studies curriculum, so when we proposed courses like Latin, Logic, Rhetoric, Philosophy, Religion, they were very highly regarded and well received by those colleges and gave us what we thought was solid evidence when we wrote our application to bring to the state department of Ed, that, "hey, these were the courses that colleges would like to see and really put these students at the head of the list." We're serious about math, history, English that everybody does, but we're going to take it to that next level of logical thinking skills....being able to express themselves in a very confident and meaningful way and we brought that to the department of Ed as the core of our high school curriculum....the inclusion of a world religions course was a natural extension of what we want to teach philosophically, and it rounded out our offering. We want students to be able to think critically for themselves as to why they may want to, or

not want to join a particular religion or a particular society, and understand the background, the history of religion from a very objective point of view.

**Q12:** What does the school hope to gain for the students who take the course?

All administrators stated a global worldview and acceptance of others as part of their answers to this question. Ms. Anderson said she also felt that, with America becoming more and more diverse, it was the schools' responsibility to educate students in a global manner. As Mr. Murphy quoted above explained, critical thinking about whether to be involved in a religion was a motivator to including the coursework, as an intended outcome.

**Q13:** How do you determine when to offer the course, and what is your reasoning behind that?

All the administrators interviewed talked about the maturity level of the students as an indicator of why they only offered their courses to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Mr. Murphy specifically relied on the teacher of the course based on what he observed of the maturity level of the students the previous year, to determine whether or not the course would be offered to those students during senior year. Mr. Jones offered the courses to grades 9 – 12, and had little information as to the criteria required to continue the offering the course.

**Q14:** Are these courses only offered to certain students (certain years)?

Charter schools 1, 2, and 4 offered the courses to grades 11—12, Charter school 3 offered it for grades 9—12.

**Q15:** Do you have years that tend to have higher course enrollment than others?

All four administrators said that just as classes tended to take on their own “personalities,” the years tended to fluctuate between students with high interest and students that were not highly motivated. Mr. Murphy talked about how some classes seem to have interest

in religious elements, where other classes might be more oriented to technology or sports. Ms. Anderson shared that she felt enrollment was influenced by parents helping students choose their electives.

**Q16:** Is there parental support for the coursework? Do you have parents asking for the course?

Only Charter school 1 had parents who actually sought out enrollment because the courses were required. In this case, the parents specifically wanted their children to take the religious and biblical literacy courses and were willing to drive long distances for that opportunity.

**Q17:** Have you ever had to deal with controversy over offering this course (from parents, administrators, teachers, or community members)? If so, please explain.

No issues of controversy arose in relation to offering the religious courses. Administrators said they were insistent that the school community understand what the courses covered and that the curriculum needed to be described accurately in their handbooks.

**Q18:** Have you ever had to deal with conflict between students taking these courses?

No incidents of conflict between students occurred at any of the schools.

**Q19:** Tell me about how you chose teachers to implement the course. What certification must they hold? (English, history)? Only Charter school 1 required teachers to be trained in relation to teaching religious and biblical coursework before teaching the course.

Charter school 2 recruited a college philosophy instructor for the course, while the three other schools used English and history teachers.

**Q20:** Have you experienced turnover of the staff teaching this course? Yes/No, and how do you feel that affects implementation?

Ms. Smith spoke at length to turnover of teachers for the course and the process that they were working to improve. Mr. Jones had a teacher retire, and therefore offered the course to the incoming English teacher. Mr. Murphy and Ms. Anderson had not experienced turnover of the course instructors.

**Q21:** Is the coursework intertwined with another course, or offered separately?

All four administrators offered the course individually as either a full year course or a semester course. However, Charter school 1 trained all teachers via Gateways to Better Education and expected teachers outside of the Bible classes to discuss religion whenever it was pertinent. Therefore the training for the entire school was mandatory.

**Q22:** Is the course content included in a state/district history/English assessment?

None of the administrators were aware of specific world religion questions appearing on their respective state standardized tests, even though they were aware of the common core requirements for teaching specific religious content.

**Q23:** What made you choose the textbooks/resources that you employed for this course?

Specifically, Charter school 1 used *The Bible in History and Literature alongside Drive Thru History; American History*. Charter school 3 used *The Bible and Its Influence*, while Charter School 2 wrote and vetted the course themselves and included a variety of primary source document materials. Charter school 4 used *Religions of the World*.

**Q24:** What do you specifically like about these resources/materials?

All administrators commented they wanted to see more resources available to teachers other than online websites. They said they appreciated items that would allowed the students to experience materials firsthand instead of using simply virtual resources. Resources included documents and artifacts from various religions.

**Q25:** Have you modified or deviated from the resources at all?

All administrators, except Mr. Jones modified their courses and added pieces to the curriculum. Mr. Murphy had students go to a worship service other than his or her own religion so they could experience the religion firsthand. Ms. Anderson had students writing a novel with religious differences as the major theme. Ms. Smith added more primary source documents.

