2009

Teaching About Religion: A Mixed Methods Study of Teachers' Attitudes, Knowledge, and Preparation, With a Focus on Islam and Muslims

Ramona Hussein
University of North Florida

TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF TEACHERS' ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE, AND PREPARATION, WITH A FOCUS ON ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

by

Ramona Hussein

A dissertation submitted to the Doctoral Program Faculty
in Educational Leadership in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

December, 2009

The dissertation of Ramona Hussein is approved:

Signature deleted

Marcia Lamkin, Ed. D., Chair — Date July 7, 2009

Signature deleted

Julie Ingersoll, Ph.D. — Date July 7, 2009

Signature deleted

Russell Mays, Ed.D. — Date July 7, 2009

Signature deleted

Jeffrey Cornett, Ph.D. — Date July 7, 2009

Accepting for the Department:

Signature deleted

E. Newton Jackson, Jr. Dept. Chair — Date 12-15-09

Accepting for the College:

Signature deleted

Larry G. Daniel, Ph.D., Dean
College of Education & Human Services — Date 01/05/10

Accepting for the University:

Signature deleted

Dean, The Graduate School — Date 01/07/10

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges several individuals who have contributed to the completion of this research project. First and foremost, I acknowledge my family. My wonderful husband, Sobhi Hussein and five devoted children were very encouraging during this process. Especially my daughter Fatima Hussein, who provided valuable editing and proofreading and my son Yousef Hussein, who supplied much needed technical support. Without their patience and support I would not have had the endurance to complete such a challenging task.

Much appreciation is extended to my dissertation chairperson Dr. Marcia Lamkin, a very understanding, diligent, and highly skilled professional who always responded promptly to my inquiries with proficient and expert advice. My dissertation committee members were also crucial to the completion of this project. Dr. Russell Mays, Dr. Richard Chant, and a very skilled Dr. Jeffrey Cornett, were instrumental in providing their expertise of school-based knowledge. Additionally, the expertise from Dr. Julie Ingersoll gave me valuable understanding and guidance within the field of religious studies.

Lastly, I deeply appreciate two key individuals from my department who were an inspiration to me. Dr. Kathe Kasten, the Doctoral Program Director, was always highly professional, encouraging and very thorough. And, last but not least, Dr. Larry Daniel, the Dean of Education, who set the bar of scholarly achievement exceptionally high for all of us.

I can no other answer make, but, thanks, and thanks.

~William Shakespeare

Dedication

LoEsther Holmes

1915 - 1995

Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

The subject of religion in public schools has always been controversial. America is a religiously diverse society, and one of the fundamental documents of this country, the Constitution of the United States, prohibits the establishment of a single religion which may seek to influence or control the ―free exercise" of all religions.

Indeed the discussion of religion in school is very extensive. The subject includes, but is not limited to the discussion of students' religious expression, prayer in school, students' religious accommodations, the right of the student to distribute religious literature, as well as the rights of students to form religious clubs.

The objective of this research study was to refine the very broad discussion of religion and religious liberties in public schools to the narrow subject of how teaching about religion is viewed in the public schools. Furthermore, given the current world's conflict with members of the Islamic faith and the increasing Muslim population in the United States, the study about Islam is a fundamental subject of inquiry for today's students who require a more global outlook.

Primary to the study of whether teaching about religion is constitutional, which it is, an examination of how teachers, administrators, and school board members approach the subject, implement the policy, and prepare teachers for the task, was the focus of this research. Using a mixed methods methodology, I collected and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data from a sample total of

1,054 Florida social studies teachers. Overall, the results of the findings were that the surveyed teachers were open to teaching about all religions. However, their training and level of understanding of the content material required to accomplish the tasks were deficient. Recommendations included the designing of appropriate pre-service and in-service training programs for teachers who have responsibilities for teaching about various religions.

Chapter One:

Introduction

This research study examined the attitudes, knowledge, and preparation of teachers regarding religion and public education. Teachers were asked, through a survey instrument called the Religion and Public Education Inventory developed by Harris-Ewing (1999), about their views of the importance of religion and of their personal teaching beliefs in regard to the instruction of religion in public schools. Also examined were teachers‘ general knowledge of the world‘s major religions, teachers‘ legal knowledge of certain boundaries when teaching about religion, and any preparation they have received which enabled them to teach about religion. Additionally, because this study was focused on the Islamic religion, an examination of teachers‘ prevailing beliefs and knowledge about Islam and Muslims is presented. Hence, the primary benefit of using a mixed-methods methodology in the current study is so that religion as a whole can be presented, while the very specific religion of Islam can be expanded upon.

Although the subject of teaching about religion is not new, it continues to promote uncertainty and apprehension among teachers who desire to follow curriculum standards on one hand, which mandate an academic approach to learning about religion, without violating the doctrine of the separation of church and state, on the other hand. Unfortunately many teachers continue to experience confusion in the aforementioned area due to a lack of training and

preparation (Harris-Ewing, 1999). As a result, many instructors have completely foregone or, worse, inappropriately approached the methods of teaching about religion.

Although religion alone represents a small portion of the social studies curriculum compared to its potential influences, it can enhance the learning experiences in other academic subjects because it can provide further relevance to human contributions in literature, history, culture, geography, politics, the arts, music, and other subjects (Hayes, Chaltain, Ferguson, Hudson, & Thomas, 2003).

Likewise, the necessity of teaching about religion is well documented by a plethora of educational and political leaders. Generally, there exists an overall lack of basic knowledge in K-12 schools about the world‘s religions. Only 10% of America‘s teenagers correctly identified the world‘s five major religions, while 15% could not name any of the world‘s major religions (Prothero, 2007a). Furthermore, a great many international current events like politics, terrorism, and globalization revolve around various religious ideologies. Discussing such events without exploring them in a religious context would be unwise (Frietas & Rotherham, 2004).

Additionally, our democratic system of government greatly depends on an informed citizenry to make informed decisions. These decisions often have both domestic and international implications. If the United States is to maintain its world leadership status, it is vital for the citizens of this country to be aware of

those international matters which affect, either directly or indirectly, our existence on this planet (Collins, Czarra &, Smith, 1999; Smith & Czarra, 2003).

A modern multicultural American society warrants the acquired knowledge necessary to integrate under-represented groups into the American populace. Because culture influences student learning and religion is a very large aspect of culture, teachers must have at least a general understanding of the way that religion, an aspect of cultural diversity, can influence student learning. This general understanding can be accomplished by well-prepared teachers who are familiar with the educational strategies needed to integrate multiethnic content into the educational curriculum (Banks, 1988).

The purpose of this concurrent mixed methods study was to describe teachers‘ attitudes, religious knowledge, and academic preparation regarding religion in public education. A survey of 57 general questions made up the quantitative portion of the study, and a list of five open-ended questions comprised the qualitative portion of the study.

The rationale for using both quantitative and qualitative data was that once a general survey of attitudes, knowledge, and preparation was conducted, the specific religion of Islam, which has political, economic, and cultural applications within today‘s current events, can be focused upon and explored to determine how attitudes, knowledge, and preparation affect a teacher‘s beliefs about a specific "other" religion.

Problem Statement

The underlying problem in this research study focuses upon teachers‘ knowledge, their attitudes, and their preparation for dealing with religion in their schools' curricula as well as dealing with religious diversity, as represented in their schools' student bodies. There are three major reasons why religion is seen as a controversial issue by some teachers, which often leads them to avoid the subject altogether. First, teachers are uncertain regarding the legality of teaching about religion; second, some teachers feel that religion is a private issue that shouldn‘t be discussed in public school; and third, many teachers feel ill prepared to teach about religion, a subject many haven‘t been specially trained in (Gaustad, 1992).

Nevertheless, national and educational leaders have agreed that religion is an important part of human life, that teachers ought to teach about religion as required within their curricula, that learning about religion is a vital aspect of being educated, and that teaching about religion is legal and permitted in schools through established curricula (Harris-Ewing, 1999; Trotter, 2007). Additionally, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the increasing population of Muslims in America along with continuing political conflicts in other predominately Muslim countries have generated frequent national discussions and debates concerning the religious beliefs of Islam and its compatibility or incompatibility with the Western world (Moore, 2006). Undoubtedly, teachers will be at the forefront of such discussions

when these issues are raised in classrooms, making this topic both timely and significant. The study will be guided by the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. What do in-service teachers believe about teaching about religion in public schools?
2 What do in-service teachers know about teaching about religion in public schools?
3. What do in-service teachers believe about teaching about Islam in public schools?
4. What do in-service teachers know about teaching about Islam in public schools?

The preceding research questions were designed to coincide with the purpose of the study, which was to examine teachers‘ attitudes, knowledge and preparation. They eventually formed the method and design of the study (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007).

Significance of the Research

This mixed methods study may contribute to improved training of in-service teachers. It focuses on teachers' prevailing attitudes regarding teaching about religion as well as religiously diverse students. A significant benefit of this study is that it may clarify some uncertainties many in-service teachers face when they have to deal with the instruction of religion in the classroom.

This research seeks to add to the current literature that discusses the significance of religious instruction in the nation‘s schools, the reasons that teachers should teach about religious doctrine, and the ways that teachers address religious diversity in the classroom. This study will also add to current research as it is conducted in a post-September 11 era in which an increasing amount of information as well as misinformation about Muslims and Islam is prevalent.

The reason for the focus on Islam and Muslims are twofold. First, as mentioned earlier, since the September 11 attacks, Muslims and the religion of Islam has been a prevalent source of media inquiry. Unfortunately, much of what has been written about Muslims and Islam, particularly from the media, is based on untruths. It is from this misinformation that individuals develop biases against others. If someone, especially a teacher, holds a bias against someone based upon religion, it may have an adverse effect upon students‘ successful learning.

There have been some attempts to correct the propaganda and assist teachers with the needed factual information for their public school students. One program at Central Connecticut State University called the Teachers' Institute on Middle Eastern Studies was developed to assist local teachers with the numerous questions students had about Muslims and the events surrounding September 11 (Delisio, 2002). Another program which was recently temporarily discontinued was a program at Harvard University‘s Divinity School. The Program in Religious Studies and Education was designed as a teacher training program where students graduated with a master‘s in religious studies,

certification in a specialized secondary level subject, and additional proficiency to teach about the academic study of religion (Harvard University, 2006).

Second, Muslims are a significant portion of the American and worldwide population. Based on a recent publication by the Pew Research Center (2009), approximately 1 in 4 individuals in the world is Muslim. Muslims are estimated to make up about 1.57 billion people. An accurate and precise estimate of how many American Muslims there are in the United States is unavailable due to the fact that the United States Census Bureau does not collect religious data on individuals. There are some close estimates, however.

The most reliable and preferred estimate is the one by the Pew Research Center (2007) that there are approximately 2.4 million Muslim Americans living in the United States. It was in this well known study that the Pew Research Center collect data utilizing the first random sample of Muslim Americans on a nationwide scale. The Center interviewed a total of 55,000 people. Ultimately a sample of 1050 Muslim Americans living in America was used. Many interviews were conducted in the Arabic, English, Farsi, and Urdu languages.

The results of the Pew Research Center (2007) study indicated that Muslim Americans are very ethnically diverse. Foreign born or immigrant Muslims make up a total of 65% of the total American Muslim population while native born Muslims make up 35%. Immigrant Muslims are generally Arab (24%), followed by South Asians (10%), followed by Pakistani Muslims (8%), Iranian Muslims (8%), European Muslims (5%), African Muslims (4%), and others (6%). American born Muslims make up approximately 35% of the total Muslim

American population with the African American population comprising 20% of that figure.

Generally, the Pew Research Center (2007) study found that Muslim Americans have a positive view of American society and state that their communities are excellent places to live. The survey also found that 71% of Muslim Americans believe that hard work can lead to material success and that, overall, Muslim Americans are well assimilated into American society. Regarding financial status, the survey found that only 2% of American Muslims were considered low-income, compared to 12% to 17% low-income levels of the general public. The survey also found that Muslim Americans repudiate Islamic extremism more so than Muslims in European countries but that 53% of Muslim Americans felt that it has become harder to be a Muslim in America since the attacks of September 11.

On the other hand, Islam appears to be a widely misunderstood religion by a good number of Americans. In another Pew Research Center (2004) study, it was reported that some 4 in 10 Americans had an unfavorable view of Islam and that 46% of Americans believed that Islam encourages violence more so than other religions. In the Association of Religion Data Archives (2003), an ABC News Poll reported that 43% of Americans indicated that Islam doesn‘t teach respect for other people‘s religious beliefs. However, Americans who believed that they understand Islam were more likely to view the religion positively.

A study by Nisbet and Shanahan (2004) found that 44% of Americans thought that some limitations of civil liberties should be implemented for Muslim

Americans. For example, 26% of Americans felt that masjids should be monitored by law enforcement and 29% of Americans felt that Muslims‘ volunteer and civic organizations should be monitored by law enforcement. Among Americans who consider themselves to be highly religious, 65% of them said that they believe Islam encourages violence more so than other religions whereas 42% of not highly religious Americans said that they believe Islam encourages violence more so than other religions.

Overall, there exists a wide spectrum of inconsistent beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about Islam and Muslims by the general American population. It was my goal to see if these beliefs transcend into the field of education. Therefore, the following discussion in Chapter 2 of this research study will provide an overview of the current literature which directly addresses teaching about religion in the field of K-12 public education. An analysis of the relevant legal issues as well as current and past practices of select public schools is included in the following discussion.

Chapter Two:

Review of Literature

The subject of religion in public school is very controversial and extensive. The subject includes, but is not limited to, the discussion of students‘ religious expression, prayer in school, students‘ religious accommodations, and the right of the student to distribute religious literature, as well as the rights of students to form religious clubs. Creationism and the religious rejection of evolution are also viscously contested issues.

The objective of this study was to refine the general discussion of religion and religious liberties in public schools to the narrow subject of the way that teaching about religion is approached within our nation‘s public schools. Furthermore, given the world‘s conflict with members of the Islamic faith, the study about Islam for students who require a more global outlook is a necessary if not fundamental subject of inquiry. The way that – and whether – religion is taught in school, particularly Islam, is the focus of this paper.

A poignant statement attesting to the importance of teaching about Islam is declared by the founder of the First Amendment Center, John Siegenthaler:

> …..since the tragedy that befell the nation that violent Tuesday morning (9-11)….. it no longer is a question of whether schools *should* teach children about Islam. They *must* teach them—and about other religions as well. It is a responsibility, a duty. In the days following the terrorist-inspired

> tragedies, students everywhere came to school with questions about what they had seen and heard and read in the news media. How could a U.S. public school teacher respond to those questions without mentioning religion? It is sad but certain that many teachers were forced to deal with those questions from a background of ignorance. Some, no doubt, found themselves answering students‘ questions by relying mostly on what they had learned from the media. (Haynes & Thomas, 2001, p. viii)

Very significant issues addressed in this research include a discussion of the two conceptual frameworks which guided the focus of this study. Additionally, a discussion of the theoretical and legal literature relating to this topic provided a foundation for greater understanding of key background information leading to today‘s assumptions and teachers‘ practices. Also, a discussion of similar previously conducted empirical research is presented. Although very limited in scope, the scarcity of previous research in this subject highlights the importance of this subject as an area for educational research.

Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual frameworks guiding this investigation are twofold. The first framework is found in the extensive literature in the guide to religion and public education called *Finding Common Ground*, written by Haynes and Thomas (2001). Published by the First Amendment Center, this document includes a discussion of, along with many other issues, the importance of teaching about religion and the ways that our educational institutions can effectively and

constitutionally accomplish the task. The second framework is based on the concepts found in multicultural education, where learners must develop in knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes in order to fully understand the intrinsic worth of other cultures. A discussion of *Finding Common Ground* will precede the multicultural discussion conceptual framework.

The authors of *Finding Common Ground* stressed that it is fundamental to distinguish between teaching about religion in school and teaching religion in school (Haynes & Thomas, 2001). Teaching about religion is an academic endeavor, not a devotional practice. When learning about religion, students are made aware of certain religious practices and beliefs but are not encouraged to accept those practices and beliefs. In exposing students to various views of religion, schools are required not to impose any particular beliefs on those students. Finally, in educating students about religion, teachers may not promote or denigrate any other religion during the education process (Haynes & Thomas).

Haynes and Thomas (2001) referred to a model which is extremely relevant to the research at hand. The model explains that the current philosophy of schools and their outlook on religious instruction operate at two extremes. One extreme represents the —sacred public school" in which schools advocate the preference of one religion, usually Christianity, and in which the assumption is that all students are Christian. The other extreme represents the —naked public school" in which there is absolutely no mention of religion due to the fear of violating the establishment clause of the First Amendment. This religion-free type of school is unjust as is the sacred public school. The ideal middle, or common

ground, is the —civil public school," in which there is a consensus that religious instruction is neither inhibited or inculcated, but includes the study *about* religion as an academic form of education which, when presented with fairness and respect, protects the rights of all students of diverse faiths (Haynes & Thomas).

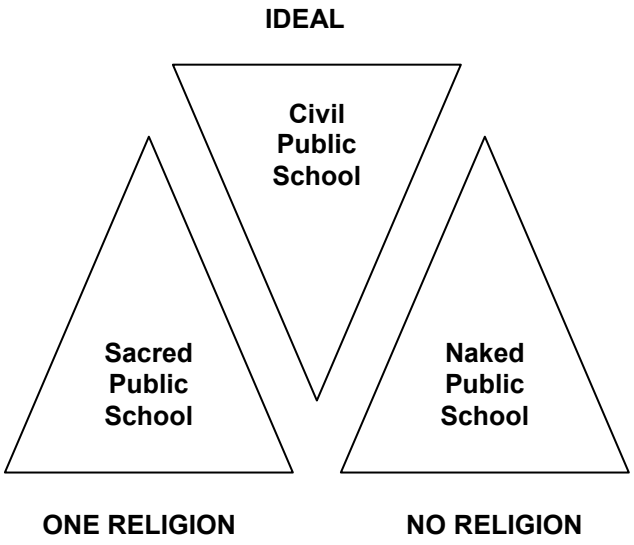

Figure 1. The civil public school model from a discussion in *Finding Common Ground,* by Haynes & Thomas (2001).

The model in Figure 1 illustrates the discussion by the authors Haynes and Thomas (2001) as they distinguish between the various models of religious education used by public schools in American society.

Alternatively, teaching religion, as opposed to teaching *about* religion, is a form of advocacy that must be avoided as public schools might be held liable for violating the constitutional mandate requiring the separation of church and state. Teachers' attempts at indoctrination or proselytizing about religion are

inappropriate and violate the neutrality required for secular educational institutions.

The second framework applicable to this research study is found in the literature of educational multiculturalism. Religious diversity is an aspect of student multiculturalism. As American schools become increasingly populated with various diverse groups of students, educational institutions should seek ways to integrate and assimilate those students into the classroom, the curriculum, and, thereafter, into larger society. Pai and Adler (2001) defined multicultural education as —a process by which individuals can develop a critical understanding of their own cultures and those of others, thus becoming more effective decision makers" (p. 247). Core facets of multiculturalism as an ideology include the acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity, respect for universal human rights and dignity, a responsibility to the world community, and a genuine reverence for the earth and the human habitat.

Prothero, a leading advocate of teaching about religion and the author of the bestselling book *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn't* (2007b), wrote a compelling case for teaching about religion in our nation's secondary and college level schools. In his work as a religious studies professor, he encountered numerous —religiously illiterate" students. In order for students to be truly educated, he argued, they must have basic knowledge of the world's major religions. Without it, the country faces a major civic problem. Prothero further argued that religious literacy is necessary for a nation of effective and educated citizens (p.9).

However, Prothero (2007b) made a serious oversight when he associated, and later abandoned the ideology of multiculturalism as a non-issue when substantiating a claim for teaching about religion. Multiculturalism, he asserted, is a form of character education which can confuse the acquisition of knowledge about religions (p. 142). Unfortunately, simply acquiring the knowledge about the major world‘s religions is not enough. Learners also have to develop the skills and attitudes it takes to understand other‘s perspectives and then take action based on that understanding. Ultimately, that action is based upon civic ideals and, ideally, that action results in the greater good for all of society (Pai & Adler, 2001, p. 111).

Similarly, Pai and Adler (2001) discussed four approaches and aims to multicultural education. The first aim of multicultural education is to have the appropriate attitude of appreciation for cultural diversity overall. The second aim is to promote the belief of intrinsic worth of each individual as well as society at large. The third aim is to develop multicultural competencies which allow one to interact effectively with various cultures, and the final aim is to facilitate conditions of educational equity where students can learn in free and open environments.

Bennett (2003) argued that the primary goal of public education is to foster the intellectual, societal, and personal development of all students to their highest potential. He reasoned that there were the four interactive dimensions of multicultural education: equity pedagogy, curriculum reform, multicultural competence, and teaching towards social justice. Equity pedagogy refers to the

changes needed in the entire school culture such as student discipline, student grouping, teacher expectations, and teaching strategies. Curriculum reform refers to the expansion of the existing mono-cultural course content to include multi-ethnic and global perspectives. Multicultural competence refers to the ability of an individual who has experienced intercultural phenomena to interact successfully with other cultures. Lastly, teaching towards social justice is the teacher‘s practice of bringing to light stereotypes, myths, and other untruths while stressing basic human values shared by all.

Bennett (2003) and Pai and Adler (2001) both indicated that multicultural education has its roots in America‘s democratic pluralistic society. Members of a culturally pluralistic society, in its ideal form, respect the inalienable rights of all citizens. In a pluralistic society, cultural differences are encouraged and respected because cultural differences are not perceived to be cultural deficits. Unfortunately, Americans are, at this writing, far from the ideal in the ways that we deal with cultural differences in education. North American history is laden with examples of gross intolerance for ethnic and racial minorities in American education; and, as religious diversity becomes a more realistic representation of Western society, educators have often treated students as members of the one major religion, Christianity, or treated students as if they have no religious leanings at all, which becomes a safety-zone for most educators (Haynes & Thomas, 2001; Hunter & Guinness, 1990).