**Q26:** How well prepared are your teachers for teaching this material? Do you offer Professional Development, or have you had Professional Development for the teachers or school as a whole in reference to this course/these courses?

All four administrators thought this was an area of concern and one in which they needed a concentrated effort to do a better job. Charter School 1 implemented professional development trainings every other year and offered online webinars each year; all teachers were required to take the training. The other three schools had nothing formally established for training as a policy, and administrators identified this as an area for improvement. These administrators looked to their teaching staff to tell them what kind of preparation they needed and then approved trainings; however, none of the teachers received training specifically for a world religions class at the time of this writing.

**Q27:** Do you specifically look for more seasoned teachers to teach these courses? If so, why?

None of the administrators felt that years of teaching hindered or helped teaching these courses. Administrators felt that years of teaching could actually hinder implementation more than help due to teachers getting set in their own ways. They all indicated that with the addition of training and proper guidance that teachers did not need to be seasoned in order to be successful.

**Q28:** Do you think that class size has a bearing on implementation of this course? If so, how?

Of the four administrators, only Charter school 1 said the class size had a bearing on implementation; the school where the course was required. The school was purposeful about trying to keep the class to 25 or smaller. The other schools had sections that could reach 35 students, and the administrators said they did not see class size affecting implementation.

**Q29:** How do the surrounding public schools influence whether or not you offer this course, if at all?

None of the administrators felt that the surrounding public schools had any influence whatsoever.

**Q30:** Does the parent population have any influence on the coursework? What support/feedback do you get from the parent community to support the coursework, if any?

Ms. Smith talked in detail about the parent population not only wanting the coursework, but driving the school enrollment up by sharing with the community about the religious and biblical literacy coursework. The other three schools did not see the parent population playing a role.

**Q31:** Community at large (area churches, private schools, etc.) have any influence on the courses offered?

Area churches and community organizations as well as private Christian schools and Catholic schools had a noticeable effect on enrollments at Charter school 1, and it was positive. Ms. Smith had been contacted on a regular basis by private schools wanting to convert to charter schools due to the ability to teach religious and biblical literacy courses.

**Q32:** What do you perceive to be the benefit(s) of the course(s) your school is currently offering/requiring?

All four administrators spoke in detail about the vision and mission of their school, their location, and why the coursework was pertinent to their program. The benefits of graduating knowledgeable students was that they performed much better both academically and socially in their college environments, whether they were near their high school, in other states or other countries. Ms. Smith and Mr. Murphy tracked students through their first two years of college, Ms. Anderson hosted alumni groups, and all three sent surveys to gain insight on how well the high school prepared students for college. The administrators were determined that the knowledge gained in world religions classes served these students in vitally important ways, particularly in how they responded to world issues and global concerns and how they handled sensitive issues. Administrators spoke about how students gained empathy for others through the studies of religions.

**Q33:** What do you perceive the challenges to be of this coursework, and what would you change if you could?

The biggest challenge found by all administrators was the ability to present the material in an unbiased fashion within a safe educational environment. Charter School 2 addressed that challenge by using a teacher who also taught another course, required of those students a year before. Mr. Murphy felt that once the students were comfortable with the teacher, knew the classroom expectations and how to relate to one another in a positive fashion, then they could embark upon sensitive material in a nonjudgmental (safe) respectful manner. Looping teachers worked well at Charter schools 1 and 2.



All administrators wanted to identify a conference or training in the subject area that was nationally accepted by the American Association of Educators (AAE), similar to conferences offered by the National Council on Teachers of English (NCTE) or to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) conferences, which were universally accepted nationwide as the standard for excellent professional development conferences.

Administrators also mentioned the lack of ancillary resources they felt were needed to improve the content and make it real for the students.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

Not all of the results aligned with implementation theory found in the literature and discussed in Chapter 2. The particular indicators mentioned in Chapter 2 were: teacher training and preparation, teacher buy-in, class size barriers, data collection, administrative and parental support, horizontal and vertical alignments, and time and resources. However, there were a few consistent elements worthy of discussion.

**Teacher training/preparation.** The overarching question in regards to teachers, not only their qualifications, but their training and preparedness for teaching the material of the courses, brought to the surface information that was profitable to the study. All of the administrators expressed strong feelings in regards to the need for training, avoiding the teaching of biases, and providing teachers with the resources needed to properly deliver the coursework. These elements aligned with implementation theory. More specifically, Chancey (2015) addressed the issue of training and the fact that teachers coming out of teacher training programs were not biblical scholars. He and Jeynes (2011) both saw training for teaching courses addressing sensitive issues as vitally important and needed as they claimed a cursory knowledge was insufficient for material of this nature. Unlike the teaching of math or history, for example, the

study of religions brought to the surface personal habits and rituals that defined a person on a spiritual level (Chancey, 2007). Teachers needed training on how to recognize their own biases and how to entertain opposing spiritual ideas with respect (Evans, 2007). Not all teachers were prepared to handle this type of “soft” knowledge or to implement these more subtle teaching skills. One administrator phrased it this way:

You can’t always put your finger on it. The way a teacher responds when a student says that they practice a particular religion, or go to a temple or mosque. But the kids can sense it, they know when a teacher doesn’t necessarily agree with their beliefs, just because of how they act through body language. It’s a soft skill communication that teachers need training in. It’s kind of like, kind of like in the old days when we trained on classroom management, except now its management of teacher responses in reference to religion [laughing].

One school significantly required training for all teachers. This particular choice of action aligns with the study Evans (2007) completed in reference to novice teachers learning how to teach religious literacy courses in public schools discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Those novice teachers that had mentors and specific elements of courses to rely upon reported more success in their student teaching experiences (Evans, 2007). They were prepared with first amendment training and knew the non-sectarian guidelines of teaching the material (Evans, 2007).

The need for training specifically on the differences between world religions and on how to facilitate discussion in the classroom without reflecting bias, was of vital importance to the administrators interviewed. Ms. Anderson stated:

Teachers don't always realize the role that they play with students who look up to them and then take everything they say as "Gospel truth." They need to be sensitive to the fact that not all students will come from the same backgrounds and be careful about their choice of words and actions. Even a smirk or a sigh can lead a student to believe that they are not approved of by the teacher because of their belief system. Teachers need to be trained and practice that skill. It's not in their nature because they are usually trying to convince students of the correctness of the information they are teaching. ... These students are impressionable during high school and are looking for adults to look up to. Teachers need to be mindful of that.

Gateways to Better Education (GTBE), an organization based in California, offers a number of professional development programs and resources for teachers and administrators (GTBE, 2015). GTBE provides lesson plan ideas, articles, and professional development seminars to teach teachers about their rights and about how to address and teach religion in the classroom (GTBE, 2015). GTBE and the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), have worked as partners to produce a number of publications reviewing overall rights and responsibilities in regards to the teaching of religion; these materials are distributed to teachers and administrators as well as parents and students (ADF, 2015). GTBE supports religious literacy in the classroom and provides resources to teachers to incorporate religion into literature and history classes as well as into life skills classes. The resources are teacher and administrator centered (ADF, 2015).

Training, or lack of it, was also addressed in the literature in regards to the IB programs (Ackerman et al., 2010), in reference to implementing Common Core Standards (Robelen, 2013), and in reference to implementing positive behavior support programs (Kinkaid, et al., 2007). All of these studies concluded that, as with most content, the more teacher training was provided, the

more confident the teachers became and, the more effectively the course material was implemented. Schmuck et al. (2012) discussed the importance of teachers affiliating with the material and also having autonomy to create lessons with their own style while meeting the needs of the standards. However, this was where Ms. Smith found “discrepancies between what a teacher may know about religions and how their own biases color their opinions” which then made room for either errors in knowledge or errors in attitudes.

**Teacher buy-in.** Closely associated with teacher training in the literature was the idea of teacher buy-in; teachers needed to believe the students needed the coursework to fully desire to teach the course. The literature revealed certain elements that when present, affected teacher buy-in negatively. Ackerman et al., (2010) and Hallinger et al., (2011) spoke to the fact that teachers did not indicate buy-in for IB programs when students came across with an attitude of entitlement. If students exhibited an attitude of already “knowing it all,” IB teachers were less likely to be invested in teaching the courses. As was the case with Common Core implementation, teachers were overwhelmed with the standards and expectations they felt were being forced upon them and, therefore, the buy-in for the changes was low (Koning et al., 2014). Waugh and Godfrey (1993), and Roehrig, Kruse, and Kern (2007) looked at teacher buy in and noted that it could take up to three years to get teachers out of a particular pattern of thinking in order to accept new curriculum. One of the administrators interviewed indicated that this was an issue as to attitudes and preconceived ideas that teachers brought into the position. Re-training or working one-on-one with a teacher to accept new coursework can be a challenge.

When discussing buy-in for religious and biblical literacy coursework in charter schools with Mr. Jones, he shared, “Since it’s not a required course it’s easy to get a teacher to take it on.

It's not state tested, so they can basically create the course they want to and take on the course to fill a schedule." Another administrator explained:

It's extremely difficult to get buy-in from teachers as many of them don't think we should be teaching religion in a public school. Their attitudes about it color the course so that students don't enjoy it and then the next year very few will elect it.

Of the four administrators interviewed, charter schools 2 and 4 had no trouble with buy-in from teachers, whereas charter schools 1 and 3 found it to be a significant roadblock. Understanding the dynamics at work in relation to teacher buy-in for these types of courses would be an area for further research and development. However, better aligning teachers with the courses they are responsible to teach would benefit all schools and all students.