Banks (1988) expanded upon the concept of multicultural education when he developed four progressive stages of curriculum reform. The four stages are

described as strategies or approaches for teachers to use when attempting to integrate multicultural content and/or alternate world views into the curriculum. The approaches are the contributions approach, the additive approach, the transformation approach, and the social action approach. The first two approaches, contributions and additive, are considered to be ineffective as they are only additions to the curriculum and don‘t allow for essential critical thinking necessary to transform learning. Banks (1988) indicated that these approaches were the foremost types used in public schools today. The later approaches, transformation and social action, are considered to be the most effective. Educators using these strategies have infused various perspectives and content from multiple groups into the curriculum so to promote understanding of significant events.

Overall, it is imperative that educators understand the significance of the religious diversity of students, parents, and other community members who practice religions different from their own. Undoubtedly religion is a major influence on one‘s day-to-day activities, as well as being an influence on how people perceive, think, and behave. Usually one‘s religion, a product of the home environment, will take the place of all other organizational micro-cultures (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006). Because of the controversial and complex nature of the subject, especially with respect to educational issues, religion can be quite problematic for educators. The following discussion will attempt to address the primary implications for educators.

Theoretical Literature

The most significant and applicable literature surrounding the aspect of teaching about religion is primarily evidenced in the wording of the First Amendment. Significant court cases which apply to the present research study will also be discussed.

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof… *(The Constitution of the United States, Article 1, Section 8, Clause 5)*

These two declarations represent the two clauses of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. The second clause, which prohibits the enactment of laws restricting the free exercise of religion, is the simplest and least applicable to the present research study. It refers to the view that Congress cannot restrict religious liberty as a matter of law and that individuals have the right to freely exercise their own religion. However, should a law already exist that restricts a particular act or event, the interests of the state could impair a free exercise of religion claim. For example, in the case of *Employment Division v. Smith* (1990), the Federal courts held that members of the Native American Church could not legally use the illegal drug peyote in religious services. Even though the drug had been used for centuries, because it was a pre-established law, the courts found that the law had an incidental effect upon the religious group and that there was no infringement on free exercise of religion (Harrison & Gilbert, 1996).

Ultimately, the freedom to believe in one's religion is absolute but the ability to exercise and act on those beliefs is not. Laws which single out a specific religion do violate the First Amendment. But, as indicated in the case involving the Native American Church, some laws may have an "accidental" or "unintentional" consequence of interfering with a religious practice. Some examples of cases where free exercise of religion is challenged include polygamy, compulsory school laws, ceremonial sacrifices, and government funds to parochial schools. In those instances of conflict, legal challenges often arise and courts must seek an equitable balance between those of the individual and those of the state (First Amendment Center, 2009).

The first clause, that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" (U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl. 5.), means that the government cannot promote any religion and /or prefer one religion over another. It also means that the United States government cannot, for example, establish a church. According to Justice Hugo Black, in language from *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), the United States government cannot pass laws aiding one religion, nor aiding all religions, nor show a preference for one religion over another. Furthermore, Black stated that the government cannot force or influence people to go or not go to church nor to believe or disbelieve in any religion. Neither can the government levy taxes to support religious organizations. In the same case, Black stated that the government needs to remain "neutral between religion and non-religion." This neutrality suggests a balance in relations because

if the government cannot promote religion, it cannot be hostile to religion either (Nord, 1995).

Justice Black further referred to the controversial metaphor used by Thomas Jefferson, which would later be used to define the establishment clause of religious liberty. He stated that in using the wording of Thomas Jefferson, the clause against establishing religion by use of law had the intention of erecting —a wall of separation between church and state." Moreover, it was the *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) case that ultimately stated that the First Amendment clearly required separation, that the Fourteenth Amendment made it applicable to states, and that a case involving subsidized school busing in New Jersey for both private and public schools didn't violate the Constitution (Hamburger, 2002).

Undoubtedly, Thomas Jefferson's words —wall of separation" have been interpreted to mean a very strict division between church and state, where one shouldn't intersect with the other. However, many analysts have asserted that this very prominent statement means something other than had been previously believed. The statement originated from an extract of a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to a group called the Danbury Baptist Association. In response to a congratulatory letter from the Association affirming Jefferson's presidential win, the president sought to implicitly respond to his opponent's claims that he was an atheist. In a responding letter he proclaimed that he refrained from celebratory practices such as religious fasts and thanksgiving celebrations as they were inherently —British" in nature and that they were offensive to republicanism. In mentioning past British practices, Jefferson was referring to the very reasons

Puritans fled their original homeland, which was due to unjust religious persecution and centralized authority. Overall, it is unclear if Jefferson intended for this document to design the national framework for religious liberties, but ultimately it would have that very effect (Hamburger, 2000).

Undoubtedly, the establishment clause protects religious liberties. It guarantees strong, diverse religious communities as well as a strong democracy. Historically, early settlers migrated to America in search of a non-oppressive government which would not force them to pay taxes on government run churches. When remnants of past old-world practices began to surface in the new America, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison led the fight against the tax as well as the old ideology of state run churches (Stone, Seidman, Sunstein, Tushnet, & Karlan, 2003).

In determining if a violation involving establishment of religion has been identified, the courts usually use several tests to assist in their interpretation. One test often used is the three-pronged Lemon test. Taken from the 1971 case *Lemon v. Kurtzman,* the Supreme Court denied funding a state program which provided aid to parochial elementary and secondary schools. The three parts of the Lemon test include government indoctrination, whether recipients of any government benefits were identified by religion, and/or if there was an excessive entanglement between government and religion (First Amendment Center, 2009).

An additional approach to the religion clauses is that of strict neutrality. Using this approach, the government treats religious groups equal to other

groups in the same situations. States use secular criteria as substantiation for their actions towards groups. This approach may permit funds to religious groups participating in secular activities, such as to students attending religious schools (Stone et, al., 2003).

Still another approach is the coercion test or principle. Using this test, there isn‘t a government violation of the establishment clause unless the government provides funds to organizations in such a way as to support or establish a church or there is coercion of individuals to participate in religion which is against their will. An example of coercion may be a school led religious invocation at a graduation ceremony (First Amendment Center, 2009).

The last but not final approach is the endorsement test. In this test, the question is whether a government act can be interpreted to indicate an endorsement of religion. A significant criterion of the endorsement test is the message to non-members of the community. If they are made to feel like outsiders or that they somehow are non-members, and, conversely, if the members are made to feel like insiders, an endorsement issue is evident. This test is often simultaneously used with the Lemon test (First Amendment Center, 2009).

The most significant case relevant to this research study regarding teaching about religion and the implications it has on schools is found in the case *Abington Township School District v. Schemp* (1963). This precedent-setting case led to a clearer understanding of ways that religion should be presented in schools. This case involved public school students who were required to begin

each day with devotional Bible readings. The *Schemp* case discontinued that practice.

Mr. Schempp, a parent from Pennsylvania, contested the fact that the state required organized Bible readings in which his children were required to participate at the beginning of school each day. The United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of Schempp by stating that the school‘s practices were unconstitutional. Justice Clark‘s opinion for the Court stated that constitutionality in religious instruction rested upon a primary purpose and primary impact of secularism. According to the opinion of Justice Clark in *Abington School District v. Schempp*, decided in 1963 by the United States Supreme Court, when religion is —presented objectively as part of a secular program of education," it does not conflict with the principles of the First Amendment (Nord, 1995, p.117). Learning about religion is a constitutional freedom and, in effect, a religious liberty which is deserving of consideration. To operate at either extreme, where at one extreme there is only one religious practice and policy or, at the other extreme, where religion is strictly obliterated from curriculum, is inefficient in today‘s society and is, in effect, unconstitutional (Nord & Haynes, 1998).

After *Schemp*, the criterion would be that religion must be presented as part of a secular program and not a devotional program. Justice Clark declared the formula for public education where religion is concerned:

> It might well be said that one‘s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship with civilization. The Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic

> qualities. The Court has prohibited the *practice* of religion in public education; it has not prohibited the *study* of religion, (*Abington Township School District v. Schemp,* 1963).

The *Schemp* case would ultimately be the foundation for the three pronged Lemon Test, named after the *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) case. This test described the criteria for adjudicating cases involving Establishment Clauses. The three elements are that, first, there must be a secular purpose; second, the act neither advances nor inhibits religion; and third, there must not be an ”excessive government entanglement with religion.”

It goes without saying that many good-intentioned teachers have advocated their own personal religious views in America‘s classrooms, all in the interest of educating students. Even entire districts are guilty of the violation, as the following example will show.

The local school board in Lee County, Florida, adopted a curriculum for area high schools which was intended to teach the courses —Bible History: Old Testament” and —Bible History: New Testament” (Schaeffer & Mincberg, 2000). After a year of controversy and legal wrangling initiated by the American Civil Liberties Union, the federal Supreme Court found several violations by school educators in the case of *Gibson v. Lee County School Board* (1998). The court found that the courses were illegally framed and taught from a Christian perspective, that the Bible was used as a history textbook, that students were assumed to be Christian and the Bible was taught accordingly, that the Bible was used to promote the Christian faith‘s religious values and lessons, and that the

district‘s Sunday schools and other religious training exercises were used to indoctrinate students in Bible content (Schaeffer & Mincberg, 2000). Needless to say, Lee County was sued and forced to cease instruction of the New Testament course; and thereafter, the courts instituted a very strict monitoring process, as well as in-service teacher training for the Old Testament course.

Approximately 50 advocacy groups and individuals met in Washington, D.C. at the First Amendment Center in March 2007 to discuss religious issues in the nation‘s schools. In addressing the ways that schools can present religious instruction to students, Steven Shapiro, the national legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union, explained that he hoped that the meeting‘s discussions would clarify differences between students‘ —expression of religious speech and government endorsement of religion” (Trotter, 2007, p. 5). On a similar note, Robert Seiple, President of the Council for America‘s First Freedom, stated that —advocacy doesn‘t create respect - teaching the controversy does,” in reference to the benefits of having students debate religious issues in the classroom (Trotter, p. 5).

Ideally, religion can and should be taught in America‘s secondary school social studies classes. However, social studies courses need not be the only exposure students have to world religions. Religion can be successfully introduced across the entire curriculum, beginning with elementary school students. Students at this level can be exposed to the major issues in religion such as studying religious holidays, role playing, applicable age-appropriate literature, and through the use of guest speakers. As students progress through

the secondary levels, religion can be introduced in classes such as history, civics and economics, literature and the arts, and the sciences. Only then will educators be regarded as taking religion to be a serious matter (Nord & Haynes, 1998).

Mandatory required courses such as world history and geography both have direct applications for the study of world religions. Studying courses such as the latter two without considering elements of religion is like studying a boat‘s sail and rigging, without considering the hidden parts underneath the boat, such as the keel and ballast, which is the true cause of the boat‘s movement. All parts, the hidden and unhidden, are extremely important (Super & Turley, 2006).

The National Council for the Social Studies, the largest social studies advocacy organization founded in 1921, has stated that the study of religion is fundamental to a well-rounded education in the social sciences.

> Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is absolutely necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity. Knowledge of religious differences and the role of religion in the contemporary world can help promote understanding and alleviate prejudice. Since the purpose of the social studies is to provide students with a knowledge of the world that has been, the world that is, and the world of the future, studying about religions should be an essential part of the social studies curriculum. Study about religions may be dealt with in special courses and units or wherever and whenever knowledge of the religious dimension of human history and culture is needed for a balanced

and comprehensive understanding. (National Council for the Social Studies, 1998, para. 4).

The purpose of this research was to examine the attitudes, knowledge and preparation of teachers that will enable them to effectively address the need for students to acquire a global education in an increasingly diverse society. As religious diversity in the United States continues to grow, it will be increasingly important that public schools be places in which religious liberty is practiced and where students learn as much as possible about one another (Nord & Haynes, 1998, p.28). Unfortunately, most citizens are oriented toward one faith – their own – or possibly two, including their own and the one they have chosen to reject or oppose. However, those who try to learn more about various religions are often discouraged due to the diverse and complex nature of the subject (Marty, 2000, p. 3). Indeed, religion is an important topic that needs to be taught properly and objectively to our students; however, there are uncertainties about the appropriate way to address the problem.

According to Nord and Haynes (1998), there are four basic reasons that religion should be taught about in public schools. The first is that religion has a significant influence on history and culture; the second is that students should understand the relevance religion has in their day-to-day lives; the third is that religion is relevant to most other subjects in the curriculum; and the fourth is that teaching about religion exposes students to a diverse set of religions apart from their own.

Another relevant concern is due to increased technological advances. Americans are increasingly more global in communications and international dealings with other cultures. It is certainly advantageous to be able to effectively interact with others from various backgrounds and cultures. Knowledge of this type is important if one has a need to know underlying reasons for peoples‘ actions and motivations. There exists a pressing need to incorporate global education into American schools. The primary reason global education needs be taken seriously is because a democratic system of government greatly depends on an informed citizenry's ability to make sound decisions. Oftentimes, these decisions have domestic and international implications. If the United States is to maintain its world leadership status, the citizens of this country need to be informed in order to participate in those international matters which affect, either directly or indirectly, human existence on this planet (Smith & Czarra, 2003). Finally, religion is a significant aspect of history in all cultures and may help to explain political, literary, scientific, historic past, and current cultural events.

The lack of appropriate teacher training is one major reason that schools have not taken the teaching of religions seriously. Authors Frietas and Rotherham (2004) explained that teachers are often not prepared in ways to address religion in education and are unable to apply practical applications to existing social studies curricula. They further noted that such training should include methodological approaches and that the attitude toward teaching religion should focus on its being an intellectual subject as opposed to its being an evangelical exchange of emotions. The authors acknowledged members of the

general public who may oppose such instruction and looked to convince members of the public that teaching about religion is not synonymous with teaching religion.

Convincing parents and community members of the importance of teaching about religions is effective communication for all schools. Moreover, most social studies curricula address teaching about religion, particularly within the contexts of history and geography. However, the actual method of teaching this subject is rarely ever mentioned in teacher preparatory programs. This suggests that the policy is in place, but the actual training is not. For the most part, teachers have a professional and ethical obligation to try to learn as much as possible regarding teaching about religion. There should be an element of empathy when teachers undertake the subject, whether they agree with it or not (Ackerman, 2000).

The purpose for this research was also eloquently stated by Stephen Prothero, the author of the recent best-seller *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know-and Doesn't* (2007b). In a call for "empowered citizenship," Prothero stated in *USA Today* that,

> More and more of our national and international questions are religiously inflected. If you want to be involved, you need to know what they're saying. We're doomed if we don't understand what motivates the beliefs and behaviors of the rest of the world. We can't outsource this to demagogues, pundits and preachers with a political agenda. (Grossman, 2007, p. 2D)

In referring to international and political concerns, Prothero also cited examples of religious ignorance regarding the swearing in of a Muslim member of Congress and a widely circulated false Internet claim that the war in Iraq was predicted in the Quran. He stated that both these occurrences revealed wide-spread misunderstanding and ignorance of the religion of Islam (Grossman, 2007).

Another scholar who addressed teaching about Islam in public schools is James Moore (2006). A social studies pre-service professor, Moore stated that teachers need to teach about Islam because a student‘s understanding of Islam is interdependent to understanding the wider scope of world history, can alleviate the increasing amount of oppression and discrimination against Muslims, and can focus on the diverse nature of Muslims worldwide and in the United States. Moore suggested that teachers emphasize to their students the significant contributions Muslims made to civilization. This instructional method is best for increasing knowledge and tolerance and minimizing prejudice. Moore reasoned that teachers should utilize primary sources and reputable guest speakers in order to teach the Islamic world view, as opposed to relying solely on outside, non-Islamic interpretations. Further, teachers need to be sensitive to the controversy of the topic and present all issues and differing perspectives fairly (Moore, p. 282).

An interesting argument was presented by Joshi (2006) in the article titled, ―The Radicalization of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism in the United States.” The author stated that because race has become a proxy for religion, those who look

different by way of skin color, name, dress, or additional distinguishing attributes become the radicalized ”other” entity. Thereafter, the radicalization process begins with identifying a specific characteristic, either real or imagined, with a particular religion. As the assumptions become widely shared among members of the dominant society, they become more than just the other, they become the other associated with a foreign enemy. Since the oil embargo of the 1970‘s and the events of September 11, 2001, two significant socio-historic events, Islam and its followers have been depicted as evil (Joshi, p. 218).

In light of world events such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the possible impending war with Iran, combined with societal struggles such as terrorism, homeland security, and the Patriot Act, teaching and learning about Islam has reached a timely and current focus. Since the unfortunate events of September 11, 2001, the knowledge and information disseminated about the Islamic religion has been restricted to a narrow framework of violence and oppression, with media influences dominating the educational domain. It is within this construct that this research was conducted.

Empirical Literature

It should be noted that the presence of empirical literature for in-service teachers regarding the Islamic religion was unavailable. There are two informal studies referred to in this section, Mastrilli and Sardo-Brown (2002) and Hoot, Szeci, and Moosa (2003), which address Islam and teachers‘ knowledge. An

analysis of those two studies will precede a discussion of the overall American population‘s knowledge of Islam and Muslims.

The study conducted on 218 pre-service teachers by Mastrilli and Sardo-Brown (2002) titled ―Pre-service Teachers Knowledge about Islam: A Snapshot Post September 11, 2001,” yielded some interesting results. Generally, the results of the 20 question, short-answer type survey indicated that pre-service teachers lacked a rudimentary knowledge of Islam, that they were unaware of the global nature of the religion, and that they were unable to explain how to integrate diversity into teaching. Some respondents did answer very basic questions correctly. A total of 82% of the respondents knew that the adherents to Islam were called Muslims, 76% of the respondents knew that Muslims call God Allah, and 51% knew that the Quran was the Muslim holy book. However, only 36% of the respondents knew that the greatest number of Muslims lived on the Asian continent, 34% knew the founder of Islam was Muhammad, and 32% knew that Ramadan was the month that Muslims fast. Less than 5% knew about the two major Islamic sects, the Sunnis and the Shiites. Additionally, less than 5% could correctly explain the meaning of Islam (submission) or indicate the five major religious duties of Islam. Further, basic knowledge about geography and population trends of Muslims and the Islamic religion was lacking.

The answers to some of the open-ended questions also resulted in various responses. Approximately one half left unanswered the question about how they thought Islam influenced the world, and one fourth left unanswered how they would integrate the experiences of an Islamic student in the classroom. The

survey concluded with suggestions for instructional designers to first establish pre-service teachers‘ existing schemata and thereafter remedy incorrect schemata with instructional strategies such as using guest speakers, research projects, readings, and some field experiences (Mastrilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002).

A very informal study (Hoot et al., 2003) queried some Muslim leaders, parents, and educators in New York and asked them what they believed the teachers of Muslim students should know about Islam. Answers included but were not limited to dietary practices, fasting, clothing requirements, teacher interventions when children are teased, providing a safe place to pray when requested, knowledge of gender and privacy issues, knowledge of controversial curriculum issues, and school-wide holiday celebrations were among the answers. The authors summarized the article by recommending that teachers become more responsive to the families of their Muslim students by becoming more aware of parental concerns. These sensitivities were thought to build positive relationships among families and communities.

One of the very few studies of a school which implemented an instructional program in world religion concerned a high school in Modesto, California. Johansen High School required all ninth grade students to enroll in a world religions course for which the purpose was that students would learn about and, as a result, respect religious freedoms. Increased student tolerance was evident in the findings of an empirical study conducted at the school following student participation in the class. Designed as a religious instruction program, the courses were initiated through the district‘s safe schools policy with notable

results. The pre-test scores of students enrolled in the World Religions and First Amendment course averaged 37% out of 100% while post-test scores increased to an average of 66% out of a total 100%. Further, —more students affirmed the importance of learning more about world religions and particularly learning more about Islam after taking the course" (Lester & Roberts, 2006, p. 16). Suggestions for program improvement included careful teacher monitoring and training.

The following are empirical studies that revealed subjective views of Muslims and Islam by the general American population, exemplifying the general lack of knowledge about the very basic tenets of the religion and adherents to the religion. The first study —Americans Struggle with Religion's Role at Home and Abroad," was published by the Pew Research Center (2002). The Pew Research Center refers to itself as a Washington, D.C., based —fact tank" which, in a non-partisan manner, presents trends, issues, and attitudes that reflect and shape America and the world through the use of public opinion polls, research, news analysis, and the holding of public forums and briefings. The Pew study reported that the American public held a generally favorable view of Muslim Americans at a 54% rating; however that rating declined to 38% favorability when respondents were asked about the Islamic religion. Some respondents might have had difficulty distinguishing between individual Muslims and the Islamic religion overall. Or respondents may have preferred to group Muslims and Islam together without distinguishing between the two. Additional key information relevant to this present study indicated that younger Americans aged 30 and under, tended to have more favorable views of Islam and Muslims than older Americans. Also,

there was a 57% majority opinion that Islam had no commonalities with major American religions such as Catholicism, Evangelicalism, and Protestantism. The investigation of Americans‘ knowledge of Islam and Muslims yielded some interesting results. Approximately two thirds of participating Americans stated that they knew nothing or very little about the practices of Islam, with only 5% stating that they knew a lot about Islam.

Another study was titled “MSRG Special Report: Restrictions on Civil Liberties, Views of Islam & Muslim Americans.” This research report was authored by Nisbet and Shanahan (2004) and published by Cornell University‘s Department of Communications, Media & Society Research Group. Cornell‘s Communications Department has an extensive program of communication theory and research, and it focuses on three main areas of study: technology, media, and science. The Group conducted a media-based study to determine ways that traditional and converging information networks affect people‘s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The survey instrument focused on the public‘s reactions to the War on Terror, civil liberties restrictions, foreign policy, and the religion of Islam.

An unexpected conclusion in the MSRG Report found that nearly half (44%) of all respondents favored the curtailing of Muslim Americans‘ civil liberties. Furthermore, as the respondents‘ levels of fear and levels of religiosity increased, so did the tendency to believe that civil liberties should be curtailed. Along with the public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans, the public‘s perceptions of Muslims were also reported. Approximately 47% of the survey

participants believed that Islam is more prone to encourage violence among its followers compared to other religions (Nisbet & Shanahan, 2004).

In another study conducted by a 2003 ABC News poll, a random national sample of 1,004 Americans was asked to give opinions on a number of various issues related to Islam, the Middle East, terrorism, and the war in Iraq (Association of Religion Data Archives, 2003). When participants were asked their opinion of Islam, 40.5% of respondents claimed a favorable opinion. However, about 38% reported an unfavorable opinion of Islam. Almost two thirds of Americans stated that they didn‘t have a —good basic understanding" of Islam. Also, people who claimed that they did understand Islam were much more likely to view it positively. Among Americans who claimed that they did understand the religion, 59% referred to it as peaceful, and 46% said that it teaches respect for the beliefs of others. By contrast, the two thirds who expressed basic unfamiliarity with the religion were 19% less likely to label it peaceful and half as likely to respond that Islam teaches respect for other beliefs.

Still another study conducted by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) organization in 2004 and 2005 resulted in similar findings. Generalized findings showed that one of four respondents believed that Islam was a religion of hatred and violence and that the overall knowledge and awareness of Islam was virtually unchanged since 2004, with 60% of respondents admitting they had little or no knowledge of Islam. The respondents also tended to have only slight knowledge of specific Islamic topics. Although almost 60% said that they knew the name of the Muslim holy book, only one third

of respondents were aware that Muslims worship the same God as Christians and Jews. Surprisingly, nearly 10% said Muslims worship a —moon god," a notion that most Muslims would find not only false but also offensive. Still another telling result was that almost one fifth of the respondents agreed that the civil liberties of Muslims should be restricted because of security reasons (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2006).

The findings of these empirical research studies reflected the overall attitude and perceptions of Muslims. Furthermore, the findings were consistent across studies, especially in those studies conducted after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. That event had a substantial and detrimental effect on the perceptions of Muslims, and it is within that context that this present research project will be conducted.

Current Policy

A significant concern for public schools is to practice very strict compliance with the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, —Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl. 5.). The meaning of the terms "no law" and "free exercise" illustrate the desire of the founders to make good on the promise of religious liberty while rejecting government promotion or endorsement of religion.

Regarding schools and the prominent authors who write on the subject of religion in schools, a Statement of Principles agreed upon by 24 major religious

and educational organizations sponsored by the Washington, D.C., First Amendment Center seeks to define religious liberty in public schools with the following statement:

> Public schools may not inculcate nor inhibit religion. They must be places where religion and religious conviction are treated with fairness and respect. Public schools uphold the First Amendment when they protect the religious liberty rights of students of all faiths or none. Schools demonstrate fairness when they ensure that the curriculum includes study about religion, where appropriate, as an important part of a complete education. (Haynes & Thomas, 2001, p. 6)

In 1998, the U.S. Secretary of Education updated a previously published set of guidelines so that districts could develop their own policies regarding religious expression. In reference to teaching about religion, the Secretary stated:

> Public schools may not provide religious instruction, but they may teach *about* religion, including the Bible or other scripture: the history of religion, comparative religion, the Bible (or other scripture)-as-literature, and the role of religion in the history of the United States and other countries all are permissible public school subjects. Similarly, it is permissible to consider religious influences on art, music, literature, and social studies. Although public schools may teach about religious holidays, including their religious aspects, and may celebrate the secular aspects of holidays, schools may not observe holidays as religious events or promote such observance by students. (Riley, 1998, par. 7)

The aforementioned statement made by Secretary Riley, addressed to all American educators, further encouraged individual school districts to develop their own policies and teacher workshops based upon the guidelines set forth.

In the state of Florida, public schools must follow the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (2008), the official curriculum guidelines for Florida public school teachers. The NGSSS curriculum guidelines were updated and adopted as official in December 2008. The earlier Florida state standards, called the Sunshine State Standards (1996), was the official guide until the revisions of 2008.

In order to substantiate my assertions that the Florida curriculum authorizes teachers to teach about religion, I conducted a series of word searches that included key words such as *religio, Islam,* and *Muslim*. The purpose of the keyword search was to illustrate several generalizations. First, that there are many actual references to religion in the Florida curriculum; second, that those references encompass more subject areas than just social studies; and third, that religion in Florida curriculum is discussed in various grade levels.

A keyword search of the NGSSS was first conducted on the word *religio*. This search resulted in finding the words *religion* and *religious*. Table 1 shows the keyword results for the search *religio*.

Table 1

NGSSS Key Word Search for the Word "Religio"

Benchmark Number	Subject Area	Grade Level
HE.8.C.2.1	Health	8
LA.5.3.2.	Language Arts	5
SC.912.N.2.2	Science	9-12
SS.2.A.2.5	Social Studies	2
SS.2.A.2.7	Social Studies	2
SS.2.A.2.3	Social Studies	2
SS.5.A.4.1	Social Studies	5
SS.5.A.4.2	Social Studies	5
SS.6.W.2.3	Social Studies	6
SS.6.W.2.4	Social Studies	6
SS.6.W.3.12	Social Studies	6
SS.6.W.3.17	Social Studies	6
SS.8.A.2.2	Social Studies	8
SS.8.A.4.18	Social Studies	8
SS.8.G.2.1	Social Studies	8
SS.912.C.2.7	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.G.2.1	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.H.2.3	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.1.6	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.2.2	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.2.20	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.1	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.17	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.4.8	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.5.4	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.8.10	Social Studies	9-12

Understandably, world history consumes the majority of social studies instruction, though there are indicators that language arts, science, and health classes include the discussion of religion. Overall, a total of 26 Florida standards were included in the first word search.

The second word search was conducted on the words *Islam/Muslim*. The word *Islam* showed the words *Islam* and *Islamic* while the search for the word *Muslim* yielded only one standard. A total of 12 references to the specific religion of Islam indicates that the religion is mandated for classroom instruction, particularly at the 9-12 grade level. Table 2 shows the result of that search.

Table 2

NGSSS Key Word Search for the Words —Islam/Muslim"

Benchmark Number	Subject Area	Grade Level
SS.912.W.1.2	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.2.5	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.2	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.3	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.4	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.5	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.6	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.7	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.10	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.3.14	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.4.2	Social Studies	9-12
SS.912.W.8.6	Social Studies	9-12

It should be noted that in the two previously discussed tables the benchmark numbers do not cross reference each other, meaning that each reference is only used once. It is likely that words such as *worship, belief*, and *culture* could elicit similar outcomes. Also, it is highly likely that word searches of other religious denominations may result in similar outcomes.

One very relevant study to this research was conducted by Susan Douglass (2000) titled ―Teaching About Religion in the National and State Social Studies Standards.‖ She carried out an extensive research project to determine the scope and nature of how religion is covered in America‘s national and state curriculum standards. Seven national curriculum documents as well as state curriculum standards for almost all of the 50 states were examined. Results found that overall, particularly regarding world history instruction, that teaching about religion was primarily superficial. Furthermore, significant study about historical developments, institutions, and influences were excluded, with the exception of Christianity. Although teaching about religion was clearly evident in the mandated national and state standards, the study found that the actual teaching about it was limited and that educators did not undertake it with much depth or seriousness.

In conclusion, religion, as a course of study combined with the overall instruction of world cultures and history, is a subject that is permitted to be taught to students in the classroom, though with caution and some guarded awareness of the liberties of other individuals. Unfortunately, schools are reluctant to partake

in the teaching of religions because of the number of reasons which have been previously mentioned.

Nevertheless, teaching about religion is a policy that is mandated by several organizations; the official state curriculum of the state of Florida, the federal mandate established by the precedent setting case *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), the position statement instituted by the National Council for the Social Studies (1998), of which the Florida Department of Education is a member, and the Department of Education‘s Secretary Richard Riley‘s (1998) official ~~“R~~eligious Expression in Public Schools.”

Overall, this research is focused on the present state of teachers‘ attitudes, beliefs and knowledge regarding teaching about religion. The focus is <u>not</u> on whether it is legal, permissible, or ethical to do so. The federal and state policy is in place for teachers to engage in such instruction. However, due to the controversial nature of the subject, it is likely that some teachers may avoid teaching about religion simply to evade the possibility of resistive forces such as parents, administrators, and community members. Many teachers feel that any discussion of religion is a private subject best left out of public classrooms. They also experience confusion regarding the legalities of teaching about religion, and they simply don‘t have the knowledge required to teach about various religions (Milson, 1997).

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the procedures and methods used in conducting the present research study. A description of the survey instrument as well as a description of the survey participants is included.

Chapter Three:

Methodology

The type of research conducted for this study is characterized as basic, descriptive research. This research sought to describe the attitudes, background knowledge, and beliefs of in-service teachers regarding teaching about religion in public education. A mixed methods research design was used to connect two data types, qualitative and quantitative, in order to report results from a single research study project.

Mixed method research is defined as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004 , p. 17). The current research study mixed methods at the data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation stages of the research. Regarding the priority of the methods approach and which was prominent, there was initially a shared and equal emphasis on the quantitative data along with the qualitative data. However, it is important to consider that this designation did change to more of a quantitative emphasis once the data were analyzed and interpreted. In all likelihood, a mixed study with equal emphasis at the initial onset of the research may develop into a study in which the qualitative data are greater or in which the quantitative data are prominent. Initial predictions regarding data type prominence are difficult to make. A more accurate

description of the dominance and priority of methods usually occurs after the collection and analysis of data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006).

The qualitative portion of this survey included open ended questions about teachers‘ attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs about students‘ religious diversity, with a focus on Islam and Muslim students. The quantitative portion of the survey assessed teachers‘ overall attitudes and knowledge about religion in public education. The survey instrument used a Likert-type scale to measure the attitude portion of the analysis and a multiple choice questionnaire to measure the information or knowledge portion of the analysis.

The quantitative and qualitative portions of the instrument were presented concurrently to the participants in the form of an online survey. Concurrent data collection is described as collecting the qualitative data and the quantitative data simultaneously. The data sets were independent of each other, and the data collection procedures were rigorous (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Participants in this study had the opportunity to complete the entire instrument at one time, in one sitting.

The advantages of using mixed methods research are many. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) described various benefits for using mixed methods research. Benefits included the researcher‘s ability to address a broader range of research questions because he or she is not confined to a single research tool or method. Also, the researcher brings stronger evidence for results due to a merging of the findings. The strengths of qualitative research such as words, narrative, and pictures are combined with the strengths of quantitative research

such as numbers, sampling, and predictions, to produce all-encompassing findings which ultimately convey stronger results.

Overall, the purpose of this study was to describe teachers‘ attitudes, religious knowledge, and academic preparation regarding religion in public education. A survey of 57 general questions made up the quantitative portion of the study, and a list of five open-ended questions comprised the qualitative portion of the study. Further, this research study was designed to answer the following four explicit research questions:

1) What do in-service teachers believe about teaching about religion in public schools?
2) What do in-service teachers know about teaching about religion in public schools?
3) What do in-service teachers believe about teaching about Islam in public schools?
4) What do in-service teachers know about teaching about Islam in public schools?

Context and Access

The collection of data took take place when I received the appropriate approvals by the University of North Florida dissertation proposal committee members and the UNF Institutional Review Board. I received training in EFM Community software, the survey hosting platform, so the research instrument was accessed and completed online by selected participants. Those individuals

completing the Religion and Public Education Inventory authored by Harris-Ewing (1999) online had the convenience of completing the instrument at any time and in any place. All survey data were received by January 31, 2009. The participants were in-service teachers engaged in teaching classes with a world or global view, particularly social studies teachers. The researcher accessed those teachers by requesting, through Florida's Freedom of Information Act, the Florida Department of Education's current email list of 2008-2009 social studies teachers.

Instrumentation

The research instrument utilized in this study was the Religion and Public Education Inventory or RPEI. This instrument was developed by Sharon M. Harris-Ewing in order to fulfill the requirements for her degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1999. Her purpose for developing the instrument was to overcome the voids and limitations of the research instruments of earlier studies. Written permission from Dr. Harris-Ewing to use the RPEI in this current research study was received. The complete survey instrument can be viewed in its entirety in Appendix A.

The RPEI is composed of three major sections, not including the demographic information. The three sections are the attitude survey, the information survey, and the qualitative questions which allow for the participant to answer several open ended questions. The attitude survey is designed to show data representative of teachers' attitudes regarding religion overall and religion in

public education. The 27 Likert-type questions which make up the attitude portion of the survey assess four scales of teacher‘s attitudes: (a) perceptions of the importance of religion; (b) expectations and teaching beliefs; (c) beliefs about the legal issues of religion in schools; and (d) thoughts and perceptions of teacher preparedness to interact with religion and religious diversity (Harris-Ewing, 1999).

The second major section of the RPEI is the information survey. The total of 20 multiple choice questions in this section were designed to represent the knowledge a teacher has of world religions overall, as well as several questions that deal with guidelines for handling religion in public schools (Harris-Ewing, 1999).

The third major section of the RPEI is the qualitative section which asks five open-ended questions regarding (a) the importance of teaching about Islam in school, (b) teachers‘ beliefs and attitudes for teaching about Islam, (c) preparation for teaching about Islam to students, (d) teachers‘ beliefs regarding the legality of teaching about Islam, and (e) teachers' attitudes regarding the religious diversity of Muslim students. This portion of the survey laid the foundation for a blending or mixing of the other two sections, while using Islam and Muslims as a specific example of religious instruction, or lack thereof, in Florida‘s school curricula.

Pilot Testing Procedures

Pilot testing procedures were conducted by the author of the RPEI instrument, Dr. Sharon Harris-Ewing (1999). Data gathering consisted of two

types: feedback from various educational and religious groups and an actual administration of the instrument in the Spring of 1998 to a sample of 77 students in a teacher education program. It was the results of these two types of data that formed the basis for numerous revisions, adjustments, and streamlining of the RPEI. Particularly cumbersome were the Attitude and Knowledge portions of the survey. Data analysis for the Attitude Survey included principal components factor analysis and data analysis for the Knowledge Survey included calculating item discriminating power, item difficulty, and the effectiveness of the distractors for each question.

One of the most positive outcomes of the pilot testing procedures conducted by Dr. Harris-Ewing (1999) was in the actual administering of the instrument to participants. The initial survey was distributed to 77 students at four different university classroom settings. Originally, the instrument was intended to be given out in its three separate sections, which consumed approximately 40-50 minutes. The reasoning for this was to restrict participants from returning and changing their original answers. However, Harris-Ewing (1999) easily reduced the time (20-25 minutes) required for survey completion without compromising test results, first, by dispensing the entire survey at once and, second, by instructing participants not to open or complete the following section until they had completed the previous one.

An improvement over manual dissemination of the instrument was the current web-based format of the survey. The University of North Florida‘s EFM Community software has the ability to restrict a participant from going back to

change original answers. Also, a feature of the software inhibits the participant from skipping an answer without answering the question first.

Ethical Consideration, Informed Consent, and IRB

The ethical consideration and informed consent information is attached as Appendix B. It states that the participant has consented freely to participate, has been informed as to the nature of the research, and has been informed of any risks. The informed consent form stated that the researcher would keep participants‘ identities and their responses anonymous and, further, that the responses would not adversely affect the participant in any way. The participant was also allowed to examine the results of the survey, had there been a desire to do so. The Application for Institutional Review of Research Involving Human Subjects was completed and processed before the study was conducted. The researcher received all necessary approvals from the University of North Florida‘s Institutional Review Board. The Institutional Review Board‘s approval is attached as Appendix C.

Data Collection

I was the sole individual who collected the data gathered from participants. An online survey was presented to each participant and collected upon participant completion. I accessed those teachers through contacting the Florida Department of Education and purchasing a specified list of social studies

teachers‘ emails. These emails were acquired as permitted by the state of Florida‘s Freedom of Information Act.

A feature of the current research study was the concurrent collection of data, during which the quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time. An important note to make is that the same individuals were selected for both the qualitative and quantitative data collection so as not to compromise any comparisons or create imbalances in the survey population.

Data Analysis

By using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical software, data analysis in this mixed methods research included a correlation analysis to measure teachers‘ attitudes and a test for significance for the coefficients. The RPEI survey initially had four variables which were classified as dealing with teachers' attitudes. These variables were identified as teachers' beliefs about religion, teachers' views of importance of religion, teachers' views of legal issues, and teachers' views of their preparation or background knowledge. These four variables were answered by participants on a five-point Likert-type scale.

Statistical descriptive data was acquired from mean scores on the information and attitude portions of the RPEI survey. Correlations of attitudes and information also illustrated the relationship between attitudes and information (Harris-Ewing, 1999).

The open-ended qualitative questions remained in their qualitative format but were analyzed using a content analysis based on a hybrid approach of using frequencies, word counts and word groups.

Participants and Participant Selection

Participants in this research study consisted of in-service, social studies teachers who had teaching responsibilities that addressed world and/or global views of socio-cultural phenomena. I selected those teachers who taught aspects of world or global studies as required within their curricula. This research study was conducted statewide. I required a minimum of approximately 300 respondents. By the time the survey closed on January 31, 2009, I had a total of 1,054 teachers who completed the entire survey.

Demographic Data

My target population consisted of social studies teachers from the state of Florida. These teachers were secondary level instructors whose teaching levels ranged from middle school at the sixth grade up to the twelfth grade level in high school. All teachers were contacted by district-assigned email. The email list was purchased from the Florida Department of Education through the Freedom of Information Act.

On December 4, 2008, in the first email to teachers, I emailed and formally invited all 7,868 Florida social studies teachers to take part in the RPEI survey. On January 15, 2009, a second invitation was sent; and the final invitation was

sent January on 26, 2009 .The survey closed on February 2, 2009. A total of 1,841 teachers opened the survey (23.4%). There were 499 teachers who opened the survey and didn‘t answer any questions. I decided to use only fully completed Attitude and Knowledge survey participant responses because I wished to measure the most accurate coefficient alpha possible and because the data set was abundant. Because a total of 787 respondents did not complete the entire RPEI survey, I excluded those responses.

All social studies teachers in each of the 67 Florida counties were invited to participate in the RPEI survey. However, there were two entities that requested additional information and approval from researcher, Leon County and the Florida Virtual School. Due to the lack of additional time and resources needed for the requested approvals, I excluded both entities from the study.

The following demographic data is based on the resulting 1,054 teachers who participated in the RPEI survey. In Table 3 the demographic table shows participants‘ gender. Males were in the majority at 54%, making up 565 of the total sample.

Table 3

Participants‘ Gender (*N* = 1,054)

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	565	53.6
Female	489	46.4
Total	1054	100.0

The ages of the participants varied. Ages ranged from the low age of 21 to a high age of 72. Five participants did not indicate age. Because the researcher designed the survey to mandate an answer before one could move to the next page, some answers were vague, such as, *over 30*, or *why*, or even *0*. All vague answers were designated as missing answers. The age groups in Table 4 show the age variance ranging from 21 to over 70 years old.

Table 4

Participants' Age (*N* = 1,054)

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
21 - 30	206	19.5	19.6
31 - 40	250	23.7	43.5
41 - 50	226	21.4	65.0
51 - 60	273	25.9	91.0
61 - 70	92	8.7	99.8
70 & up	2	.2	100.0
Total	1049	99.5	
Missing	5	.5	
Total	1054	100.0	

The third demographic question asked the participants' experience in teaching. The least experienced group of teachers made up the highest percentage of teachers; those teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience were the largest group at 279 members, but only by 3 individuals. The second largest group, with 276 members, was the most experienced, with 21 or more years of experience. The other two groups, those with 6 to 10 years of experience and those with 11 to 20 years of experience, made up the remaining 22% and 25%.

Table 5

Participants' Teaching Experience (N = 1,054)

Years Experience	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
One to five	279	26.5	26.5
Six to ten	231	21.9	48.4
Eleven to twenty	268	25.4	73.8
Twenty one or more	276	26.2	100.0
Total	1054	100.0	

The table illustrating teacher certifications was typical of a population whose primary duties were to teach secondary level students. A total of 82% of the survey population indicated that they were certified to teach at the secondary level, making up a total of 869 secondary level teachers. Those certified in elementary education made up a small percentage of 1.5% while the remaining 16% of teachers stated that they were certified at both levels.

Table 6

Participants' Grade Level Certifications (*N* = 1054)

Grade Level	Frequency	Percent
Elementary	16	1.5
Secondary	869	82.4
Both	169	16.0
Total	1054	100.0

Also, a requirement of secondary level social studies teachers is academic subject certification. A total of 97% of the participants in the study indicated that

they were certified in social studies education. Of the entire population consisting of 1,054 teachers, a total of 1,039 stated that they were certified in social studies.

Table 7

Subject Area Certifications (*N* = 1,054)

Subject Area	Frequency	Percent
Social Studies	1039	98.6
Other Subjects	15	1.4
Total	1054	100.0

The next five tables illustrated participants‘ responses regarding their religious identities, perspectives, and participations. In Table 8, the survey question asked about religious affiliation. Teachers were asked to state with which religious denomination they identified.

Table 8

Teachers‘ Religious Affiliations (*N* = 1,054)

Religious Affiliations	Frequency	Percent
Baptist	117	11.1
Buddhist	4	.4
Episcopalian	37	3.5
Hindu	2	.2
Jewish	45	4.3
Muslim	3	.3
Protestant	272	25.8
Roman Catholic	199	18.9
None	216	20.5
Other	159	15.1
Total	1054	100.0

The largest group, 272 teachers, described themselves as Protestant. That group made up 26% of the survey population. Muslim teachers accounted for .3% of the sample population, the next to the smallest group. The smallest group comprised of the Hindu teachers as only .2%.

Overall, survey participants were almost equally divided when answering whether they were a member of a faith community. Although the majority, 52%, stated that they were a member of a faith community, their majority in this query was slight. A total of 48% of survey respondents stated that they were not members of a faith community.

Table 9

Participants' Membership in a Faith Community (*N* = 1,054)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	545	51.7
No	509	48.3
Total	1054	100.0

In a three-scaled measure of self descriptions, participants were asked to indicate the degree of their own religiosity. A majority of the respondents, 51%, indicated that they consider themselves *somewhat religious*. This percentage encompassed approximately half of the survey population. The other half was divided between those who consider themselves *very religious* and those who consider themselves *not at all religious*.

Table 10

Participants' Description of Their Degree of Religiosity (*N* = 1,054)

Self Description	Frequency	Percent
Very religious	264	25.0
Somewhat religious	539	51.1
Not at all religious	251	23.8
Total	1054	100.0

Similar to the previous question, participants were asked to describe the way they would describe their religious perspective. Those describing themselves as having a *liberal* perspective made up the largest group of responses at 31% of the survey respondents. They were followed by those who identified themselves as *moderate/mainline* at 24%. The individuals with the *conservative* perspective ranked third in this category at 21%. The remaining categories of *agnostic*, *other*, and *atheistic* followed third, fourth, and fifth.