Teachers passionate about providing students with the best experiences possible to develop their own thinking patterns and life choices would likely be the better mentors for this type of coursework (Evans, 2007). Properly preparing those to not only teach the material chosen, but to also allow students the freedom to come to their own conclusions, would prove profitable in the end (Chancey, 2007). Engaging students in interreligious discussion with one another would allow students to become skilled in speaking when differences of politics or ideologies come to the surface in daily conversation (Largen, 2014). This skill is essential if we choose to live in harmony with others that believe differently. By incorporating respectful conversation, educators could coach students on how to share their perspectives. Trained educators understood that disrespecting a person's religious traditions by being rude, applying wrong stereotypes, or proliferating ignorant ideas only grew dissension; not generating respect for others (Largen, 2014). Providing for interreligious discussion in the classroom opened the door for students to share in a safe, nonjudgmental environment. Students needed to have the

opportunity to share their viewpoints with others in a respectable manner. Alongside preparing teachers with the tools to deal with sensitive topics in the classroom, their ability to teach students about the importance of tolerance and compassion would provide the expected outcome of building empathy in the student body.

### **Discussion of Other Results**

The other elements brought out and uncovered in the literature review in reference to implementation were: class size barriers, data collection, administrative and parental support, horizontal and vertical alignments, and time and resources. These elements did not surface as vital indicators to implementation when it came to religious and biblical literacy courses.

However, there were a few other themes that surfaced as important, more specifically, whether the course aligned to the vision and mission of the school, the importance of employing primary source documents, and the perceived benefits of teaching this particular coursework.

**Vision/mission of the school.** Another element that emerged in regards to implementing coursework in the area of religious and biblical literacy was the vision and mission of the organization. Courses were assimilated quickly and without question when they aligned with a specific element of the vision or mission of the school.

Of the four administrators interviewed, all of them referenced a specific piece of their vision and mission that was addressed through the course they offered. It was important for an international school, for example, to address all cultural differences for their students, and so their course fit into their vision and offerings neatly. Classical schools also identified a natural fit, as classical education found its roots within the antiquities and was grounded in religions of the Middle East. Another school specifically addressed patriotism in their mission and vision, and administrators said they believed that the inclusion of a world religions course was

applicable to their curriculum to develop an understanding of the conflicts that shaped nations and identities.

Gabriel and Farmer (2009) specifically recommended aligning curriculum to the vision and mission of the school. In setting school culture, the researchers argued, the vision and mission should be explicitly visible and tangible in the coursework offered to the students. Research discussed school improvement plans that evaluated coursework to align to the mission and vision of the school by asking questions as to why an activity or course would be offered (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009). Researchers emphasized that schools seeking to improve even more, or to develop a successful framework, should deliberately align coursework with program structure (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009). Feiman-Nemser, Tamir, and Hammerness (2014) wrote a book on training teachers for success in mission-driven schools. The same elements that helped new teachers to succeed should be applied when secondary schools implemented new curriculum. Feiman-Nemser et al. (2014) addressed three different programs for teacher training and noted specifically that those programs whose missions and visions were clear, and delivered coursework logically aligned to the particular school's vision, had higher success rates with their students. The Harvard Graduate School of Education's study (2014) also provided insight into K-12 programs. If the courses offered aligned with the vision and mission of the school, then they were understood and accepted as part of the curriculum. Kezar and Kinzie (2006) looked specifically at the role of the mission of a school in relation to student engagement in undergraduate studies and found students were deeply affected by the culture within the institution when it came to engagement in the curriculum. Researchers stated:

The mission of the institution is one of the most visible and powerful articulations of the culture and usually relates to values and meaning for a campus and provides guidance for

people to act. ....many researchers have identified a connection between the mission statement and resultant practices, programs and activities of an organization (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006, p. 152).

Research further articulated that the mission served as a “focal point for faculty, staff, administrators and students and an area of common understanding” and as a proactive factor to improve learning for students (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006, p. 159). The research indicated the mission and vision of the school have the power to support the coursework offered. Therefore, not only should schools examine their mission and vision statements, but they should ask whether or not all of their coursework “fits” with the vision and mission of the school.

Providing the best of educational materials to students so they could build critical thinking skills was an element included in all of the mission statements of the schools participating in this study. That particular goal could be fulfilled by providing students with primary source documents when at all possible.

**Primary source documents.** The employment of primary source documents to structure a curriculum on religious and biblical literacy became a key component in the discussions with all four administrators. Educators were generally aware of the importance of using primary source documents when conducting research. However, administrators at the schools that were the focus of this study indicated the importance of primary source documents without any commentary from outside sources specifically so students could draw their own conclusions on what messages the materials conveyed. Ms. Anderson put it this way:

....so really, what do I have, or any teacher have to offer beyond what the actual four noble truths are, the eightfold path or the doctrines of suffering for a Buddhist? Let the students read it themselves and make their own evaluation. What I have found is that they



are quick to find the common points between religions like Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism. They all have some common pieces.... it's kind of funny to watch them discover it....but it wouldn't mean anything if I simply told them that there were commonalities, they have to discover them on their own and make their own connections. ....I remember one day when the light bulb went off for a student who discovered that the "Jewish Jesus" and the "Christian Jesus" were basically the same person, with varying beliefs of what he actually did. But that student made a significant finding for his own understanding....we all laughed about it in class, including the student, as it was a real enlightenment.

Mr. Murphy was quick to point out the school did not want to deal with choosing commentaries on texts, so when they designed the course the decision was made to use only original source documents. Students then evaluated the material independently, and Mr. Murphy said he felt it was the best way to protect the school from any ill feelings on the part of families. He stated:

We never intended to be any kind of a, you know, "religious" school, we simply wanted to prepare students for what they would need both in college and in the real world after high school. Even though the course is an elective, you don't want to offend parents or students by what is being read or discussed in the classes, so you best protect yourself by using the original documents without anyone else's input. No one will argue with that, and we felt we were being both fair and consistent with what the students were reading....we are a classical school, and you know, if we're going to read The Federalist Papers in history, we're going to read directly from the Torah when studying Judaism, it just makes sense! Wasn't it St. Augustine who said that one is absurdly foolish to send his son to school to learn what the teacher thinks!

The schools that chose to use specific textbooks, chose them due to the inclusion of sections of primary source documents such as the Torah, sections of the Mahayana Sutras, and the Qur'an.

When referring to the literature on education, support existed for studying primary source documents with high school students. Eastern Illinois University's website, for example, hosted an article referring to the use of primary source documents and gave the following reasons as to why educators should do so:

Primary sources expose students to multiple perspectives. Also, primary sources help students develop knowledge skills and analytical abilities such as the skills required to develop deep critical thinking, understanding that their history is local and personal, helping students to acquire empathy for the human condition, considering different points of view in analysis, and understanding the overall continuum of history and his or her place in it (Rich, 2016, p.1).

Morgan and Rasinski (2012) reiterated this same idea when they discussed the reasoning behind using primary source documents in the classroom. Aligning with the common core requirements that students were able to analyze information, stated, "Primary sources allow a student to get as close to a moment in time as possible, to have more of the firsthand, lived-through experience that is so critical for deep understanding" (p. 585). As proponents of primary sources, researchers argued that students needed the opportunity to construct understanding from the details of the source instead of simply being told what happened, where, and when (Morgan & Rasinski, 2012).

Potter (2005) discussed the value of using primary source documents when teaching civics. She used the example of a letter from a serviceman to Thomas Jefferson, and then Jefferson's letter to William Crawford in 1816. Potter (2005) advocated the use of many primary

source documents in the teaching of history and civics, such as “letters, reports, photographs, drawings, sound recordings, motion pictures, and artifacts as well as other items” (p. 358).

Fishman (2003) also supported the use of primary source documents, especially when teaching middle school students about slavery. Fishman and a colleague designed an activity using the story of *The Pearl* as a primary source document to teach teachers the power of storytelling at a summer conference in 2001. With the integration of the primary sources surrounding the incident of *The Pearl*, along with the novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and documents from Abraham Lincoln referring to the book that “started the Civil War,” Fishman (2003) and her colleague designed a program for teachers to point out the importance of primary source documents. The authors remained convinced that in order to understand historical events, all the pertinent information must be documented, and to do so requires the use of primary source documents (Fishman, 2003).

Primary source documents also provide students with a common language from which they evaluated and generated discourse of their own. Providing time for nurturing the spirits of students, equipping the elements of a program such as *Passageways* (Kessler, 2000), promoted the exercise of thinking through knowledge to form and shape worldviews. Once students were educated with a common language and common knowledge of world religions, they would begin transforming their own biases and including their new knowledge to build new constructs (Kessler, 2000).

This information was useful in the design and implementation of religious and biblical literacy courses in public schools because primary source documents do not usually contain biased commentaries and they allowed students to interpret the writings and thus acquire knowledge to develop their own worldviews.

**Perceived benefits/challenges.** As mentioned in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, graduating students with a non-biased understanding of global religious beliefs and how to accept one another and practice religious tolerance was a perceived benefit by all four administrators. The ultimate goals included lessening levels of violence and angst against others holding different religious views. There was mention of the importance of learning Bible passages for testing reasons (AP and IB), but for the most part, the overarching quality of not being religiously ignorant and being more socially accepting, was deemed most important to participants. Graduating students who were sensitive to the needs of others and who did not categorize people based on their religious preferences, was a primary desired outcome found not only in the course descriptions and vision and mission statements, but heard through conversation.