Table 11

Participants' Description of Their Religious Perspective (*N* = 1,054)

Religious Perspective	Frequency	Percent
Conservative	219	20.8
Moderate/Mainline	252	23.9
Liberal	331	31.4
Agnostic	107	10.2
Atheistic	55	5.2
Other	90	8.5
Total	1054	100.0

The last demographic question with results reported in Table 12, asked participants about the frequency of their attendance at religious services. The

largest group of respondents, 32%, indicated that they attended religious services on a weekly basis. The second largest group of respondents, 16%, stated that they *never* attended religious services. The remaining teachers did attend some religious services which they ranked as *yearly*, *every few years*, *once a month*, *monthly*, and finally *other*, respectively.

Table 12

Participants' Attendance at Religious Services (*N* = 1,054)

Attends Religious Services	Frequency	Percent
Daily	10	.9
Weekly	339	32.2
Once or twice a month	121	11.5
Monthly	80	7.6
Yearly	135	12.8
Every few years	124	11.8
Never	171	16.2
Other	74	7.0
Total	1054	100.0

Overall, it appears that the survey respondents represent a varied group of teachers with regard to gender, age, years of teaching experience, and religious denomination and practices. The common trait amongst all of them is that the majority of the respondents are social studies teachers (99%).

Concluding Statement

The rigor of past research in this area is varied as well as limited. There has been much written about religious liberties in public school settings such as creationism in science classes, religious holiday exemptions, prayer in schools,

the wearing of religious apparel and symbols, and the constitutionality of those practices; however, very minimal or no research has been conducted among in-service teachers‘ who teach about religion in schools, particularly those teaching about the Islamic religion.

By using a mixed methods research design, it was anticipated that (a) the qualitative data would expand upon the quantitative data; (b) the qualitative data would confirm the quantitative results; (c) the qualitative data would offer an alternative viewpoint; (d) the study would facilitate a context necessary to research an underrepresented group; (e) a more in-depth analysis to a basic educational theme would result; and (f) an improved way to study societal trends would emerge (Creswell, Shope, Clark, & Greene, 2006).

In the following fourth chapter, I will discuss the results of my quantitative and qualitative data within the context of my original four research questions, which were:

1) What do in-service teachers believe about teaching about religion in public schools?
2) What do in-service teachers know about teaching about religion in public schools?
3) What do in-service teachers believe about teaching about Islam in public schools?
4) What do in-service teachers know about teaching about Islam in public schools?

Chapter Four:

Results

There were two primary goals of the present research study, particularly with respect to my decision to use a mixed-methodology approach. The first goal was to examine teachers‘ general attitudes and knowledge about religion in the public school classroom. The quantitative portion of the Religion and Public Education Inventory (RPEI) served the purpose of that goal quite well. The Attitude Scale and the Knowledge Scale provided ample data so that a thorough examination of the respondents‘ data could be evaluated. The first and second research questions served as a general inquiry about religion in schools:

1) What do in-service teachers believe about teaching about religion in public schools?
2) What do in-service teachers know about teaching about religion in public schools?

The second goal was to examine specifically ways that the religion of Islam was taught and discussed in the public school classroom. It was within that specific examination that I wanted to gain additional insight beyond the traditional Likert-type responses. It is quite straightforward to ask a survey participant to rank a belief on a particular scale, but it is much more complex and time consuming to analyze written short-answers that cite reasons for a particular

belief. Nevertheless, the following third and fourth research questions received abundant responses:

3) What do in-service teachers believe about teaching about Islam in public schools?
4) What do in-service teachers know about teaching about Islam in public schools?

I will first present the Attitude Survey analysis. The Knowledge Survey‘s data will follow and lastly, a content analysis will complete the Results section.

Attitude Survey

The RPEI instrument consists of three major sections, the Attitude Survey, the Knowledge Survey, and the Qualitative Questionnaire. The Attitude Scale is the first major section of the RPEI survey instrument. It is a 27-item assessment of the participants‘ attitudes and perceptions regarding teaching about religion in schools. Additionally, the instrument was developed to assess four major constructs: (a) teacher‘s views on the importance of religion; (b) teacher‘s beliefs regarding religion in the classroom; (c) teacher‘s perspectives about the legal issues of religion in education; and (d) teacher‘s views on their level of preparation to teach about religion and teaching religiously diverse students. These constructs are a result of a consensus of educational and religious scholars who advocate the academic study of religion. The foremost supporters of this —ew consensus” are Nord and Haynes (1998). Based on literature from numerous authors, scholars, and religious leaders, the four constructs of

importance of religion (Rosin, 1998), teaching beliefs (Neville, 1995), legal parameters (Eastland, 1993) and teacher preparation (Piediscalzi, 1991a) were developed by the survey author Harris-Ewing (1999) into items of measurements which comprised the Attitude Survey.

All 27 statements were ranked on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). A complete version of the Attitude Survey is displayed in Table 13. Included in the table are the survey questions, the mean scores, the standard deviations each question, respectively. Also included are the total scores for the mean scores and the standard deviations.

The statistical mean represents the average mean score for all teachers‘ responses. For example, the fifth question asked about teachers‘ preparation. The average response for question five resulted in a mean 3.35. So, on the Likert-type scale which rated 1 as *strongly agree* and 5 as *strongly disagree*, teachers 3.35 mean surpassed the *undecided* middle range of 3 and approached the *disagree* option at 4. From this result we can infer that the average teacher is *uncertain* and or *disagrees* with the statement that he or she was academically prepared to teach about religion.

The standard deviation is the measure of dispersion or variability of the population of participants. The smaller the figure, the more likely the data points are close to the mean (Holcomb, 2006).

The sum for both scores is represented at the end of the table. The mean sum of all scores resulted in 55.25. A total score of 55.25 would indicate that overall, respondent teachers‘ attitudes indicate that they *agree* and *strongly*

agree that teaching about religion is important. Since possible total scores fell within a range of 27 to 135, a 55.25 makes up approximately half of the total possible score. However, an informal observation of the data also indicates that teachers are not confident in their abilities to provide that type of education because the mean scores associated with teacher preparation type questions were higher than the other attitude questions.

Table 13

Complete Attitude Survey With Descriptive Statistics

Attitude Survey Questions	*M*	*SD*
ATT1. Preparing teachers for religious diversity was included in the multicultural education courses I have taken.	3.17	1.23
ATT2. The study of religion does not belong in the public school curriculum.*	1.71	.98
ATT3. Religion is not a particularly important aspect of cultural diversity in the United States today.*	1.46	.65
ATT4. Teaching students about religion is a necessary part of educating them to live in an increasingly diverse world.	1.56	.87
ATT5. The place of religion in the public school curriculum was covered in specific subject matter courses I have taken.	3.35	1.16
ATT6. To be well educated a person needs to learn about religious influences in history and contemporary society.	1.42	.73
ATT7. I have been well prepared to teach about religion as it arises in the curriculum.	2.62	1.25
ATT8. Separation of church and state means that public schools cannot teach about religion.*	1.61	.85

ATT9. It does not take any special preparation or knowledge to teach religiously diverse students.*	1.84	.78
ATT10. As a teacher, I do not expect that religion will be a part of the curriculum.*	2.02	1.02
ATT11. Appreciation of art and music includes attention to religious influences and themes.	1.82	.77
ATT12. To be an effective teacher, I need to understand the religious beliefs and customs of my students and their families.	1.97	.96
ATT13. There is a difference between teaching religion and teaching about religion.	1.36	.60
ATT14. Educational implications of religious diversity and teaching about religion have not been discussed in any of my courses.*	2.75	1.19
ATT15. Teachers should be prepared to teach about religion whenever it arises naturally in the curriculum.	1.81	.77
ATT16. Public school teachers should discourage discussion of religion in the classroom.*	1.90	.92
ATT17. Religion and public schooling issues were covered in my foundations of education and educational methods courses.	3.37	1.13
ATT18. Understanding history requires an understanding of religious beliefs and ideas.	1.33	.59
ATT19. As a teacher, I expect to teach my students about different religions.	1.82	.94
ATT20. The Supreme Court has taken God and religion out of the public schools.*	2.54	1.19
ATT21. It is not very important to learn about different religions.*	1.45	.69
ATT22. I have a good understanding of the legal issues regarding religion education.	2.22	.97
ATT23. Teaching about religion is the same as teaching about moral values.*	2.19	1.02

ATT24. Contemporary world conflicts are profoundly affected by religions convictions.	1.55	.75
ATT25. I have learned strategies for teaching about controversial subjects, including religion.	2.61	1.14
ATT26. Teachers are permitted to teach about religion in public schools.	2.07	.98
ATT27. Religious belief no longer has much effect on people's values.*	1.73	.80
Sum of all scores	55.25	10.7

Note. 1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*.
*These items were reverse scored.

Preliminary Testing of the Attitude Survey

Preliminary testing was conducted to determine the constructs used in the present study. The alpha reliability coefficients were calculated for all items in the Attitude Scale in order to ascertain the degree of internal consistency. Also, a principal components factor analysis was conducted so that the constructs in the Attitude Scale could be identified.

Reliability Analysis

Alpha reliability analysis for the Attitude Scale of the RPEI was determined by using the Analyze/Scale function in SPSS computer program. The coefficient alpha for scores on the 27-item Attitude scale was .82.

Table 14

Attitude Scale Reliability Coefficient

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	*N* of Items
.82	.83	27

Factor Analysis

A principal components factor analysis was performed using data from the 1,054 teacher participants on the Attitude Scale of the RPEI. The factor analysis was done to establish the nature of the constructs within the Attitude Scale and to determine relationships among the variables.

The exploratory principal components factor analysis was conducted using data from the 27-item Attitude Scale. The final analysis identified four components; therefore, four factors were extracted and rotated using a Varimax rotation procedure. The rotated solution, as shown in Table 15, yielded four interpretable factors: importance of religion, beliefs of teaching, preparation, and legal parameters. All four factors ultimately accounted for approximately 43% of the variance (Green & Salkind, 2005).

This result is consistent with the results of the author of the RPEI, Dr. Harris-Ewing (1999). The author devised four primary components in a pilot study which was designed to describe the four major elements involving teachers‘ attitudes with respect to teaching about religion. Those four elements

were (a) importance of religion, (b) beliefs of teaching, (c) preparation, and (d) legal parameters. Additionally, alpha coefficients were run on scores on the four sub-components and are cited in the following discussion.

Table 15 shows the output of a principal components factor analysis conducted on the 27 items in the Attitude Survey. The purpose was to determine if essential constructs or themes could be identified (Daniel, Blount, & Ferrell, 1991).

Table 15

Factor Matrix of Attitude Survey (*N* = 27)*

	Component			
Attitude Survey Items	1	2	3	4
ATT12	**.634**	.163	.067	-.061
ATT18	**.629**	.166	.004	.165
ATT21	**.583**	.329	-.039	.030
ATT06	**.554**	.224	.064	.057
ATT11	**.530**	.255	.006	-.041
ATT13	**.525**	-.127	-.025	.363
ATT09	**.517**	.025	.011	-.073
ATT02	.231	**.772**	.001	-.081
ATT08	.156	**.726**	.043	.188
ATT10	.265	**.614**	.122	.081
ATT04	.396	**.572**	-.026	-.106
ATT16	.209	**.568**	-.034	-.036
ATT26	-.023	**.522**	.206	**.543**
ATT05	.016	-.056	**.757**	-.077
ATT17	-.057	-.112	**.743**	-.123
ATT01	.062	-.071	**.725**	-.012
ATT14	.086	.094	**.646**	.038
ATT07	.018	.200	**.634**	.179
ATT25	.017	.100	**.618**	.178
ATT22	-.049	.184	.322	.347
ATT19	.399	.499	.129	.289
ATT20	.069	.084	.119	**.692**

ATT27	.405	.179	.096	-.017
ATT15	.463	.385	.061	.074
ATT03	.366	.407	.005	-.156
ATT24	.442	.106	-.064	.060
ATT23	.029	-.142	-.105	**.553**

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.
* The bolded items indicate factors greater than .5 which are most highly correlated with its identifying construct.

Factor number one had an initial eigenvalue of 5.75, and accounted for 21% (5.75/27) of the variance across the solution. It was most associated with items 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 18, and 21. A minimum factor saliency criterion of |.50| was used as a determinant. These items primarily represented the respondents' attitude regarding the Importance of Religion. Overall, the Importance of Religion construct represented the response that religion is viewed as an important aspect of education and learning. Including a total of seven items, Importance of Religion yielded an alpha coefficient of .72.

Factor number two had an initial eigenvalue of 3.05, and accounted for 11% (3.05/27) of the variance across the solution. It was most associated with items 2, 4, 8, 10, 16, and 26. A minimum factor saliency criterion of |.50| was used as a determinant. These items generally represented the respondents' Teaching Beliefs, following the theme that teachers agree on teaching about religion in schools and particularly that learning about religion is a part of being well educated. Including a total of six items, Teaching Beliefs resulted in an alpha coefficient of .78.

Factor number three had an initial eigenvalue of 1.53, and accounted for 6% (1.53/27) of the variance across the solution. It was most associated with

items 1, 5, 7, 14, 17, and 25, which represented the scale, Preparation. A minimum factor saliency criterion of |.50| was used as a determinant. These six items represented the respondents‘ attitude reflecting their education and training for teaching about religion. This scale is based upon the premise that in order for teachers to teach about the complexities of various religious beliefs, they must be prepared for those tasks. The factor, Preparation, resulted in an alpha coefficient of .78.

Factor number four had an initial eigenvalue of 1.36 which accounted for 5% (1.36/27) of the variance across the solution. A minimum factor saliency criterion of |.50| was used as a determinant. It was associated with items 20, 23 and 26, which referred to the scale Legal Parameters. This scale was designed to show ways that teachers understand the law and legal issues surrounding religion and public education. The alpha reliability analysis for Legal Parameters resulted in a low coefficient of .45. This coefficient is consistent with the low .47 alpha coefficient reflected in the original study conducted by Dr. Harris-Ewing (1999). The low alpha coefficient may be attributed to the complexity in wording as well as the diversity of the questions. It may also be attributed to the small number of questions presented for that category. As a result, this sub-component was dropped from the analysis, resulting in three major subcomponents hereinafter referred to as Importance, Beliefs, and Preparation. Additionally, similar measures of Legal Parameters were measured in the Knowledge section of the RPEI, so that construct was not fully excluded from the results.

Table 16 shows the three subcomponents of the Attitude Survey with the means, standard deviations, and the sum of the 19 scores.

Table 16

Descriptive Statistics for Attitude Survey Subcomponents

	n	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	*SD*
Preparation	6	6.00	30.00	17.9	4.93
Importance of Religion	7	7.00	28.00	11.20	3.15
Teaching Beliefs	6	6.00	27.00	10.88	3.87
Sum of 19 Scores	19	19	80	39.93	8.32

Knowledge Survey

The Knowledge Survey, the second section of the RPEI, is a measure of respondents‘ knowledge, unlike the Attitude Survey, which measured attitudes and beliefs. The Knowledge Survey contains 20 multiple-choice questions. The objective-type questions were designed by Harris-Ewing (1999) to measure the knowledge required of instructors who may be faced with teaching about various religions other than their own.

In this research study, all 20 questions of the Knowledge Survey were used exactly in their entirety similar to the usage in the original study conducted by Harris-Ewing (1999). Item analysis was conducted by Harris-Ewing (1999) on all 20 questions in the form of three measures; item discriminating power, item

difficulty, and the effectiveness of the distracters of each question. Discriminating power measures the degree to which a certain question distinguishes between the high test scorers and the low test scorers, thus contributing to the internal consistency of the test. Item difficulty measures the proportion of correct responses test-takers make to each question. Finally, distractor effectiveness assesses the extent to which the choices in a multiple choice type question serves to distinguish those who know the correct answer from those who do not.

The knowledge test questions are based on two major scales. The first scale refers to the law as it pertains to religion and public education. The second scale refers to knowledge of major world religions. Specifically, the knowledge scales are sub-divided into the following categories: (a) five questions on legal issues, (b) three questions on Judaism, (c) four questions on Christianity, (d) three questions on Islam, and (e) five questions on other world religions. The questions were designed to assess the knowledge necessary for teachers to address these various issues in the classroom. Correct and incorrect answers were scored and recorded so that analysis of the data could include the total scores from the Knowledge Survey. A complete listing of all 20 questions of the Knowledge Survey is included in Appendix A, Section Two.

The Knowledge Survey was, by far, the most difficult portion of the survey instrument for the teacher participants. Many teachers wrote comments in the qualitative short-answer section to apologize for their lack of ability to answer the questions correctly. The mean for all teachers was 13.21 out of a maximum of

possible 20. This score averages to approximately 66%. Table 17 reports the total score for all 1,054 participants who completed the Knowledge Survey.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for Total Score on Knowledge Survey (*N* = 1,054)

	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	*SD*
Knowledge Survey Total	3.00	20.00	13.21	3.32

Similar to the Attitude Survey, the Knowledge Survey was also grouped into sub-components. The sub-components, of which there are a total of five, served to categorize the data and to assess the areas in which the strengths and weaknesses exist among certain knowledge constructs. The five sub-components are designed to measure the following competencies: legal knowledge, knowledge of Christianity, knowledge of Islam, knowledge of Judaism, and knowledge of other world religions. The tables for all five sub-components are individually listed so as to illustrate the individual mean scores for each question. This information will prove valuable in recommendations for future potential professional development.

The first sub-component, legal knowledge, includes the first five questions of the Knowledge Survey. These questions were intended to assess the respondents‘ knowledge of legal issues, particularly as they pertain to public education. Table 18 shows the way teacher respondents answered the questions regarding legal knowledge.

Table 18

Descriptive Statistics for Knowledge Survey of Legal Issues (*N* = 1,054)

Question	*M*	*SD*
KNOW1 First amendment	.91	.28
KNOW2 Supreme court rulings	.63	.48
KNOW3 Lemon Law	.39	.49
KNOW4 Student‘s religious rights	.73	.45
KNOW5 Doctrine of strict neutrality	.81	.40

Note. Each question represents a minimum value of 0 and maximum value of 1.

The highest mean scores for the legal knowledge category show that for question one, regarding the First Amendment, teachers performed well as the mean showed .91. The lowest mean scores in the legal knowledge category was question three, which refers to the Lemon Law. This law refers to the *Lemon v. Katzman* (1971) case where aid to parochial schools was struck down due to the Supreme Court‘s opinion of excessive entanglement. The Lemon Law ultimately became a standard test in determining violations of the establishment clause (Greenwalt, 2005). The mean score for that question was .39.

The next sub-component in the Knowledge Survey pertains to the respondents‘ knowledge of Christianity. A total of four questions were included to assess the teacher‘s knowledge of the subject. The lowest mean (.53) in question 13 referred to the Christian doctrine of incarnation, while question 17 received the highest mean (.67) which referred to African American religions.

Table 19 shows the mean scores for the four questions measuring knowledge of Christianity.

Table 19

Descriptive Statistics for Knowledge Survey of Christianity (*N* = 1,054)

Question	*M*	*SD*
KNOW 8 Protestants and Roman Catholics	.53	.50
KNOW13 Christian doctrine of incarnation	.53	.50
KNOW17 African American religion	.69	.46
KNOW20 Protestant denominations	.63	.48

Note. Each question represents a minimum value of 0 and maximum value of 1.

The next knowledge area from the survey is Judaism. The lowest mean score in this sub-component was .48, and it referred to question number 6. This question asked about the —most solemn Jewish holy day.” The highest mean is reflected in question number 18 with a mean of .90. Almost all teachers demonstrated knowledge of the question referring to Passover. Table 20 shows the mean scores for the three questions referring to Judaism.

Table 20

Descriptive Statistics for Knowledge Survey of Judaism (*N* = 1,054)

Question	*M*	*SD*
KNOW 6 Jewish holy day	.48	.50
KNOW12 Statements about Judaism	.52	.50
KNOW18 Passover	.90	.30

Note. Each question represents a minimum value of 0 and maximum value of 1.

The next sub-component in the Knowledge Survey is that of Islam. A focus of the present research study, these three questions served to assess the respondent‘s knowledge of the Islamic religion. Table 21 shows the results of this sub-component.

Table 21

Descriptive Statistics for Knowledge Survey of Islam (*N* = 1,054)

Question	*M*	*SD*
KNOW10 Order of religions	.48	.50
KNOW11 Five pillars of Islam	.91	.29
KNOW19 Knowledge of Quran	.48	.50

Note. Each question represents a minimum value of 0 and maximum value of 1.

Question number 11 received the highest mean score at .91. Teachers appeared to be well acquainted with the content of this question, which referred to the Five Pillars of Islam. However, the remaining two questions received the identical low mean scores of .48. Those were questions 10 and 19. Question 10 referred to the order of the major world religions, and question 19 cited items not found in the Quran.

The final sub-category referred to other world religions, which included Buddhism and Hinduism. These five questions were meant to assess the teachers‘ knowledge about other global religions. Table 22 lists the five questions, 7, 9, 14, 15, and 16, with their mean scores.

Table 22

Descriptive Statistics for Knowledge Survey of Other World Religions (*N* = 1,054)

Question	*M*	*SD*
KNOW 7 Hinduism	.74	.44
KNOW 9 Buddhism	.63	.48
KNOW14 Match the pairs	.75	.43
KNOW15 Karma	.88	.33
KNOW16 Four Noble Truths	.60	.49

Note. Each question represents a minimum value of 0 and maximum value of 1.

Interestingly, the sub-category of other world religions showed reasonable results. The lowest mean score of .63 was question 9 which asked teacher respondents about the Buddhist concept of nirvana. The highest mean score was .88, associated with question 15. That question referred to the Hindu principle of karma.

Table 23 summarizes all the five sub-components in the Knowledge Survey. By a small margin, the mean per question for Christianity is the lowest at .60/1.00. The religion of Islam follows with a mean per question score of .62/1.00. The third lowest mean in the group is Judaism, which shows a mean per question score of .63/1.00. As indicated earlier, the category Other World Religions appeared to be familiar content with teacher respondents. That sub-component had the highest mean score of 3.6 and a mean per question score of .72/1.00.