Challenging the ability to reach that outcome was the hiring of teachers with certain characteristics to teach the religious and biblical literacy courses. Indeed, the attitudes and biases of teachers could easily color the coursework in such a way that students would rather not elect the coursework and avoided the topic altogether. Finding the right “fit” in a teacher was coupled with the challenge of finding texts or ancillary resources that complemented the course text in a non-biased way. None of the administrators interviewed had curriculum committees researching available texts or resources. It seemed fitting that schools looking to include religious or biblical literacy courses engaged a curriculum committee or a group of people to research available courses to determine whether they would fit the population of the respective charter schools well.

It is also worthy to note that the schools with the greatest interest (enrollment) in the religious and biblical literacy courses had similar specific elements in their course descriptions. Not only were they clear in describing what would be studied, but they all provided an expected

outcome for the coursework; students would become more compassionate and tolerant of others, as well as knowledgeable of various belief systems from around the world. This was very evident in the international school as they hosted foreign students and sent their students to foreign countries on exchange.

None argued that having students be more tolerant of one another and accepting of the belief systems of others, was a negative outcome. Neither would school administrators and parents argue that students should not be taught about the religious basis of the founding of their country or their civil liberties. However, the course of action a particular school took to get there remains up for debate. It would be in the best interest of a school to research available resources and get input from all stakeholders before selecting a particular religious or biblical literacy course to implement at a particular school.

### **Limitations**

As is obvious in all scholarly studies, the researcher brought attitudes and biases to the research process. My personal history as a Christian conducting research at a Christian University, along with being a classroom teacher for over 30 years, brought elements of bias to this study. My own interpretations of what was meant by religious or biblical literacy was bound by the constructs of world religions, which tended to eliminate “spiritual not religious” groups and focused on the more common or traditionally acknowledged religions. I have taught in school settings that have both emphasized particular religions and schools that have purposefully ignored religion as a whole. I have served in public schools that found it important to teach compassion and tolerance for different religions right alongside other elements that make the human race intriguing. Motivation behind this study centered on the belief that, as responsible adults, we should be educating our students in all facets of their being—body, mind, and spirit—

and that if we desire to turn young adults out into society by way of excellent educational practices then we cannot ignore the pressing global religious issues that surround us. It is my opinion that teaching compassion and tolerance in the area of religions should be inclusive of a public education, however I respect the rights of parents and their choices of education models for their students. For the purposes of this study I was seeking to understand the experiences of school administrators who had already engaged this coursework, therefore whether or not I thought the courses should be included in public education was a moot point.

This study was also limited at the level of data collection because of the low number of administrators interviewed and the limited quantity of cases that represented data collection and analysis. If the study was replicated, and time was a not a factor, more time could be spent searching out additional schools that offered courses in religious and biblical literacy.

Differences in the data could be loosely associated with demographics of where the schools were located, due to regional norms; however, it was the intention to have a sample that was cross national. More time could have been spent searching out schools offering the courses in a broader range of religious and biblical literacy contexts, along with studying public schools in general, not specific to public charter schools.

### **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

In this particular multiple case study, only one of the elements of implementation theory has clearly surfaced as viable: the importance of teacher training and preparedness to teach a religious or biblical literacy course. The data collected supported the work of Chancey (2012) and Jeynes (2011) who exhorted that a focus on teacher preparation should be taken seriously by colleges and universities training teachers.

Owning knowledge of many different religions, coupled with the compassion for another's point of view and the assumptions that we all are human, serve a purpose, and are deserving of respect seemed to be a common element among all administrators. Leading students to be both compassionate and tolerant of others' religious beliefs, not only do teachers need to be trained in the area of teaching and modeling these behaviors, but administrators needed to set the stage for a culture of acceptance and respect for others both within the walls of the school and through community interactions. In essence the entire school became transformative as members of the community learned together and adjusted their frames of reference (Mezirow, 1991).

The core categories mentioned in chapters 4 and 5, teacher preparedness, coursework fitting into the mission and vision of the school, using primary source documents, and the pre-conceived benefits and challenges of teaching the courses, all fed an idea of both compassion and acceptance which indeed aligned with the core variables at work in these courses.

A closer examination takes place into the implications of practicing compassion and acceptance for others by educating teachers and students in the area of world religions and beliefs, and anchor learning in a respectful environment, there are benefits to offering the courses examined in this study. Society as a whole benefits when topics are addressed with both compassion and acceptance.

Transformational leadership lends itself to never completing the course of transformation, but remains committed to a constant re-examination of attitudes and worldviews. Mezirow (1991) discussed the importance of understanding biases and of maintaining a willingness to grow as individuals by elaborating on our points of view with constant receptivity to establishing new ones. We transform our views regarding religion by educating ourselves and transforming

our generalizations about groups of people or religions in general and then adding that new knowledge to our existing frame of reference (Mezirow, 1991).