Table 23

Descriptive Statistics for all Subcomponents Knowledge Survey (*N = 1,054*)

Sub-components	Number of Questions	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	**M/ question*	*SD*
Legal Issues	5	00	5.00	3.46	.69	1.01
Judaism	3	00	3.00	1.90	.63	.86
Christianity	4	00	4.00	2.39	.60	1.15
Islam	3	00	3.00	1.87	.62	.89
Other World Religions	5	00	5.00	3.60	.72	1.29

*Based upon each question worth a maximum of 1.00.

In conclusion, the data from the Attitude Survey and the Knowledge Survey were comprised of the constructs needed to run the subsequent correlation analysis. Correlation coefficients were computed among the three Attitude sub-components and among the five Knowledge sub-components, making a total of eight scales. Table 24 illustrates the correlations which form the components of the RPEI survey instrument.

Table 24

Correlations of Sub-components of Attitude and Knowledge

	Attitude Survey			Knowledge Survey				
	Importance of Religion	Teaching Beliefs	Preparation	Legal Issues	Judaism	Christianity	Islam	Other World Religions
Importance of Religion	1	.522**	.067*	.067*	.110**	.135**	.134**	.190**
Teaching Beliefs	.	1	.137**	.150**	.187**	.247**	.195**	.290**
Preparation			1	.089**	.104**	.084**	.109**	.118**
Legal Issues				1	.153**	.181**	.111**	.143**
Judaism					1	.257**	.263**	.280**
Christianity						1	.345**	.341**
Islam							1	.423**
Other World Religions								1

#$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Correlations

Correlations are statistical measurements of the linear relationship between two variables. A correlation coefficient is the resulting value which represents the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. Pearson's *r* correlation coefficients can range from -1.00 to 1.00, with −1 indicating a perfect negative linear relation, 1 indicating a perfect positive linear relation, and 0 indicating no linear relation between the variables. The primary principle to acknowledge in correlation research is that correlation does not infer causation (McMillan, 2008).

The relationship between the Attitude Survey and the Knowledge Survey was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. This bivariate analysis provided valuable descriptive data of the attitudes and knowledge of Florida in-service teachers. Some of the correlations were moderately high, some were moderate, and some were weak, however, all were statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance. A *p* value of less than .05 was required for statistical significance. The highest *p* values were attached to the correlations between Importance of Religion and Preparation ($p < .031$) and Importance of Religion and Legal Issues ($p < .031$).

Although many authors have written about ways to interpret the correlation coefficient, the most prominent author in this research domain is Cohen (1988). His scale for effect size (r) interpretation is .10 to .29 (weak), .30 to .49 (moderate), and .50 to 1.0 (strong). However, he did recommend that a strict

adherence to that range is not a requirement as research context and purpose are also variables that may influence results. Therefore, based on that recommendation, I will remain flexible in interpreting the data.

Attitudes

Among the three Attitude sub-components, the highest correlation appeared between the two variables Importance of Religion and Teaching Beliefs ($r = .52$, $p < .001$). When r is squared, the resulting 25% indicates the percentage that one variable is related to the variation in the other. In practical terms, this 25% variation can be perceived as having genuine value, particularly with such a large population. This *strong* correlation indicated that the more a teacher thinks that teaching about religion is important, the more likely s/he is to believe that teaching and learning about religion should occur in the learning environment.

Knowledge

The correlations among the five Knowledge sub-components were interesting. The first relationship worth noting was a *strong* correlation between Knowledge of Islam and, Other World Religions, which was the highest correlation in the Knowledge category ($r = .42$, $p < .001$). These data indicated that the more teachers knew about Islam, the more likely they knew about other world religions also. Therefore, a person who studied world religions most likely had studied about Islam as well. This fact is understandable considering that Islam, a major world religion, is not traditionally viewed as an American religion.

There were other similar correlations that followed, though not as strong as the two aforementioned ones. Two *moderate* correlations did emerge. The more teachers knew about Christianity, the more likely they also knew about Islam ($r = .35$, $p < .001$) and Other World Religions ($r = .34$, $p < .001$). Last on that scale were three weak correlations worth noting. The more that teachers knew about Judaism, the more likely they knew about Christianity ($r = .26$, $p < .001$), Islam ($r = .26$, $p < .001$), and Other World Religions ($r = .28$, $p < .001$).

This aspect of the analysis was enlightening as it indicated that the more teachers had knowledge of one religion, the more likely they had knowledge of other religions also. An interesting aspect of the Knowledge survey is that all of the correlation coefficients were significant, positive, and moderately correlated; this feature of the analysis was enlightening as it indicated that the more teachers had knowledge of one religion, the more likely they had knowledge of other religions also.

Attitudes and Knowledge

The highest correlation between attitude and knowledge was that of Teaching Beliefs and Other World Religions ($r = .29$, $p < .001$). This positive borderline moderate correlation indicated that the more a teacher believed that religion was a legitimate subject of academic study, the more that teacher had knowledge of Other World Religions. Teachers not only felt that way about Other World Religions, but they believed that Christianity ($r = .25$, $p < .001$), Islam ($r =$

.20, $p < .001$) and Judaism ($r = .19$, $p < .001$) were also legitimate subjects of academic study.

The quantitative results, which reported teachers‘ scores on the Attitude and Knowledge scales of the RPEI, provided a comprehensive overview of attitudes and knowledge of the sample of Florida social studies teachers who responded to the survey. Teachers‘ responses on the Likert-type statements in the Attitude survey indicated that, generally, teachers feel that it is important for students to learn about religion and that teachers believe that information about religion should be taught in school. Further, according to the Attitude survey, teachers did not feel that their academic training prepared them to teach about religion. Specifically, they were less likely to indicate *agree* or *strongly agree* on the questions referring to adequate teacher preparation.

Interestingly, the Knowledge scale did indirectly confirm the uncertainty teachers felt about their academic preparation regarding teaching about religion. On the Knowledge scale, teachers performed quite low, at 66%, on very basic questions about various religious beliefs.

The following qualitative data, where teacher respondents narrated their answers to specific qualitative questions about teaching about Islam, were also quite interesting. It was within these very thick, rich descriptions that I could ascertain the reasons why many teachers answered the previous Likert-type questions the way that they did.

Qualitative Results

The five open-ended qualitative questions examined the reasons why teachers answered the survey questions the way they did. For example, why did teachers feel that it was important, or not important, for students to learn about Islam? Or why did they believe that they had, or didn‘t have, the legal authority to teach students about Islam? The following analysis of teachers‘ responses provided abundant insight into their reasons for answering the questions that were asked in the RPEI survey.

Overall, I was pleased at the large number of participants who completed the entire survey. There are some slight differences in the number of teachers who responded to the short-answer questions. The reason the numbers of participants resulted in slightly higher numbers from the quantitative survey (*N* = 1,054) is that some teacher respondents completed the RPEI without answering the short answer questions. Additionally, some teachers did not answer all five short-answer questions. The value of these responses was such that I kept and analyzed all qualitative data, the completed and incomplete.

The respondents‘ answers varied from being very lengthy and explanatory to simple —yes” or —no” responses. Incidentally, many respondents answered with responses yes or no. Also, there were answers filled with vivid emotion and answers quite calloused, especially those which exhibited some biases about the subject matter. Overall, it is my aim to establish, through an analysis of a very large amount of data, the teachers‘ reasons for some of the answers given in the first and second sections of the survey. Overall, my primary aim was to present a

condensed research summary that accurately reflected the written responses of the teachers surveyed.

The five questions, when downloaded into pdf format, took up approximately 65 pages each of written text, resulting in a final document of over 300 pages. The responses were transferred from digital into printed format so that the researcher could easily review and annotate certain distinct passages. The initial stage of reviewing and marking the raw data was performed manually with direct notations made on the original paper documents. This process consisted of an informal overview of the data, which included labeling and identifying.

It was during this preliminary process that I read all responses and used colored pencils to indicate all —yes," "no," or —other" among the participants' responses. Thereafter, when I returned to the raw data to count those types of responses, the task was fairly efficient.

However, during the initial stage of review, I observed obvious patterns of responses that were overwhelmingly repetitive. There were very common and collective reasons some participants answered the way they did. For example, when teachers were asked whether they felt that it was important for students to learn about Islam, many responded affirmatively because it was a —major religion," because it was —historically influential," and because it was —distorted by the media." I recognized that these words and word groups could be classified in strands of identifiable categories through the use of computer-assisted frequency analysis.

Due to the large amount of data generated by the survey, particularly by the open-ended survey questions, I found that initially coding each answer was often times subjective and very time consuming. In order to process the data efficiently and accurately, while at the same time reducing researcher bias, I decided to use quantitative data analysis techniques in order to process the huge data set. Moreover, to continue with the research methodology of mixed methods, particularly at the analysis stage of the research, I elected to employ a technique which combined a statistical or quantitative component to the analysis of the qualitative data generated by the RPEI survey. Ultimately, I chose to focus the research efforts on computerized text analysis techniques. A University of North Florida study using computerized text analysis compared to traditional techniques of text analysis found similar results after final analysis (Bright, O'Conner, & Smallwood, 2007).

A hybrid method of text analysis was demonstrated in a published study by Light and Yasuhara (2008). In their analysis of a large qualitative data set, they applied a process that they termed a "quantitative-qualitative hybrid approach" (p. 21). Their approach utilized high-frequency word analysis as part of incorporating a content analysis of a large data set. The authors of the study indicated that their hybrid approach was particularly useful in the analysis of responses to short, open-ended survey questions. Furthermore, the "hybrid analysis is better suited for larger data sets and will capture the survey's general trends and ideas versus using a traditional qualitative approach" (Light &

Yasuhara, 2008, p. 25). Therefore, the Light and Yasuhara method of analysis was replicated and used for this present research study.

Content analysis, as defined by Berelson (1952), is "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications" (p.74). A powerful data reduction research tool, content analysis focuses on content and the internal features of various types of communications media. Procedures of content analysis include coding text, breaking it down into manageable segments, and then performing an analysis on the data. Lastly, the researcher makes inferences based upon the analysis (de Sola Pool, 1959). The method of content analysis has become more credible and more frequently used due to advances in computer technology (Hahn, 2008).

Automated text analysis is usually performed on the data set extensively at the initial stages of the study using word frequency techniques to rank and sort the data (Hahn, 2008). Thereafter, as the volume of data was substantially reduced, word groups and categories were constructed. Particular attention to category development and definition was given, as these two elements of content analysis are vital to the utility of the method. Two major flaws that could occur in the utility of the content analysis method include the faulty definition of categories and the setting up of categories which are exhaustive and/or non-mutually exclusive (Stemler, 2001). It was my intention to avoid those flaws in category development.

The process of development for the automated text analysis in the present study consisted of seven steps. The steps were as follows: (a) cleaning the data;

(b) performing the first frequency analysis; (c) developing a stop list; (d) determining word groups; (e) performing the second frequency analysis for word groups; (f) developing categories from the series of word groups; and (g) making and developing inferences based upon the analysis of the categories in the data set.

Step 1. Cleaning the Data

Teacher responses were downloaded from the EFM Community survey software into a Microsoft word document file, identified as rich text format. The rtf files were the only types of files accepted by the qualitative data analysis software program, MAXqda (2007). Before the frequency analysis was performed, all documents were corrected for spelling mistakes, and the documents with symbols or other characters were made to be uniform throughout. For example, all references to September 11 were changed to 9/11, and all references to in-service were corrected with the appropriate dash inserted.

Step 2. Frequency Analysis for Single Words

Once the files were cleaned, they were grouped by question topics which were importance, belief, legal, preparation, and diversity. A question referring to diversity was included into the qualitative survey because I believed that teachers‘ thoughts regarding religious diversity was necessary and relevant to the present study. Each question was allotted its own content analysis process

based upon the topic of the answers given. Using the word frequency feature in MAXqda, a list of high-frequency words was generated for each question topic. A screen shot in Figure 2 shows a portion of the list of words that resulted.

Word	Word length	Frequency
yes	3	818
world	5	425
islam	5	365
students	8	356
religion	8	322
about	5	304
religions	9	274
understand	10	269
i	1	226
important	9	227
all	3	213
not	3	169
because	7	167
they	4	163
learn	5	159
should	6	156
have	4	145
history	7	142
major	5	137
understanding	13	137
people	6	132
other	5	126
their	5	118
muslims	7	117
one	3	112
many	4	111
need	4	104
our	3	99

Figure 2. Word frequency list for the topic, Importance of Islam.

Step 3. Determining the High-Frequency Word/Word Group Cutoff

In order to maintain consistency with the original study of the hybrid approach, the high-frequency words were calculated on a per-participant basis. A cutoff range of .10 word/word group incidence rate or higher per participant was designated to indicate high-frequency word/word groups. The per-participant method was chosen over the standard method of total number of participants' words because participants usually vary in the quantity of their writing. Each of the five questions in the RPEI short answer survey yielded approximately 1,065 to 1,071 participant responses for each question. Those responses varied from simple "yes" or "no" responses to answers written in full paragraph form. By using the per-participant frequency, the differences in writing techniques from short answer to essay style was minimized. For example, the first question pertaining to Importance of Islam, yielded the word *history* 142 times. The question was answered by a total of 1065 participants. So, the average per-participant frequency for *history* was 142 / 1065 = 0.13, which is above the .10 cutoff. Ultimately, the .10 cutoff designated a frequency rate of 105 words or more, meaning, all words that were mentioned by a total of 105 participants or more were designated as high-frequency words.

Step 4. Go Words, Stop Words

Once the word frequency lists were created, lists of key words were developed. These functions in the MAXqda (2007) program are referred to as the "go list" and the "stop list." The go list consisted of words that were only used in

the analysis. For example, if one searched the details of the word *teach* from the frequency list, the program would only output the actual word *teach* but not *teacher* or *instructor*. Alternately, the stop list works just the opposite way. These were words which were frequently used but had minimal value in analyzing the data. The stop list consisted of the following high-frequency articles, verbs, and pronouns such as *the, that, are, my, on, for, with, do, an, this, what,* and *has.* A screen shot in Figure 3 shows the stop list in MAXqda (2007).

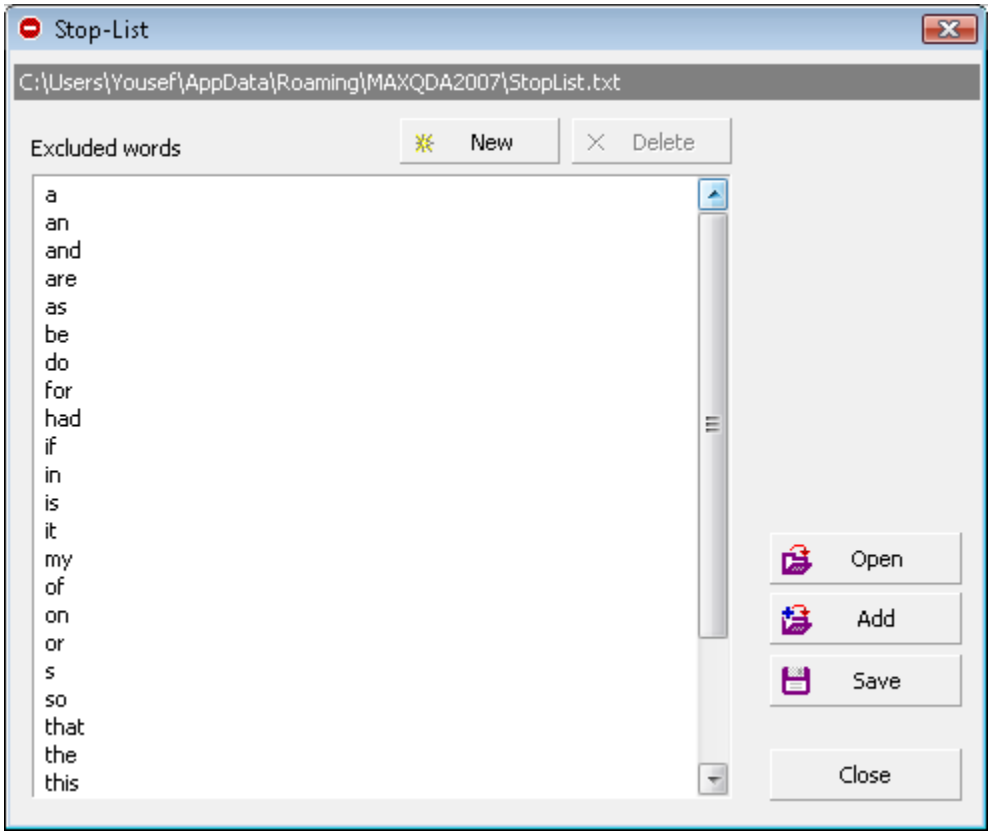

Figure 3. Stop-list in MAXqda.

Step. 5. Establishing Word Groups

An important step to establish word groups is to take the words in the go list and sort them according to their appropriate word groups. The text retrieval

function in the MAXqda program provided an informative key word in context (KWIC) analysis showing the commonalities of various words. This function was performed for all of the go words. For example, the key word *understand* could be expressed as other terms within teachers‘ responses. One teacher might indicate an *understanding* while another teacher might use the word *learn*. However, all these word variations were used within the context of *understand*. These word groups were placed in categories based on similarity. A screen shot in Figure 4 shows the text retrieval of the key word *understand*.

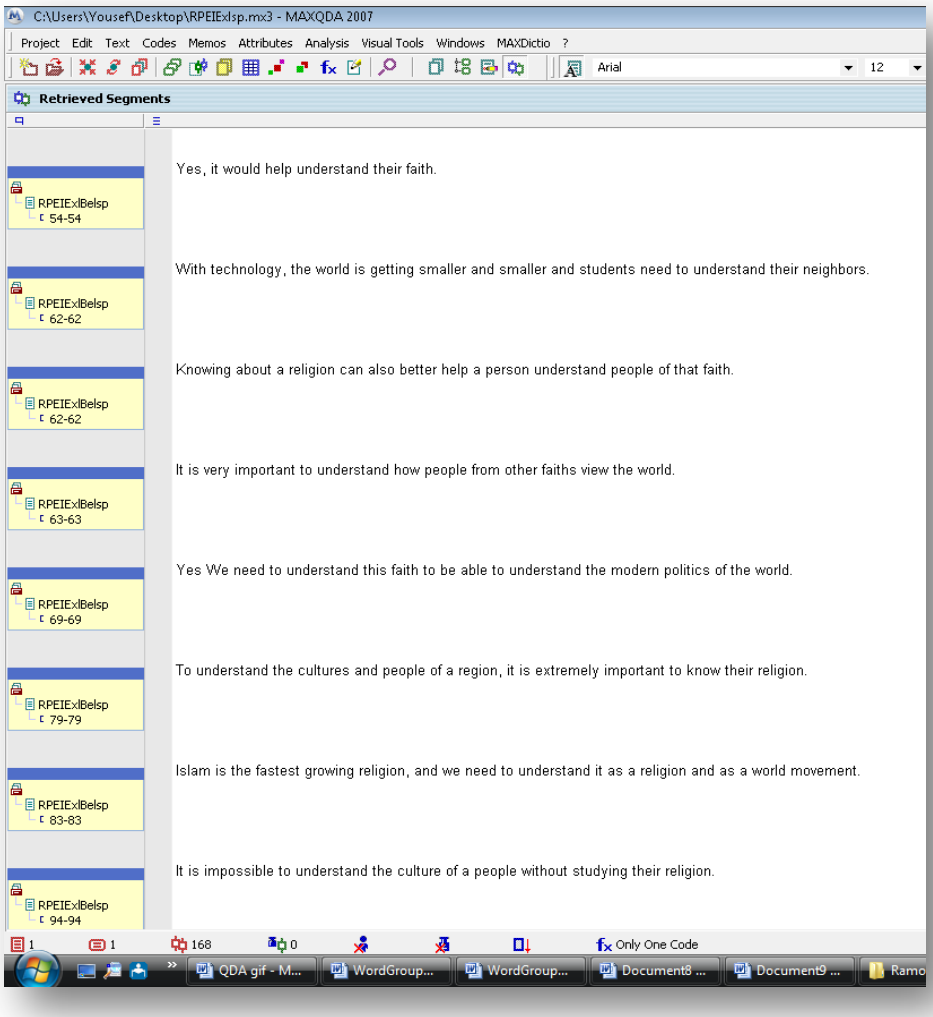

Figure 4. Key word in context feature in MAXqda for *understand*

Step 6. Frequency for Word Groups

After the categories for the word groups were generated, the total list for the frequencies of those word groups was created. For example, once the key word *understand* was grouped with *understanding* and *learn*, the aggregate total for that category was produced. By using the Maxdicto dictionary feature in the MAXqda (2007) program, each word in each category was searched regarding frequency, and the number of uses was totaled.

Step 7. Developing Inferences

Developing the final inferences based on the categories in the data set was a multi-step process. Generally, to overview the previous six steps, the process began with cleaning the data, conducting the word frequency analysis for each topic, determining a word frequency cutoff figure, establishing a list of stop words and go words, establishing common word groups or categories, and, finally, establishing the frequency for the word groups.

The final inferences were based on the final word group frequency along with the manual and well as automated key word in context (KWIC) functions. For example, in the last questions referring to diversity in religion, *not*, usually not a go word, was queried because of its frequency to determine the words used in association with it. The results indicated that *not* was associated with ~~n~~not unique," or ~~n~~not different," or "religion not an aspect of diversity." So, inferences were made based on frequencies, and these frequencies informed the researcher‘s conclusions about the teachers‘ final statements.

The following tables and explanations provide an analysis for each topic question along with the word group categories for each. The percentages in the following pie charts represented each word group in relation to final word group development for each topic.

The following excerpts are derived directly from the short-answer questions presented to Florida‘s in-service social studies teachers. Further, the excerpts were chosen based upon the overall teachers‘ representations of the responses. Because all teachers‘ identities were anonymous, no speakers are identified. There were five short answer questions presented to all teachers. For illustration, each question has a table listing the words with the highest frequency, and each question also has a pie chart with the percentage of words as the sum of all total words.

Table 25

Word and Word Groups for Qualitative Question 1.

Word	Grouping
World	religion, religions, all, other, people
Islam	major, Muslims
Students	understand, learn, world history, understanding

Note. The response *yes* was provided by a total 818 survey participants.