These practices have serious implications for educational institutions in general. If teachers are willing to be transformational and purposeful in changing their own biases, then that behavior will infiltrate the environment of the school. Teaching practices based on compassion, knowledge, and tolerance will empower students to grow within the space of a safe environment. Those same students will then take that knowledge into their homes and communities and influence those with whom they interact on a daily basis. The outcomes should naturally generate a more civil and respectful population of young Americans.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study can be expanded in a number of different ways by examining more deeply the religious and biblical literacy coursework available to public charter schools and the vetting process used to determine validity. An in-depth study of the various resources available as well as their effectiveness in public schools would constitute an important extension of this work. As this study sought sample public charter schools throughout the country, additional research could track the positive and negative correlations between different religious and biblical literacy courses offered in different regions of the country.

Another area of research that could extend this study would be the collection of data on the success rates of students who took these types of courses in high school. This study was limited to public charter schools; however, entire school districts throughout the United States are incorporating similar courses, and a study of how well those students perform after leaving high school would provide further indication of whether or not religious and biblical literacy courses should be a staple in public schools. Certainly, a quantitative study of the AP Literature



and European History scores for students in schools where religious coursework is implemented would be interesting to collect. It would add to this study and extend the work of Jeynes (2010).

Extending this study beyond the limitations of religious and biblical literacy, the inclusion of spiritually supportive programs in public schools could be explored. Serving the spiritual but not religious (SNR) population, there are programs in place across the country that look to serve the hearts and minds of students outside the confines of religious literacy (Kessler, 2000). Investigating what schools are offering to students in order to feel spiritually supported would constitute an interesting course of study.

## **Conclusion**

As stated well by Kohler-Evans and Barnes, (2015):

The bombardment of images, stories and news demonstrating how insensitive people are to one another can be a hindrance, but careful attention to the messages we bring into our classrooms through our teaching, to demonstrate the value of caring for and about other people, can make a powerful difference (p.36).

With the continuation and support of violence against those that are of differing religious identities and a chosen ignorance of what these people hold as worldviews, we will continue to see the violence that not only permeates society, but that has also been making inroads into our schools. Religious differences need to be discussed, taught, and contemplated by students who are maturing into our next young adult generation of Americans. It is our duty to educate them in such a way as to build tolerance and compassion for humankind, not further cause division through ignorance and pride.

By providing a combination of teacher sensitivity, teacher training and preparedness, the studying of original documents, and providing an explicative course description including

intended outcomes from the coursework, educators can address this growing concern in our diverse country. The beginnings of what appears to be a formula for success in educating the next generation of Americans in religious differences lies within the boundaries of exercising compassion, world religions and belief systems, and then transforming our own biases based on new knowledge. Students in American schools deserve to understand their classmates, schoolmates, and neighbors within the human condition, and it is well within the power of public charter schools to act as a catalyst by offering courses based in both religious and biblical literacy alongside character development. Teachers who are equipped with the resources they need, and the passion to see young people be successful in relationship with those that have differing opinions of views will make an impact on our next generation. Students who learn how to disagree respectably, educate themselves in areas where they are ignorant, and practice honor and decency toward others will be our future ambassadors and statesmen. To reach this goal, effectively implementing courses in our middle and high schools with non-biased curriculum and well trained teachers will be mandatory. Effective implementation of courses will serve to better prepare our students for the global economies in which they will work and live.

I believe it is well within the reach of our educational professional goals to help shape our students to better the coming generations for all Americans, for the betterment of society worldwide.

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## **Appendix A: Email Invitation**

Hello Sirs/Ma'am,

As an Ed.D. student in the proposal stage of my dissertation, I am contacting you to see if you would be interested in being involved in my case study research this fall. I am an educational doctoral student at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon and live in Northern Utah. Your school name was provided by The Bible Literacy Project as a school that offers The Bible and It's Influence as a high school course. I am looking for two schools to work with as I study implementation of Bible and Religious Literacy courses in public charter schools. If you would be interested in allowing me to interview your administration and teachers that teach the course, I would do so over a couple of days this coming fall. Of course, all of the mandatory disclosure paperwork would be enacted. I am hoping to stay within driving range, and as I currently live in Utah, California is an easy drive. I am contacting a number of schools in order to include them in my proposal, due at the end of this month.

The title of my dissertation work is: In God We Trust; A Case Study of Implementation of Religious and Biblical Literacy Courses in Public Charter Schools. I am pursuing this area of interest as I am writing the charter for a new school here and Utah, and I would like to incorporate Bible and religious literacy courses. I hope you will be interested in participating. Thank you for your time and consideration. I will wait to hear back from you regarding this opportunity.

Susan Goers

[Email address]

## Appendix B: Charter School Administrator Interview Protocol

### Charter School Administrator Protocol

I appreciate your letting me gather information about your experiences with religious and biblical literacy courses at your school. I have some questions I'd like to ask you related to religious and Bible literacy course implementation. We will record our meeting here on join.me, and I may need to take a few notes, are you okay with my doing so? You will have access to the recorded file, and I will be emailing you a document with your responses to verify before I use it in the study. Your identity will be protected.