The first question of the survey yielded the lengthiest and the richest teachers‘ responses. Teachers felt very strongly that it was important for students to learn about Islam and Muslims. A word frequency search of the word *yes* resulted in a total of 818 hits out of a total of 1,071 total participants. The words

no or *undecided* did not make the cutoff of 10% criterion for word usage in the final analysis and therefore were not included in the final analysis. Based upon teachers‘ responses to the first question, there was an overwhelming positive response to the feeling that it is important for students to learn about Islam.

Listed in Table 25 are three categories which make up the majority of teachers‘ answers regarding the importance of teaching about religion. The categories of world, Islam, and students were prevalent. Teachers not only felt that students should learn about Islam, but that students should learn about all the world‘s religions. The first category of world encompasses the majority of teachers‘ responses that world religions are important and have value in academic settings. Overall, teachers felt that people of other world religious faiths and beliefs were important additions to classroom instruction. The following is a representative response.

> Islam is the religious faith of a billion people, one-sixth of Earth's population. Add to that the misunderstandings before leading up to and after 9/11, as well as our nation's involvement in two wars - both in predominantly Muslim countries - it is critical that American students have at least a basic knowledge of Islam, one that has not been twisted and distorted by those with their own agenda. There are presently more people who practice some form of Islam in America than there are in a number of "Muslim" nations. In my experience, American children have an alarming lack of knowledge about Islam, coupled with an alarming amount of misinformation. As democracy depends on an informed electorate, it is vital that this area not be neglected.

Islam was the second most prevalent category cited within the importance topic question. Teachers stated that because Islam was a —major” and —growing” religion, the mere history of Islam itself as well as its large number of Muslim followers warranted its characterization as an important subject for students to

learn about. Another representative response cited the number of Muslims as well as the current political climate as a reason to study it.

> Yes - At the very least, because it is a major world religion. Beyond that, it is a religion that occupies a very large place in the American conscientiousness [*sic*] but is mostly misunderstood, by even those who would call themselves knowledgeable. The discussion of Islam in America is detoured to discussions of geopolitics of Muslims, with no real discussion of the Muslim faith. Because of the generally low level of understanding, this unifies the tenets of politics (often radical) and the faith as one, when they are merely coincident.

Students was the third most prevalent topic indicated in the teachers‘ responses. It is also another direct response to the question of importance of students learning about Islam. Teachers indicated that it was important that students have an understanding about Islam and Muslims as these topics are relevant in the course of today‘s current events. Islam was also noted as being relevant in the context of world history, as indicated by one responding teacher.

> I think that the more knowledge students have, the better they are able to understand the Islamic culture. Our children in Miami have many Islamic classmates and they accept them with open arms. However, when the word Islamic comes up, they don't realize the connection and show negativism. I do not allow this attitude to prevail. It's a teachable moment and I take advantage of it. I feel this is extremely important.

Most surveyed teachers used words (47%) to respond that it is important for students to learn about Islam, as well as about all religions of other people. This was followed by the second most prevalent reason (33%), which is that it benefits the students in their learning. Thirdly, it is important because Islam (20%) is a major religion. Figure 5 illustrates the three major high frequency word groups which represent the three major categories of the teachers‘ responses.

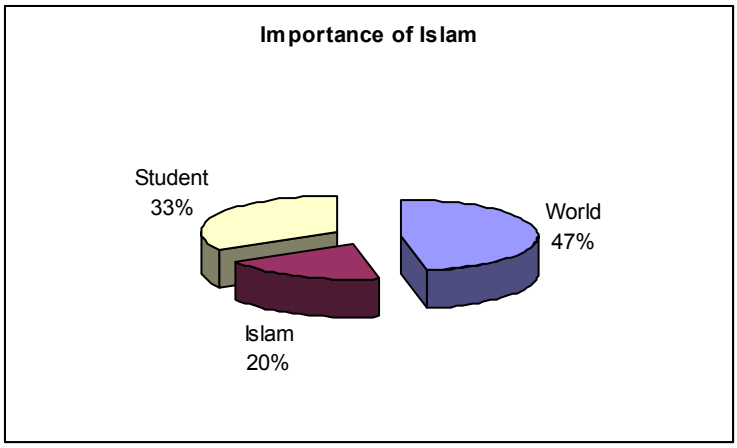

Figure 5. Importance of Islam word group percentages

Table 26 shows the word and word groupings which resulted from the frequency tabulations for the question referring to Beliefs of Teaching about Islam. Teachers believed that because Islam is a world religion, it was important for students to know about.

Table 26

Word and Word Groups for Qualitative Question 2.

Word	Grouping
World	religion, religions, all
Islam	curriculum, world history, other, only, social studies
Students	teach, teachers, understand

Note. The word *yes* was counted 665 times, the word *no* 117 times.

The second question in the survey pertaining to the belief that teachers should actually teach students about Islam yielded a slightly reduced level of enthusiasm. Although the majority of responses indicated *yes* with 665

responses to117 responses for *no*, there was some difference in opinions. This question provided the same categories as the first question with slightly different reasons reflected the in word groups. Table 26 refers to that specific word group category.

The first category, world, mirrored the response to the first question. Teachers felt that students should have knowledge of all world religions; and, because Islam is a major world religion, it is appropriate for teachers to discuss it.

> Yes. I teach world cultures and give students a basic view of Islam as well as the other world religions. With technology, the world is getting smaller and smaller and students need to understand their neighbors. The media puts forth stereotypical views of people that are not realistic views and the more students know, the better they can view each person regardless of religion as an individual. Knowing about a religion can also better help a person understand people of that faith.

However, the second category, Islam, was grouped with similar curricular aspects of instruction. This link appeared to occur because the key word in context (KWIC) function associated similar responses with curriculum such as *history* and *social studies*. The word *world* was used twice in reference to world religion and world history. Although world religion was used most often, its association with the phrase —world history" could not be discounted. This association was in line with teachers‘ responses that indicated that Islam should only be taught within the context of history and social studies, as one responding teacher indicated.

> In order to understand the historical foundations of the Western Civilization, it is impossible not to talk about the Islamic achievements and contributions to the world. Those achievements are constantly being omitted in history classes. After all, there might be no algebra, no Renaissance, etc. without the Muslims.

Interestingly, the majority of the *no* responders indicated that teachers should not teach about Islam unless it was in the context of social studies. Many of these teachers‘ responses also noted that if a teacher taught about Islam, s/he should have to teach other religions as well. An example of such a response is evident in the following statement.

> Not necessarily. If such teaching is part of the logical curriculum of a subject, then yes, teachers should teach about Islam and other religions. If the subject area does not call for such teaching, then no effort should be taken to teach about any religion.

The third category, students, simply reflected teachers‘ concerns about teaching for understanding, and that students know and understand about the world around them. The following excerpt reflects the teacher‘s concern for the students‘ well-being while handling the responsibility of a controversial subject.

> Absolutely, but qualified. As with all public education, there is an appropriate time and place for discussing controversial issues. At the appropriate place in the approved curriculum a teacher should feel comfortable teaching about any religion's development, expansion, and influences throughout the world. After all, as educators we are supposed to provide both rigorous and relevant learning- what could be more rigorous or relevant than studying a topic that is so prevalent in the media and in current conflicts throughout the world. Moreover, there is a significant distinction between teaching about a religion and teaching faith. Educators should feel comfortable teaching equally about all religions and should refer all questions of faith to the student's parents and/or religious leaders.

Although the responding teachers did indicate that efforts should be put forth to teach students about Islam, the response was not as enthusiastic as the response to the first question. This is evident in the reduced number of *yes* answers, which totaled 665, and the inclusion of 117 *no* answers. Figure 6 shows the percentages of the three high frequency word groups found in the responses

to the questions regarding beliefs of teaching about Islam. Primarily, responding teachers used wording (42%) to indicate that all religions should be taught about and that Islam (35%) was a relevant subject in their social studies curriculum.

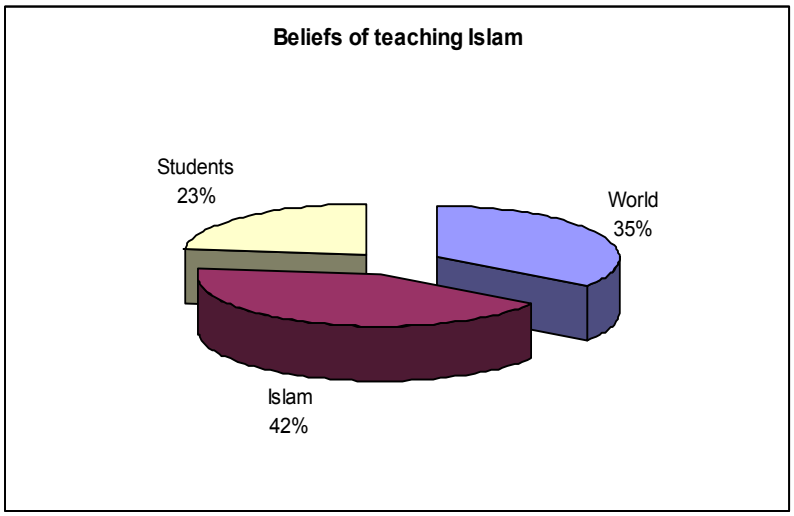

Figure 6. —Teaching beliefs" about Islam word group percentages.

The third question in the survey regarding a teacher's legal authority to instruct about religion brought out quite a few rich responses. Table 27 shows the responses to the legal question. With 668 *yes* responses and 168 *no* responses, the majority of teachers felt legally obliged to teach about Islam, though under very strict guidelines.

Table 27

Word and Word Groups for Qualitative Question 3.

Word	Grouping
Teach	students, teaching, legal authority
Religion	world, Islam, religions
History	curriculum, world history, social study

Note. The word *yes* was counted 688 times, the word *no* 168 times.

The first category of teach referred to a duty that the teacher has to instruct all students on the required subject matter. And, because Islam, a major world religion, was legally required for instruction by state curriculum, teachers were more than willing to teach about it. There were also indicators that they taught about other major world religions, since the word *all* appeared as a repeated theme. One teacher‘s response represented the majority who responded positively to this third question.

> Of course I do. I have the academic liberty to teach about any subject that is included in my curriculum. Certainly all the world's major religions have contributed to world civilization. Students cannot begin to understand the major forces that have shaped world civilization without understanding the basic tenets and history of all the world's major religions.

The second category of religion is a repeated pattern with associated words of *world, Islam, religions, other,* and *major*. The significance of Islam included the fact that it is a major world religion and that, while teaching it, the teacher must remain fair and unbiased. This concept of remaining balanced and impartial was also a repeated theme among the responding teachers, as indicated in the following response.

> I believe I have the legal authority to teach world religions in a general/comparative way. It is in an effort to establish a general understanding of the major world religions and how they have affected/contributed to world history. Human actions cannot be separated from their motivations and religion has a fundamental effect on human behavior. Islam is part of this. The study of these religions, in middle school, is often the first exposure that students have to religions other than their own. As long as teachers keep to the facts (the principles of a religion) without putting in their own interpretation, they are legally safe from litigation.

The third category of history is another repeated pattern stemming from the second question; however, it appears more prevalent in the question about

legal standing. Those teachers who answered *yes* readily pointed out that the Florida state curriculum standards included teaching about Islam and that the subject was documented in their textbooks. The repeated themes of history and historical were evident as teachers stated the appropriate context in which to teach about Islam, particularly within the context of world history classes. Also a final repeated theme from the previous questions was that religion, and particularly Islam, should be taught within the context of social studies.

> I do have the legal authority to teach students about Islam because I am certified by the state of Florida to teach world history and it is impossible to teach World History without discussing the 5 major religions. Also, I do not demand students to believe or accept what I am teaching them, they just need to understand why it is the way it is.

Some teachers were very direct in documenting the appropriate social studies standards they use, for example,

> …s.s.a.2.4.6 understand features of the theological and cultural conflicts between the Muslim world and Christendom and the resulting religious, political, and economic…

Some of the explanations from teachers who responded *no* to this question were quite candid. The reason for some negative responses included the teacher‘s not having adequate knowledge to teach about Islam.

> I do not think you can teach what you don't know. So much of [*sic*] is sort of hard to learn that in a book. I think we can just encourage understanding of others and look for the good in people. Teachers that have the opportunity to travel and learn firsthand about other cultures can do a better job of sharing that firsthand knowledge.

Still other *no* responses demonstrated an overall uncertainty or fear about ways to approach the subject of teaching about religion (Islam). One fear was associated with job security.

> I have no idea what I am allowed to teach about religion. I have no clue where the line is for explaining the faith in the context of my lesson, its historical reference, and discussing current events around the world. I want to answer students‘ questions, but I also want to keep my job.

Another fear was associated with legal repercussions as a result of teaching a sensitive subject.

> Honestly I do not fully understand how much I am allowed to teach or even speak about religion in the classroom. I have heard colleagues say ~~-d~~on‘t even go there at all” because of the legal issues involved.

It is possible that some teachers‘ fears were not without some foundation. It is also possible that the culture of a given school can implicitly influence a teacher to be apprehensive about teaching a given subject. An example of a *no* response from a teacher attempting to complete a lesson on teaching about Islam is illustrated in the following statement.

> No - I tried to present a basic overview of the five major religions of the world to my middle school students (very basic, because my knowledge is very limited). I presented Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism without difficulty, but was stopped by district administration when I got to Islam. A parent had complained that I was over-emphasizing the Muslim beliefs but, at that point, I had only presented information about the *geography* of the Arabian area - I hadn't even begun the religion section.

Figure 7 shows the word frequencies which were prevalent for the legal aspects of teaching about Islam. Prominent high frequency word groups are religion at 36%, teach at 33%, and history at 31%. This particular word grouping indicated that surveyed teachers did believe that they had legal standing to teach about Islam as it was a part of their content curriculum.

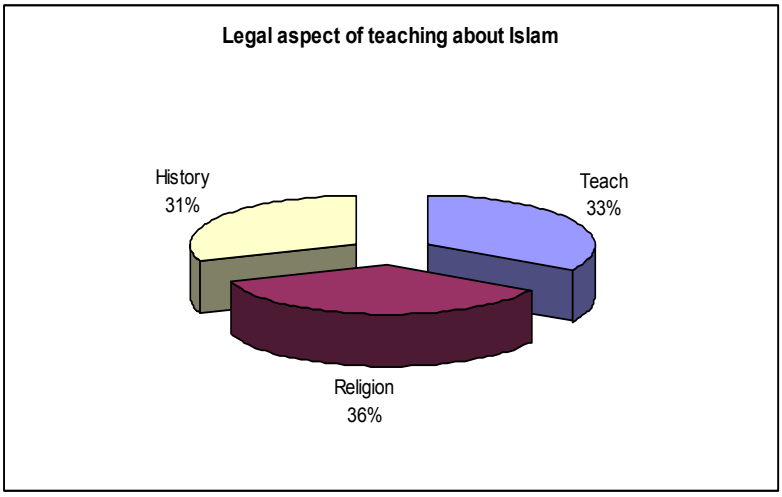

Figure 7. —Legal" aspects of teaching about Islam word group percentages

The next question asked teachers about their preparation for teaching about Islam. Table 28 shows the words and word groups for that response. Some inconsistencies were evident which emerged in the responses.

Table 28

Word and Word Groups for Qualitative Question 4.

Word	Grouping
Islam	religion, religions
Personal	preparation, teach, students
Formal	classes, world history, college

Note. The word *no* was counted 113 times, the word *none* 125 times, and the word *not* 151 times.

Table 28 shows the distribution for the teacher preparation question. Teachers‘ responses were listed in a series of practices and experiences describing their preparations for teaching about religion, particularly Islam. The three categories were sorted and ranked in the following way: Islam, personal

preparation, and formal preparation. The negative responses reported in the table show the frequency of teachers‘ responses that they were not formally prepared to teach about Islam.

Teachers generally expressed the belief that they were not adequately prepared to teach about religion, particularly the Islamic religion. Many stated that, as a result of world affairs and events, they had undertaken a personal quest to read about, study, and research the particulars of the religion on their own. An oft-repeated theme in this section was that teachers had also tried to learn from their students if a Muslim student attended the class. Teachers also indicated that they learned about Islam as they taught the subject. Ultimately, the personal preparation for the study of Islam took many forms, as reported by a teacher in the following response.

> Personally, I have taken a few courses in African history and Middle Eastern history that has given me a good background in world religions. I don't consider myself an expert by any means, but I do believe that I am well equipped to instruct, or to at least impart factual religious information. I have taught long enough and in enough social studies classes that I have taught major religions (global studies classes) and I have explained the beliefs held by members of those religions. The teaching materials I have used in the past have always taught -- bottom line -- that tolerance and understanding is the key to bringing up peaceful and accepting young people. I will investigate on my own if needed to answer questions students have.

Still other methods of personal preparation involved efforts by teachers which took them beyond the classroom, as reported by a teacher in the following excerpt.

> I have studied Islam on my own, over the past decade. I have also attended a NEH workshop that discussed the religions of Judaism and Islam at the University of Florida (Gainesville, FL). I have also attended a mosque and have taken my students to a mosque on a fieldtrip. I have

> taught comparative religions at my high school, and Islam is one of the major units that were discussed. I also teach about the rise of Islam in the context of post-ancient/early-modern history.

Regarding formal instruction, the majority of responses stated that teachers learned about Islam in college while taking world history classes. Most teachers admitted to no formal training or preparation in religions, especially Islam. Some teachers indicated that they took a world religions class in college, as indicated in the following response.

> When I was in college I took a world religions course. That was over 40 years ago and I don't remember a great deal of the detail. There were many terms in this survey that I have never heard.

One teacher wrote about the purpose of taking world religion classes in the past:

> During the 60‘s and 70‘s, in schools of education you took religion only if you planned to teach religion. The schools were not yet doing anything much with diversity. I have gained most of my knowledge through personal research.

Some teachers stated that multicultural classes discussed religion in generalities. However, one teacher wrote that,

> Even having a master degree in religious education I can‘t say I‘m qualified to teach Islam to my students.

Figure 8 illustrates the word group frequencies for preparation. Formal preparation is slightly higher, at 34%, than the personal preparation scale, which shows 30%. Most teachers readily indicated that although formal instruction was enlisted, religion was discussed as an aspect of diversity and culture, and not necessarily as a course of academic study.

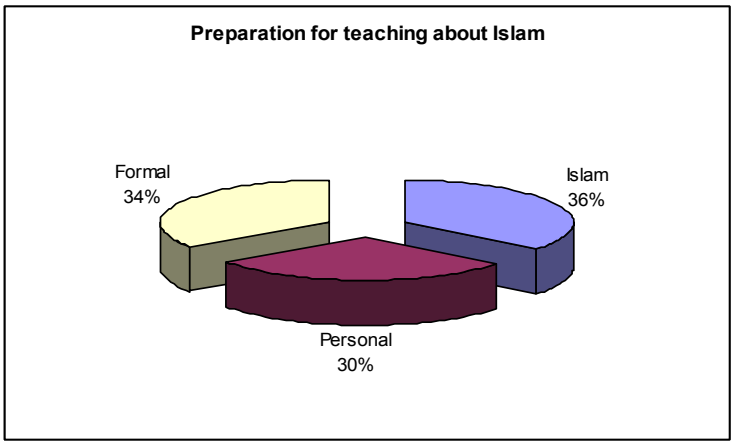

Figure 8. Preparation for teaching about Islam word group percentages

The last question presented to teachers involved diversity and how they felt about the religious diversity of Muslim students. Table 29 shows the words and word group for that question.

Table 29

Word and Word Groups for Qualitative Question 5.

Word	Grouping
Students	all, student, learning, learners
Not	diversity, unique, important, different,
Religious	religion, Muslim

Note: The word *yes* was counted 366 times, the word *no* was counted 220 times.

Table 29 refers the question regarding student religious diversity. Teachers answered this last question also in varied ways. Nevertheless, there were 366 direct *yes* responses and 220 direct *no* responses. There was an overall belief that all students are diverse. However, there was some indication that religion was not an aspect of student diversity. The reason that the word *not* was included as an important word in the analysis was due to the frequency of its

use in association with the words *diversity* and *student,* as indicated in the following response.

> Cultural differences always affect a person‘s education in terms of the knowledge and experiences, as well as their interests and biases in class. I do not think that a particular religious background impedes or promotes learning, but culture sensitivity should be a focus for teachers. I also like to have my students consider any of the stereotypes that they have relating to specific religions and cultures before a unit (privately, not shared) and then I have them reflect upon these ideas afterward to determine if their beliefs have changed or if they feel more informed about the group that was studied.

A very poignant answer appeared in the following response:

> To address your example, no, I don‘t believe that Muslim students (or Hindu for that matter) have characteristics that cause them to learn differently than Christian students. But you have touched on a subject I feel strongly about. I believe that students should be taught to be tolerant and understanding, but I have a problem with celebrating diversity. When we emphasize —diversity” we are by definition emphasizing our differences not our similarities. Diversity tends to divide and set us apart from one another; it is the opposite of unity. In order to get along we must focus on the things that we have in common. Diversity is a fact, but as long as that is where we place our attention, we will never get beyond the things that divide us.

There was some uncertainty about the way student diversity was perceived, as evidenced in the teachers‘ responses. Some teachers stated that a student‘s learning ability was not affected by his or her religion but that it was affected by a student‘s culture. Teachers also stated that students were unique and different with respect to personalities and other personal characteristics; but that religion or religious beliefs were not an element of student diversity. Overall, the feeling expressed was that religion was not an important aspect of student diversity but that student diversity was significant in terms of student learning and dealing with student learners. Nevertheless, the majority of the teachers stated

that all students were diverse. The following response represents that perspective.

> Absolutely. Every student has a unique background, whether it be ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, or gender. Do Muslim students have a collective identity? No more or less than Christian students have a collective identity and learning style. However, there are some things that shape a Muslim student‘s worldview. There is also an additional cultural awareness that a teacher of Muslim students must possess. For instance, if teaching a classroom filled with Muslim students, perhaps it would be wise of a female teacher to dress conservatively, thus demonstrating awareness of the Muslim beliefs regarding female appearances; or if there is an activity with food, not bringing in pizza with pepperoni thus demonstrating awareness of the Muslim dietary restrictions preventing the consumption of pork products. This is not necessarily agreeing with or personally practicing those beliefs, but more about demonstrating an understanding of and respect for your students as individuals. Being an educator is about knowing how to reach your students- all of your students, including the Muslim ones.

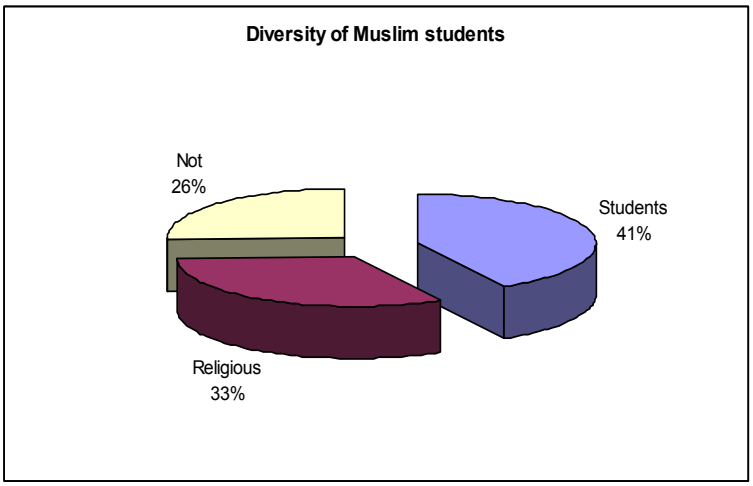

Figure 9. Religious diversity word group percentages.

Figure 9 shows the word group frequencies for the student diversity question. As previously noted, *not,* at 41%, is a word frequently mentioned in teacher‘s responses indicating that religious diversity is not a significant aspect of student diversity. The majority of teachers did state that all students were

diverse, although when asked about religious attributes of students, they felt that religion was not a significant aspect of student learning.

As a conclusion to the data analysis and, to provide additional specific information about quantities in specific word groups, a category map is displayed in Figure 10. The map gives a visual image of each topic question with a listing of the three word groups represented. The diagram for all categories of the survey open-ended questions is itemized, including all word frequencies for all five topics. The percentages, as previously stated, represent the frequency that the words in a particular word group were mentioned by survey participants. For example, in reference to the first category of Importance, the word *world,* and the associated words in that group make up 47% of teachers‘ responses when answering that Importance question. Furthermore, the word *world* was frequently associated with the words *religion, religions, all, other* and *people*. So, when teachers were asked about the importance of teaching students about Islam, the majority of responses were *yes* because it is a world religion(s), a religion of the world, other world religions, other people of the world and frequently, they stated that all world religions should be taught. Word group titles have larger word frequencies as they were extracted from the top, or very near the top, of the word frequency list.

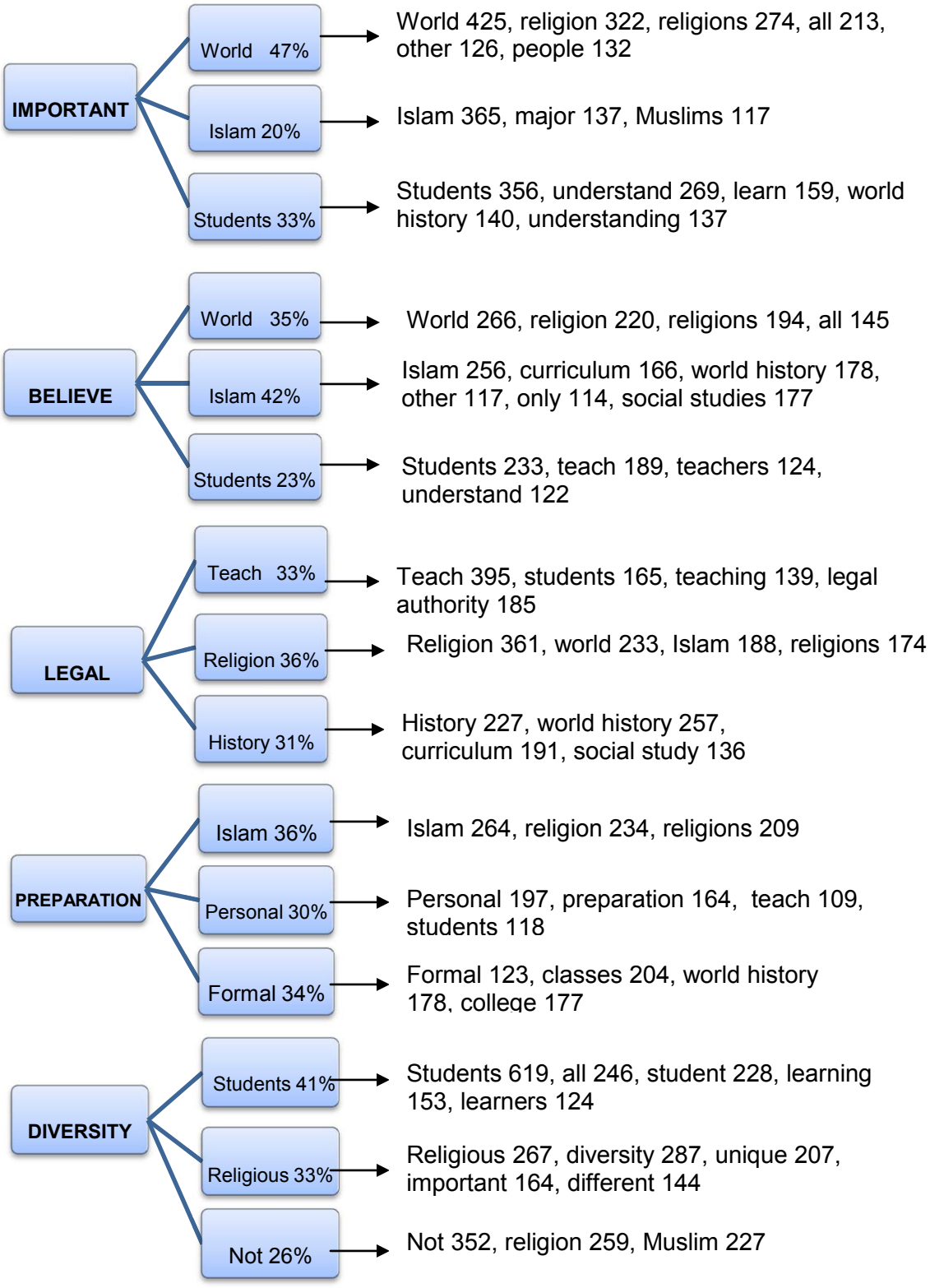

Figure 10. Numeric values for all category word groups.

Concluding Statement

The previously mentioned data types, the Attitude Survey, the Knowledge Survey and the data from the short-answer qualitative questions, comprehensively frame the discussion for the final chapter of the present study. However an overall synopsis of, first, the Attitude Survey indicates that surveyed teachers felt favorably about teaching about religion within the context of their curriculum. Second, even though there was a favorable attitude towards teaching about religion, teachers appeared to lack the general knowledge necessary to perform the required instruction, based upon the Knowledge Survey administered. Third, there was no general distinction or opposition to teaching about Islam as opposed to teaching about other religions as long as there was an instructional purpose to be served. However, there was unexpected data in the excerpts of the qualitative data which surfaced regarding religious diversity and religiously diverse students, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

A side issue should be clarified: no assumptions were made regarding priority of data type. Although the quantitative data has been presented first, it was the qualitative data that was first processed and analyzed. This procedure was a recommendation made by my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Marcia Lamkin, and I believe it to have been a well-advised one. By analyzing the qualitative data first, I was able to identify the initial reactions of teacher participants to the short-answer questions without being influenced by predetermined results from the quantitative survey. Qualitative data in mixed methods research has traditionally been used to (a) determine if qualitative data confirmed the quantitative results

and, (b) elaborate and expand on the quantitative outcomes (Creswell et. al., 2006). This present study has included the later two research strategies.

The following results and discussion of analysis therefore combines both types of research data, qualitative and quantitative, to form a mixed-methods research study which comprehensively answers the original research questions:

1) What do teachers believe about teaching about religion in public school?
2) What do teachers know about teaching about religion in public school?
3) What to teachers believe about teaching about Islam in public school?
4) What do teachers know about teaching about Islam in public school?

Chapter Five:

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to examine the beliefs, knowledge, and preparation of in-service social studies teachers regarding teaching about religion and teaching specifically about the Islamic religion. This study is one of the very few that address the ways that in-service teachers deal with religions in the classroom, particularly one religion with which many are unfamiliar. It is this researcher‘s hope that other researchers interested in examining specific denominations will propose similar inquiries.

This chapter reports on the study‘s results, findings, research implications, and conclusions. The results of the study‘s four research questions will also be discussed. Some of the resulting data were acquired in quantitative format and another portion of the data was gathered in qualitative format. Nevertheless, it became apparent early on in the research that the study focused on two primary components: teachers‘ beliefs and teachers‘ knowledge. Teachers‘ beliefs were appropriately measured by the Attitude Survey and teachers‘ knowledge were measured by the Knowledge Survey. Additionally, in order to examine those two components within the context of the specific religion of Islam, the five open-ended, qualitative questions were asked of every participant.

Therefore, to facilitate a thorough discussion of the findings and results, and in keeping with the mixed-methods format of the present study, I will discuss

the four research questions according to the aforementioned two components; teachers‘ beliefs and teachers‘ knowledge.

Teachers‘ Beliefs

What do teachers believe about teaching about religion in public school?

The Attitude Survey within the Religion and Public Education Inventory (Harris-Ewing, 1999) provided an inclusive look at the beliefs of the surveyed population of teachers on the issue of teaching about religion. For the most part, it was the descriptive findings which served to answer the first research question regarding those teachers‘ beliefs. Overwhelmingly, the surveyed teachers believed that the subject of religion was important and that it was a necessary component to being a well educated individual. They felt that teachers should expect for religion to be discussed within the classroom and that religious influences and themes crossed over into the arts, music, history, and contemporary society. Furthermore, teacher respondents appeared to be well versed on the premise that teaching about religion, a permitted form of instruction in schools, is completely different than teaching religion, a violation of the First Amendment. Overall, responding teachers believed that they should be prepared to teach about religion as it occurs naturally in the school‘s curriculum.

The data which demonstrated this result were found in the Attitude Survey. The overall mean for the questions for Importance of Religion was 1.6 (11.19/7). The overall mean per the question regarding Teaching Beliefs was 1.8 (10.88/6). On a scale of 1 through 5 (one for strongly agree and five for strongly

disagree), the reported attitude of Florida's in-service social studies teachers showed that they agree and strongly agree that religion should be taught about in school. In addition, even more teachers feel that religion was "important" within the context of learning in an educational environment. Table 30 shows the mean scores for each sub-component of respondent teachers' attitudes.

Table 30

Attitude Survey Subcomponents (*N* = 1,054)

Sub-components	Number Questions	Min	Max	*M*	**M/ question*	*SD*
Preparation	6	6.00	30.00	17.86	2.98	4.93
Importance of Religion	7	7.00	28.00	11.20	1.60	3.15
Teaching Beliefs	6	6.00	27.00	10.88	1.81	3.87
Sum of 19 Scores	19	19	80	39.93	2.10	8.32

**Note.* 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree

Furthermore, using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, a strong correlation resulted between the two variables "importance of religion" and "teaching beliefs" ($r = .52$, $p < .001$). This correlation indicated that the more important teachers thought that teaching about religion was, the more likely they were to believe that teaching and learning about religion should occur in the learning environment.

Based upon the quantitative results from the Attitude Survey and the results using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, the majority of Florida's in-service social studies teachers positively affirmed the importance of

religion. Teachers also overwhelmingly held positive teaching beliefs regarding the actual teaching about religion in schools.

What do teachers believe about teaching about Islam in public school?

There were two qualitative participant questions that were very useful for answering the questions which focused on teachers' beliefs about teaching about Islam. Two research questions were presented to teachers which asked about their attitudes regarding beliefs. Both of the questions were useful in answering this second research question. Those two questions were:

11) Do you feel that it is important for public school students to learn about Islam? If yes or no, please explain why.

12) Do you believe that teachers should make efforts to teach students about Islam? If yes or no, please explain why.

The results of the content analysis for these two participant questions revealed some interesting attitudes and comments. Regarding question number 11, which refers to the "importance" of learning about Islam, the majority of surveyed teacher respondents stated that learning about Islam was important for students. The reasons teachers indicated in their explanations were because "Islam is a major world religion," so "students understand current events," and that "students know people of other beliefs or faiths." Also, the word *yes* was counted a total of 818 times in response to question number one. A total of 1071 teachers responded to the question. Undoubtedly, the majority of the teachers

believed that religion, particularly Islam, was an important subject to discuss in the classroom.

Regarding participant question number 12, which asked teachers if they believed efforts should be made to teach about Islam, the responses were mostly positive. Here the word *yes* was counted 665 times and *no* answers were counted 117 times. Although the majority of teachers believed that they should teach about Islam, as well as all of the other major religions, caution seemed to prevail over a blanket affirmation of the task. Teachers were careful to indicate that the teaching of any religion should be within the context of the required curriculum content and subject area (in this case social studies classes).

Do the qualitative results confirm or refute the quantitative results?

Based upon the data from the RPEI survey instrument, the qualitative data confirmed the quantitative results for teachers‘ beliefs. Teachers indicated both in the Attitude Survey and in the designated qualitative questions which referred to teachers‘ attitudes that they agreed, and sometimes strongly agreed, that religion, including the religion of Islam, was is an important subject to teach about in schools. The majority of teachers also believed that religion, and particularly Islam, should be taught in schools and that generally teachers should expect to teach about religion because knowledge about religion was a necessary component of being a well-educated person.

Overall, there were no differences in the results between teachers‘ beliefs about teaching about religion and teachers‘ beliefs about teaching about Islam.

Both types of data, the qualitative data and the quantitative data, generally reflected the same outcome. It should be noted that there were some negative comments about teaching about Islam and about Islam overall, however those comments were not numerous enough to exceed the frequency cutoff of 10% of the participants, so ultimately they were not reported results.

Teachers‘ Knowledge

What do teachers know about teaching about religion in public school?

The Knowledge Survey of the RPEI also provided ample descriptive data to assess teachers‘ knowledge about religion and religious issues in public schools. As indicated in chapter 4, the teacher respondents who took the Knowledge Survey averaged a total grade of 66% overall. On the grading scale used by Florida public schools, this percentage would amount to a D grade.

Overall, teachers were unable correctly to identify the characteristics of the major world‘s religions, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Interestingly though, teachers were better versed on other world religions and legal issues. The reason for this disparity remains unclear although a speculation could be made about whether the number of questions made a difference in the result.

In a closer analysis illustrated in Table 31, the mean result per question provided a more accurate comparison of the resulting scores. Legal Issues resulted in a mean per question item of .69 (3.46/5), with Judaism at .63 (1.90/3), Christianity at .59 (2.38/4), Islam at .62 (1.86/3), and Other World Religions at .71 (3.59/5). Therefore, according to the Knowledge Survey in the RPEI, and

according to descriptive data based on teachers‘ responses using mean per question, the majority of the surveyed Florida social studies teachers demonstrated the least knowledge about Christianity, and they demonstrated the most knowledge about Other World Religions. Teacher respondents also performed relatively well on *legal issues*, which showed how well teachers understood the legal parameters surrounding teaching about religion.

Table 31

Knowledge Survey Sub-components (*N* = 1,054)

Sub-components	[a]*M*/ Question	Number of Questions	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	*SD*
Legal Issues	.69	5	00	5.00	3.46	1.01
Judaism	.63	3	00	3.00	1.90	.86
Christianity	.59	4	00	4.00	2.38	1.15

[a]Based upon each question worth a maximum of 1.00.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients also provided some useful data with which to assess the nature of teachers‘ knowledge, keeping in mind that all correlations were statistically significant. A moderate correlation (.341) was found between knowledge of Other World Religions and knowledge of Christianity. This correlation could be interpreted to mean that the more an individual knew about other world religions, the more he or she was likely to know about the religion of Christianity, or vice versa. Two weak correlations were also found; the first was between knowledge of Judaism and knowledge of Christianity (.257), and the second one was between knowledge of Judaism and

knowledge of Other World Religions (.290). Overall, it can be suggested, and logically so, that the more a person knew about one religion, the more that person was likely to know about other religions as well.

What do teachers know about teaching about Islam in public school?

The data gathered to answer this last research question consisted of three qualitative participant questions from the RPEI Survey and data taken from the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient table. In continuing with the discussion of the correlations coefficients, the coefficients regarding Islam will be addressed. A prominent scale for interpreting the magnitude of correlation coefficients is the Cohen (1988) scale. The Cohen (1988) guidelines for correlation coefficients (r) is indicated as follows; .10 to .29 (weak), .30 to .49 (moderate), and .50 to 1.0 (strong). So, a moderate correlation (.423) was found between knowledge of Islam and knowledge of Other World Religions. This correlation indicated that those teachers who had some knowledge of Islam were likely to have some knowledge about Other World Religions as well.

Another moderate correlation (.345) was found between Christianity and Islam. In reference to the common knowledge variable, this correlation indicated that the more a teacher had knowledge of *Christianity* the more likely s/he had knowledge of *Islam*. This correlation was also a reasonable one to surface since, according to the descriptive statistics in Table 31, the teachers who participated in the survey demonstrated weak knowledge, based on mean score per question on the three religions specified; Islam, Christianity and Judaism. However, the

resulting overall correlations indicated that those teachers who did perform well on the knowledge survey likely had knowledge of multiple religions, as opposed to having knowledge of only one religion.

It was, however, the short-answer, open-ended participant questions that provided very thick, rich descriptions in reference to teachers‘ knowledge about teaching about Islam. The three qualitative participant questions from which researcher drew in order to answer this last research question were:

13) Do you believe that you have the legal authority to teach students about Islam? If yes or no, why?

14) What is your academic preparation for teaching students about Islam, provided you were required to do so? Indicate any and all study such as formal classes, personal preparation, in-service teacher workshops, etc.

15) Do you feel or believe that religious diversity is an important element of student diversity? For example, are Muslim students unique in their characteristics as learners?

I determined questions 13, 14, and 15 to be knowledge questions because when asking about legal authority, I was inquiring about teachers‘ knowledge of legal parameters in the school environment. Academic preparation refers directly to knowledge acquired, whether formal or informal. And teachers‘ views on religious diversity implicitly referred to teachers‘ knowledge and awareness of Florida‘s multicultural, multiethnic student body, which teachers must be prepared to accommodate.

The question regarding legal authority elicited some interesting responses. The majority of the survey teacher respondents generally appeared to have a sufficient understanding about the legal parameters surrounding the topic of teaching about religion. The three major words, around which word groups were designed, were *religion*, *teach*, and *history*. Using the MaxQDA software which assisted in performing the content analysis for these word groups, I determined that the survey teacher respondents believed that they were legally permitted to teach about Islam because it was mandated in their course curriculums, that it was historically relevant, and that it should only be taught within the context of social studies instruction.

The research question on academic preparation was also quite telling. By a small margin, most teachers stated that they were exposed to the religion of Islam within the formal context of other required classes, such as world history or diversity courses. Still, teachers were apt to indicate that they only covered Islam generally and that in order effectively to teach it, they had to continue to prepare using their own personal devices. Another motivator for teachers‘ personal preparations was the predominant place that Islam holds in current events. Undoubtedly, teachers have a need to feel prepared as newsworthy events that address a particular group of people enter the classroom. Those teachers whose comments indicated that they took a world religions course were not numerous enough to exceed the frequency list cut-off.

The mean per question column in Table 31 illustrated teachers‘ uncertainty regarding personal preparation for teaching about Islam. After

rounding, teachers averaged 3 on the 1 through 5 Likert-type scale, where 1 is *strongly agree*, 3 is *uncertainty*, and 5 is *strongly disagree*.

The question on diversity also produced a number of interesting responses. Some controversy and confusion did emerge in response to the diversity question. Specifically, teachers were asked, ~~"~~Do you feel or believe that religious diversity is an important element of student diversity? For example, are Muslim students unique in their characteristics as learners?" Although the majority of teachers stated in the affirmative that student diversity was important, there were indicators that teachers did not recognize religion as an aspect of student diversity. For example, in the content analysis procedures for the word groups in the diversity category, there were approximately 42% of the words associated with *not,* indicating a negative response to the second part of the question. Additionally, many teachers felt diversity meant that teachers were obligated to teach to a variety of different learning styles, and they did not agree that religion should be included as a variant of learning styles. This response may indicate some shortcomings in the wording of the question.

However, the fact remains that the majority of Florida's social studies teacher survey respondents characterize student diversity in terms of race, culture, language and alternative learning styles but appear to believe that religion is not necessarily an aspect of student diversity.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative data collected and analyzed for the present research study served to answer the four major research questions in a very comprehensive way.

Do the qualitative results confirm or refute the quantitative results?

First, recall the original question, "What do teachers know about teaching about Islam?" In the analysis of the Knowledge Survey results, the data showed that teachers lacked the basic knowledge to teach about Islam or the other major world religions, including Christianity and Judaism. The overall percentage of correct responses for teacher participants who took the Knowledge Survey was 66%. Further, of that 66%, knowledge of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism had the lowest correct scores.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were informative because they showed a moderate correlation between knowledge about Islam and Other World Religions. This result means that teachers knowledgeable in the Islamic religion would likely be knowledgeable of other world religions as well. This information is important for creators of professional development classes, because the academic study of all religions can conform to a comparative structure with an established set of variables being identified among all denominations.

Regarding legal issues, teacher respondents were generally aware of the legal issues surrounding teaching about religion since they did score a mean 3.4 on a 0 to 5 scale, with 5 being the maximum scaled score. However, there was a tendency to exercise caution when Islam, as opposed simply to religion, was the instructional component. This difference was evident in numerous teachers' answers which stated that Islam should only be taught within the context of social studies instruction. In contrast, in the Attitude Survey, teachers agreed that

religion was important and that it had relevance within the subjects of music and the arts also.

The subject on teacher preparation also required particular analysis, especially during the content analysis phase. Although the majority of teachers readily admitted to receiving formal instruction in Islam, such as university classes, in-service workshops, and other instructional formats, they did indicate that the study of actual religion was a component of the whole class, such as in world history or diversity classes. Teachers‘ understanding of Islam and other religious denominations was still void of general understanding, based upon the 66% overall score of the Knowledge Survey. Likewise, the Attitude Survey did show that in the preparation category, teachers scored a mean per question of 3.0. On a scale of 1 *strongly agree* to 5 *strongly disagree,* a 3 reveals that the teacher was uncertain about whether their teacher preparation was adequate.