#### **Preliminary**

*If applicable, ask:*

Can you please state in what region of the country your charter school exists?

How long have you been an administrator in this particular school?

Prior to this position, what is your background in education?

How many courses focusing on Religious and biblical literacy is your charter currently implementing?

Is (are) this (these) course(s) required or elective? More than one?

Have students requested more courses of this nature?

Why do you believe this is so?

How was the course introduced to the school?

Part of the original charter?

Parent directed?

Has this course always been offered?

How long under your administration?

How does offering this course fit into the mission and vision of your school?

Can you tell me the story of who chose the curriculum, and how they did so?

What does the school hope to gain for the students who take the course?

Talk to me about enrollment. How do you determine when to offer the course, and what's your reasoning behind that?

Are these courses only offered to certain students (certain years)?

Do you have years that tend to have higher enrollment than others?

Is there parental support for the coursework? Do you have parents asking for the course?

Have you ever had to deal with controversy over offering this course (Parents, Admin, Teachers, Community)? If so, please explain.

Have you ever had to deal with conflict between students taking these courses?

I'd like to know a bit more about those who teach this course. Tell me about the how you chose teachers to implement the course. What certification must they hold? (English, History)?

Have you experienced turnover of the staff teaching this course? Yes/No  
How do you feel that affects implementation?

Is the coursework intertwined with another course, or offered separately?

Is it included in a state/district History/English assessment?

What are the consequences if students don't do well on the test?

*If yes, or previously implied:* How important were these tests in your decision to offer this topic?

What made you choose the textbooks/resources that you are employing for this course? Which are you using or have you used in the past?

What do you specifically like about these resources/materials/

What do you not like?

Have you modified or deviated from the resources at all?

How well prepared are your teachers for teaching this material?

Do you offer PD, or have you had PD for the teachers or school as a whole in reference to this course/these courses?

Do you specifically look for more seasoned teachers to teach these courses? If so, why?

Do you think that class size has a bearing on implementation of this course? If so, how?

How do the surrounding public schools influence whether or not you offer this course, if at all?

Does the parent population have any influence on the coursework? What support/feedback do you get from the parent community to support the coursework, if any?

Community at large (area churches, private schools, etc.)

What do you perceive to be the benefit(s) of the course(s) your school is currently offering/requiring?

What do you perceive the challenges to be of this coursework, and what would you change if you could?

Thank you for your time. If I have any additional questions or need clarification, how and when is it best to contact you?

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent Form**

### **CONSENT FORM**

**Research Study Title:** In God We Trust: A Multiple Case Study of the Implementation of Religious and biblical literacy Courses in Public Charter Schools.

**Principal Investigator:** Susan Goers, M.Ed.

**Research Institution:** Concordia University

**Faculty Advisor:** Julie McCann, PhD

The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of how coursework is being implemented, or has been implemented at your charter school. The interview should take approximately one hour via an online join.me meeting, at a time that is convenient for you. There will be no monetary compensation for participating in the study. The researcher has been granted permission to recruit participants at your school by the school administration.

You will be asked to respond to a series of questions regarding course implementation, resources, training, class size, and class description.

#### **Risks:**

Some administrators, teachers, or counselors may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions, such as whether or not you enjoy teaching the course, feel qualified to teach it, or whether or not you have ever had to deal with controversy over offering the course. However, your information will be protected, coded, and used only in this study. Personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via manual encryption (School A, School B, etc.).

Due to the nature of the study, and the small number of schools offering these courses, there is a slight chance of deductive disclosure of information. However, the researcher will take all possible precautions to ensure confidentiality in the study. Your meeting file will be available to you via join.me.com to review and the researcher's notes and coding will be shared with you via Google Drive for your member checking. You will have the opportunity to approve the information before it is used in the research. The researcher will only use a (Teacher A, B, C, etc.) code to analyze the data. The investigator will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be permanently deleted three years after we conclude this study.

#### **Benefits:**

Information you provide will help other public charter schools who are looking to implement courses similar to the ones your school currently offers or has offered in the past.

#### **Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The information will be used solely for the purposes of completing a dissertation thesis. The only exception to this is if you tell the investigator about abuse or neglect that causes concern for your immediate health and safety.

Join.me.com allows the interviewer to record your session and then share the session with you. You will have the ability to delete the session if you choose to not allow it to be used; or to delineate certain information from the session. You will then receive access to a shared drive with a document for you to member check. You will have the opportunity to further clarify that information. Once member checking has been completed, the interviewer will delete the recorded session off of Join.me.com and you will receive notification. The shared document in Google Drive will remain until the final narrative is written and the project is complete, at which time those documents will be deleted by the researcher, and you will be notified.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking may be personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Susan Goers at [sgoers@gmail.com](mailto:sgoers@gmail.com). If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email [obranche@cu-portland.edu](mailto:obranche@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date



## Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Digital Signature



Name (Typed) Susan M. Goers

Date 02/15/2017