Lastly, in response to the question on diversity, teachers indicated that, although students were diverse in many ways, there was a limitation to religious diversity that was not applicable to student learning. Overall, there was a general pervasive denial of religious diversity as an aspect of general diversity. I believe that this perception represents a shortcoming of teachers‘ pre-service and in-service preparation. Religion is arguably an incredibly important aspect of diversity. That is evidenced by the presence in American classrooms of students of various religious minorities, such as Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and other numerically underrepresented religious groups. Strike and Soltis (2004) asserted that our nation‘s public schools have historically tried to make

everyone behave as one, utilizing the melting pot theory. However, people‘s culture, ethnicity, and religion are not simply facts about them; these factors are essential to their self-understanding and self-definition. To fail to affirm the identity and the characteristics of people is to deny their own sense of worth. Diversity as a component of education should be an undisputed truth, not just a collection of impressions about which agreement or disagreement is an option.

Nevertheless, the qualitative results did confirm the quantitative results and, further, the qualitative results helped to expand on the data to reveal other issues which could not have been evident without teachers‘ expressive, narrative answers to the questions.

Implications for Education

The field of education is definitely evolving. Educators are now in the era of high stakes testing during which extensive knowledge of specific content material is required. Furthermore, accountability for that knowledge is required so that educators are well versed in their instructional content areas. In order for teachers to transmit the required knowledge to students, they must be well prepared through appropriate pre-service and in-service trainings. The required knowledge for teachers should first be defined and, thereafter, implemented into appropriate teacher preparation programs.

Additionally, as indicated in the literature review of the present study, students must be prepared to function in a global society. The information age has made it possible to easily access various cultures and societies one could

not have accessed in the past. Students must be prepared to interact with various types of cultures, and they must also have knowledge of those cultures if those interactions are ultimately going to be meaningful.

Implications for the Field of Social Studies

The field of social studies can greatly benefit from this research. The results of the present study, indeed, show that teachers lack basic knowledge of various religions and cultures. The administrators of social studies organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies or the Florida Association of Social Studies Supervisors can encourage professional development workshops to address the void that the present study discovered and discussed.

Along with in-service training efforts, pre-service activities can also take place within educational institutions at which teachers are currently being trained. Curricula at the post-secondary level could be more attentive to religions and religious beliefs and the ways they affect the way of life of certain cultures.

Implications for the Field of Religious Studies

The field of religious studies is very important with respect to this research. Religious studies departments can help to develop curricula that can be utilized for the benefit of social studies. Knowledge which is useful for teachers can be interpreted into user-friendly language. Religious studies professionals can also explain the ways that religion is essential in decision making and major events of other cultures. Further, if teachers take religious

studies classes, religious studies departments can tailor specific classes for teachers that address their own state‘s K-12 requirements.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers can greatly benefit from the policies and training that the present study could generate. The most significant finding of this study was that teachers are not knowledgeable in the area of teaching about religions. This is required knowledge for Florida secondary level students, as referenced in the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. Furthermore, knowledge of various religions extends to knowledge of the activities, decisions, and everyday way of life of other cultures. Increased understanding in this area can only enhance and improve the performance of teachers and their students.

Implications for Students

Students are, by far, the primary beneficiaries of religious education taught in public schools. As America‘s youth becomes more proficient in their knowledge of other religions, these youth will become more capable in dealing with various types of people, from all walks of life. Students will also become better decision-makers as adults, and will, hopefully, make more educated choices when utilizing their voice in the societal forum. Ultimately, the youth in America will become more informed citizens from learning about world religions, as they may use this knowledge to become more skillful in regards to

international trade, politics, world conflict/peace, scientific advancements, and other matters so important to cooperative living in a global society.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study were that, most prominently, the survey was too long. Teachers‘ comments on the length of the study indicated that the length may have influenced the quality of the short-answer questions, which were placed at the end of the survey. Although participating in the survey was even considered enjoyable by some teacher participants, I would have liked to use an instrument which was not as long as the RPEI so that participants could complete the survey in a shorter amount of time. A suggestion to correct this limitation would be possibly to use only the Attitude Survey or only the Knowledge Survey as research instruments. This method could allow for the investigation of a more refined research construct as opposed to measuring both attitudes and knowledge.

Another limitation is that the Knowledge Survey did not include as many questions pertaining to Islam as was preferable. Although the number of questions was similar to the number of questions asked about the other religions, I recommend the addition of a few more to emphasize the focus within the quantitative segment and to achieve more descriptive results while reporting teacher knowledge.

A final limitation of the study was that the questions from the Knowledge Survey were much too general. Even though teachers performed poorly on the

Knowledge Survey, a more accurate assessment of teachers‘ knowledge competencies should reflect that knowledge they need to transmit to students, as required by Florida curriculum guidelines. For example, if teachers are required to teach about Muslims‘ contributions to Eastern civilization, the survey should include questions that address that required knowledge.

Future Research

There are many possibilities for future investigation in this area. To begin, the demographic portion of the RPEI lends itself to specific areas of target populations which can be identified using research specifics such as age, years of experience, religious leanings, and other identifying attributes. The RPEI can also be used to survey other types of populations, such as concerned community members and leaders, parents, and also post-secondary instructional personnel.

Another area for future researchers to pursue is other specific religions on which to focus such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions that have historical relevance for social studies instruction. A comprehensive study of all of the major religions could complete the research needed for the social studies course content.

Final Thoughts

This study is important because it helps to identify areas in social studies with which teachers need additional assistance. There is a degree of unfairness in the idea that teachers are given the responsibility and are further held

accountable to teach a subject about which they have not been trained to teach. Furthermore, to expect teachers individually to undertake their own self-training is even more unreasonable. Religion and teaching about religion are considered to be controversial subjects although they need not be. There is nothing controversial about teaching about religion or about Islam because they are addressed in the Florida‘s K-12 curriculum, but controversy can easily emerge if the method of instruction is mishandled. Therefore, particular attention needs to be given to develop appropriate trainings and workshops. The ambiguity regarding the subject matter needs to come to an end and all concerned parties, educational institutions, state boards of education, and school administrators should implement the curriculum policy as it was written.

Nevertheless, the inability of the survey teacher respondents to demonstrate basic knowledge about various religions was not unexpected. The lack of pre-service and in-service teacher preparation already discussed is a major contributor to the fact that teachers lack the very content knowledge required for them to teach, as mandated by state curriculum. However, the unexpected did emerge in the responses to the short-answer diversity question in which teachers stated that they generally did *not* believe religion to be an aspect of student diversity. Specifically the question was, ―Do you feel or believe that religious diversity is an important element of student diversity? For example, are Muslim students unique in their characteristics as learners?” Further, there appeared to be some confusion about the view of diversity itself. Therefore I will

try to put some of the uncertainties into perspective in an to attempt to resolve and bring solutions to the issues raised in the research study.

First, diversity in the classroom is a fact in today‘s multicultural society. With well over 2 million Muslims in the United States, Muslim students are adequately represented in American classrooms. If teachers do not view Muslim students as unique learners, then they are saying implicitly that it is not important if a student comes to school fasting during the month of Ramadan. They also tacitly indicate that the occasions of Islamic holidays are not important. Furthermore, they imply an indifference to Islamic sensitivities as gender differences are concerned, with specific reference to school dances, proms, and other mixed gender activities. I do not believe the participating teacher respondents to be indifferent, but the teachers‘ responses in this survey did indicate some discrepancies in the levels of preparedness among Florida‘s teachers for the current diversity that exists in the nation‘s classrooms.

There are solutions to this problem. One solution is to incorporate greater emphasis on religions into required courses for teachers, such as methods or general diversity classes. Many of these classes address religion superficially without allowing the course content to match the curriculum requirements for social studies instruction. Another solution is for teachers to take a world religions course outside of their departments of education. This solution provides the ideal solution because it would allow for teachers to understand various religious tenets within the context of major historical developments.

As I begin to close this research study I am reminded of a verse in the Quran, translated into English by Abdullah Yousef Ali:

—O mankind! We created you from a single (pair)

Of a male and a female,

And made you into

Nations and tribes, that

Ye may know each other

(Not that ye may despise Each other).

After a description of the origins of mankind, the verse further explains that we evolved into different ”nations and tribes” so that we can come to know one another. Undoubtedly all cultures have attributes and qualities, which, when shared with others through cooperative means, can improve the way of life for everyone.

As an educator, I hope that this research project can pave the way for our students to learn and know other cultures as well as other belief systems. If we intend to prepare our students for a global society, then this will be one of the most important steps in pursuing that goal.

Appendix A

COMPLETE RELIGION & PUBLIC EDUCATION INVENTORY

SECTION ONE:

ATTITUDE SURVEY

This section consists of 27 statements related to religion and public education. Some of the statements refer specifically to your experiences and prior education. For each statement, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement as indicated.

Survey instrument deleted, paper copy is available upon request.

Survey instrument deleted, paper copy is available upon request.

SECTION TWO:

KNOWLEDGE SURVEY

This section contains 20 multiple choice questions related to religion in general and religion in the public schools specifically. Some of the information may be familiar to you; some probably will not be. Please answer each question to the best of your ability, making an educated guess if necessary.

Survey instrument deleted, paper copy is available upon request.

Survey instrument deleted, paper copy is available upon request.

Survey instrument deleted, paper copy is available upon request.

Survey instrument deleted, paper copy is available upon request.

SECTION THREE:

DEMOGRAPHIC AND PERSONAL INFORMATION

This section asks you to provide basic information about yourself. The information will be used for comparative purposes only. Please fill in the blank or circle the correct response as appropriate. There are also a few short answer questions. Thank you for your time and thought.

Survey instrument deleted, paper copy is available upon request.

Survey instrument deleted, paper copy is available upon request.

ANSWER KEY FOR SECTION TWO OF THE RPEI

Survey instrument deleted, paper copy is available upon request.

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT FOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to gather information about in-service teachers' understanding and attitudes regarding religion in the public schools. The following survey titled, ‗Religion and Public Education Inventory (RPEI)' will ask questions about teacher's attitudes as well as questions about teacher's knowledge of various religions. Some questions, particularly those about Islam, will ask that you provide narrative responses.

You will be asked to provide some general information about yourself for comparative purposes only. Your individual responses will remain anonymous and confidential. Nowhere will you be asked to give your name or any personally identifying information. Furthermore, your participation is voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without adverse consequences.

By clicking onto the next page, you agree to participate freely, without coercion, and having completely agreed the following statement:

I consent to participate in the research affiliated with the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Florida, and conducted by Ramona Hussein. I have been informed of the nature of the research, any risks that participation may involve and the uses of any personal information that I will be asked to disclose. I am aware that I may decline to participate in the study at any point during the study, even if I have already started to participate. I am also aware that if I do not wish to continue to participate in the study I will not be penalized in any way. I am aware that my responses will be made anonymously and no one will have access to my responses except the researcher and her advisor. I am aware that my responses will in no way be used by any individual for the purposes of making a decision about my future and that I have a right to examine the overall results of the research and any conclusions drawn from these results.

*Requests for information pertaining to this study may be obtained from:

Ramona Hussein
Email: Husseinfam@aol.com

Appendix C

UNF
UNIVERSITY of NORTH FLORIDA.

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
1 UNF Drive
Building 3, Office 2501
Jacksonville, FL 32224-2665
904-620-2455 FAX 904-620-2457
Equal Opportunity/Equal Access/Affirmative Action Institution

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 22, 2008

TO: Dr. Marcia Lamkin
Educational Leadership

FROM: Dominique Scalia, Research Integrity Coordinator
On Behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board

RE: Review by the UNF Institutional Review Board IRB#08-127:
"Teaching about religion: A mixed methods study of teachers' attitudes, knowledge and preparation with a focus on Islam and Muslims"

This is to advise you that your study, "Teaching about religion: A mixed methods study of teachers' attitudes, knowledge and preparation with a focus on Islam and Muslims," has been reviewed on behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board and has been declared exempt from further IRB oversight.

This approval applies to your project in the form and content as submitted to the IRB for review. Any variations or modifications to the approved protocol and/or informed consent forms as they relate to dealing with human subjects must be cleared with the IRB prior to implementing such changes.

Should you have any questions regarding your approval or any other IRB issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at 620-2443 or d.scalia@unf.edu.

Thank you.

References

Abington Township School District v. Schempp and Murray v. Curlett, 374 U.S. 203 (1963).

Ackerman, J. (2000, February). *The ethics of teaching about religion in the public schools*. Paper presented at the World 2000 Teaching World History & Geography Conference, Austin, TX.

Association of Religion Data Archives. (2003). ABC News of Islam Poll. ABC News. Retrieved from http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/ABCISL03.asp

Banks, J., A. (1988). Approaches to multicultural curriculum reform. *Multicultural Leader*, *1*, 1-3.

Bennett, C. I. (2003). *Comprehensive multicultural education: Theory and practice*. Boston: Pearson Education.

Berelson, B. (1952). *Content analysis in communication research.* New York: Free Press.

Bright, M., O'Conner, D., & Smallwood, R. (2007) Qualitative data analysis: Comparison between traditional and computerized text analysis. [Electronic version]. *Osprey Journal of Ideas and Inquiry, 6*, 356-367

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Collins, H., Czarra, F., & Smith, A. (1996). *Guidelines for global and international studies education.* New York: The American Forum for Global Education. Retrieved from http://www.globaled.org/guidelines/index.html

Council on American-Islamic Relations (2006). *American public opinion about Islam and Muslims.* Retrieved from http://www.cair-net.org

Creswell, J., & Clark, V. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J., Shope, R., Clark, V., & Greene, D. (2006). How interpretive qualitative research extends mixed methods research. *Research in the Schools, 13(*1), 1-11.

Daniel, L., Blount, K., & Ferrell, C. (1991). Academic misconduct among teacher education students: A descriptive-correlational study. *Research in Higher Education*, *32*(6), 703-724.

Delisio, E. (2002) Teaching about Islam, the Middle East. [Electronic Version] *Education World*. Retrieved from http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/profdev009.shtml

de Sola Pool, I. (1959). *Trends in content analysis*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Douglass, S. L. (2000). *Teaching about religion in national and state social studies standards.* Nashville, TN: Council on Islamic Education and First Amendment Center, Retrieved from http://www.cie.org/ItemDetail.aspx?id=N&m_id=29&item_id=88&cat_id=57

Eastland, T. (1993). *Religious liberty in the Supreme Court: The cases that define the debate over church and state*. Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Employment Division v. Smith, 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

Everson v. Board of Education, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16, 18 (1947).

First Amendment Center. (2009) *Religious liberty in public life: Establishment clause*. Retrieved from http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/rel_liberty/establishment/index.aspx

Florida Department of Education (1996). *Sunshine State Standards*. Retrieved from *http://www.fldoe.org/bii/Curriculum/SSS/sss1996.asp*

Florida Department of Education (2008). *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards.* Retrieved from *http://www.floridastandards.org/Standards/FLStandardSearch.aspx*

Freitas, D., & Rotherham, A. (2004). *Teaching about religion* [Electronic Version]. *Education Week, 23*(16), 37.

Gaustad, E. (1992). American history, with and without religion…the whole truth…so help me God. *OAH Magazine of History*, 6, 15-18.

Gibson v. Lee County School Board, 1 F. Supp. 2d1434 (M.D. Fla. 1998).

Gollnick, D., & Chinn, P. (2006) *Multicultural education in a pluralistic society*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Green, S., & Salkind, N. (2005). Using *SPSS for Windows and Macintosh: Analyzing and understanding data*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Greenwalt, K. (2005). *Does God belong in the public schools*? Princeton, NJ: University Press.

Grossman, C. (2007, March 8). Americans get an _F‘in religion. *USA Today.* p. 5D.

Hahn, C. (2008) *Doing qualitative research using your computer*: *A practical guide*. London: Sage Publications, LTD.

Hamburger, P. (2002). *Separation of church and state.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Harris-Ewing, S. (1999). *Religion, religious diversity and public education: Pre-service teachers‘ attitudes, knowledge and preparation.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, New York.

Harrison, M., & Gilbert, S. (1996). *Freedom of religion decisions of the United States Supreme Court.* San Diego, CA: Excellent Books.

Harvard University. (2006, February). *Program in religion and secondary education.* Retrieved from the Harvard Divinity School Web site: http://www.news.harvard.edu/ gazette/2007/02.08/-edreport.html

Haynes, C., Chaltain, S., Ferguson, J., Hudson, D., & Thomas, O. (2003). *The First Amendment in schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Haynes, C., & Thomas, O. (2001). *Finding common ground*. Nashville, TN: The First Amendment Center.

Holcomb, Z. (2006). *SPSS basics: Techniques for a first course in statistics*. Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing.

Hoot, J., Szecsi, T., & Moosa, S. (2003). What teachers of young children should know about Islam. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 31*(2), 85-90.

Hunter, J., & Guinness, O. (1990). *Articles of faith, articles of peace: The religious liberty clauses and the American public philosophy.* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

Johnson, B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. (2004). Mixed methods research: A paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*(7), 14-26.

Joshi, K. (2006). The radicalization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *39*, 211-226.

Light, J., & Yasuhara, K. (2008, October). *Analyzing large free-response qualitative data sets: A novel quantitative-qualitative hybrid approach.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the ASEE/IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference, New York.

Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602, 612 13 (1971).

Lester, E., & Roberts, P. (2006). *Learning about world religions in public schools: The impact on student attitudes and community acceptance in Modesto, California.* Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center. Retrieved from http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/pdf/FirstForum_ModestoWorldReligions.pdf

Marty, M. (2000). *Education, religion and the common good*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mastrilli, T., & Sardo-Brown, D. (2002). Pre-service teachers‘ knowledge about Islam: A snapshot post September 11, 2001. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 29*(3), 156-161.

MAXqda (2007). VERBI Software. Consult. Sozialforschung. GmbH, Marburg.

McMillan, J. (2008). *Educational research: Fundamentals for the consumer*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Milson, A. (1997). *The objective is objectivity: A survey of teachers‘ attitudes toward teaching about religion in the public schools.* Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/15/c7/3f.pdf

Moore, J. (2006). Teaching about Islam in secondary schools: Curricular and pedagogical considerations. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 39,* 279-286.

Nash, R. (1999). *Faith, hype and clarity: Teaching about religion in American schools and colleges.* New York: Teachers College Press.

National Council for the Social Studies. (1998). *Study about religions in the social studies curriculum: NCSS position statement*. Retrieved from http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/religion

Neville, R. (1995). Religious diversity and cultural inclusion in America. *Religion and Education*, *22*(2), 28-39.

Nisbet, E., & Shanahan, J. (2004). *MSRG special report: Restrictions on civil liberties, views of Islam, & Muslim Americans.* Retrieved from Cornell University's Department of Communications, Media & Society Research Group Web site: http://www.comm.cornell.edu/msrg/report1a.pdf

Nord, W. (1995). *Religion and American education: Rethinking a national dilemma.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Nord, W., & Haynes, C. (1998). *Taking religion seriously across the curriculum.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Pai, Y., & Adler, S. (2001). *Cultural foundations of education.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Pew Research Center. (2002, March 20). *Americans Struggle with Religion's Role at Home and Abroad.* Retrieved from http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=387

Pew Research Center. (2004). *Plurality sees Islam as more likely to encourage violence*. Retrieved from http://www.pewforum.org/publications/surveys/islam.pdf

Pew Research Center. (2007). *U.S. religious landscape survey*. Retrieved from http://religions.pewforum.org/reports.

Pew Research Center. (2009). *Mapping the global Muslim population*. Retrieved from http://pewforum.org/newassets/images/reports/Muslimpopulation/Muslimpopulation.pdf

Piediscalzi, N. (1991). Back to the future?: Public education religion studies and the AAR in the 1970s and 1990s—Unique opportunities for development. *Religion and Public Education, 18,* 237-251.

Prothero, S. (2007a, March 16). America's profound ignorance of religion. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, pp. B6.*

Prothero, S. (2007b). *Religious literacy: What every American needs to know – and doesn't.* San Francisco: Harper.

Riley, R. (1998). *Secretary's statement on religious expression*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Rosin, H. (1998, October 29). In unexpected ways, issues of faith shape the debate. *The Washington Post*, p. A1.

Schaeffer, E., & M. Mincberg. (2000). *The good book taught wrong: Bible history' classes in Florida's public schools.* Washington, D.C: People for the American Way Foundation.

Sisisky, C. (2006). Re-thinking how to teach about religion in the world history classroom through collaborative peer education. *World History Connected, 4*(1). Retrieved from http://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiuc.edu/4.1/sisisky.html

Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. A. (1999). *Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class, and gender* (3rd ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Smith, A., & Czarra, F. (2003). *Teaching in a global context*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandria, VA: Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.1f7f8e4a1b4bac58dd1b2110d3108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_viewID=issue_view&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalmoid=ae2c7ca109eaff00VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

Stemler, S. (2001). An overview of content analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, *7*(17). Retrieved from http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17 .

Stone, G., Seidman, L., Sunstein, C., Tushnet, M., & Karlan, P. (2003). *The First Amendment.* New York: Aspen Publishers.

Strike, K., & Soltis, J. (2004). *The ethics of teaching*. NewYork: Teachers College Press.

Super, J., & Turley, B. (2006). *Religion in world history*. New York: Routledge.

Tashakkori, A., & Creswell, J. (2007). Exploring the nature of research questions in mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(3), 207-211.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2006). A general typology of research designs featuring mixed methods. *Research in the Schools, 13*(1) 12-28.

Trotter, A. (2007, March 12). Consensus is sought on religion in schools. *Education Week, 26*(27), 5.

Vita

Ramona Hussein

Education:

Ed.D. University of North Florida, Educational Leadership, 2009
M.Ed. University of West Florida, Educational Leadership, 2001
B.S. San Jose State University, Business Administration, 1989

K-12 Experience - Private School:

Levels taught:
Elementary school
Middle school
Positions held:
Principal
Teacher

K-12 Experience - Public School:

Levels taught:
Middle school
High school
Positions held:
Assistant Principal
Teacher

Administrative & Teacher Certifications:

Florida Educator‘s certificate number 752633

Endorsements:
Educational Leadership (all levels)
Business Education (grades 6 -12)
Coverages:
English/Language Arts (grades 6-12)
Exceptional Student Education (all levels)

Personal Information:

Contact Information:

husseinfam@aol.com