

# Van brummelen neutral curriculum

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In an era of “ keeping it real,” there is an abundance of artificiality. A vast portion of the population prefers artificial intelligence, artificial sweeteners, artificial insemination, and artificial Christmas trees. However, I have yet to see a demand for artificial curriculum. Van Brummelen (2002) presents four common definitions of curriculum; however, none of them include an essence of artificiality. Neutral curriculum is a curriculum that is void of flavor. It lacks original thought, authentic character, and experienced beliefs. Presenting and promoting the belief of a neutral curriculum is irresponsible and impossible to accomplish. Only a lifeless, spiritless, and soulless being could teach a neutral curriculum. Curriculum is educational tofu; it absorbs the new flavors of the spices of our worldview and the marinade of content. Curriculum can change its form in order to provide the nourishment needed for us to become academically and emotionally strong. When curriculum is coming from or being presented by a teacher, it is impossible for it to be neutral. A neutral curriculum would teach the what, but not the how for application of the skill/content.

One can comprehend the impossibility of a neutral curriculum when introducing Martin Luther King’s “ I Have a Dream” speech, the Declaration of Independence, and Robert Frost’s “ The Road Not Taken. ” Moreover, when Vann Brummelen shares that teachers live and nurture a way of life (p. 4), this belief reiterates that exemplary teaching is a lifestyle that reflects our personalization of the world. Being neutral in regard to curriculum would mean avoiding conflict, confrontation, questioning, reflecting, or analysis of anything or anyone (including self).

On the other hand, curriculum is purposeful, inquisitive, dynamic, and anything but neutral. I believe that the dissonance that some students, teachers, and administrators face is the impasse of high stakes neutral assessments that don't accurately measure the aims of the curriculum that we have the responsibility to teach to students. Many national and state assessments are shifting from measuring curriculum achievement with rote memorization of facts to higher order thinking skills to develop social responsibility and commitment.

In order for this to occur, there must be an interwoven quilt of humanity and content mastery. When teachers (humans) interact with students (humans), it is impossible to remain neutral with curriculum. It is reflected in our actions with each other, students, information, and as we teach students to think and problem solve. If a neutral curriculum was possible or ideal, anyone could effectively teach. This is a potential reason why teacher retention continues to be problematic. I question if current teacher preparation programs explore the synergy of our belief systems and our pedagogy.

Due to my belief that it is impossible to teach a neutral curriculum, I question how this connects to Dr. Jane Pollock (2007)'s concept of pedagogical automaticity. Pedagogical automaticity refers to a set of skills that teachers can teach without needing to really think about what they are doing. She states that we inherit most of our pedagogical automaticity from our elementary and secondary teachers. In regard to a neutral curriculum, or the lack thereof, how much of the beliefs and worldviews that we integrate into our curriculum is based upon what a prior teacher(s) has taught us.

If we are able to distinguish ideas and make decisions based upon the curriculum presented to us, is that a testament of us having a great teacher or being a great student? Christian Teacher's Responsibility in a Christian School A Christian teacher's responsibility applies at a Christian school because their scope of curriculum extends beyond content, commitment, and beliefs. They are torches of wisdom. Proverbs 4: 11 states God calls teachers to lead students in the way of wisdom.

A Christian teacher that teaches at a Christian school must not only present the embraced curriculum of the Christian school, he/she must also teach the student the appropriate strategies to defend, challenge, and respect opposition of their faith. This is not a schema that is generally practiced in a secular school. While teaching at Christian schools, Christian teachers must instill faith based perseverance and humility at an early age, while Christian teachers at a public school are focusing on content and behavioral expectations.

It is a dual image of not having all of the answers to the questions that your students ask about faith, yet reflecting an unwavering belief in God's word and serving His kingdom. Not only does a Christian teacher at a Christian school have to remain abreast with curriculum professional development, he/she must maintain spiritually developed. The discernment that they must teach their students will be assessed beyond a paper and pencil test. Many of the tests where the students will need to reflect their Christian school curriculum is in the World.

Therefore, this is why a neutral curriculum is not possible for a Christian teacher in a Christian school environment. Attempting to teach a neutral curriculum in a Christian school environment would be sinful based upon Matthew 18: 5-6 which states, " And whoever welcomes a little child like this welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large milestone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea (The Holy Bible: " New International Version, 1984). " Christian Teacher's Responsibility in a Public School

A Christian teacher's responsibility applies in a public school in a non-neutral schema, yet it is less explicit. Van Brummelen states that the teacher should not confuse the classroom for the pulpit. One religion should not be presented in a more biased or favorable fashion than another. The public school Christian teacher will reflect Christian morals and values through his/her mannerisms, behaviors, and interactions with the curriculum and other beings in their presence. While the Christian teacher at a public school may not post the Ten Commandments, he/she may post and connect their Ten Classroom Rules to the same document.

For Christian teachers in a public school, the purpose of the curriculum appears to be the process and not necessarily the product being only Christianity. The Christian teacher, that is employed by a public school, will have equilibrium of religious analogies and experiences for students. She/he will model educated and intrinsic freedom that has been earned by exploring curriculum in order to ensure that students have their own educational

freedom and autonomy to make their own decisions about faith and worldview.

Legal Implications for Both In their study, The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2007) found that “ two-thirds (69%) of Americans agree with the notion that “ liberals have gone too far in trying to keep religion out of schools and government. ” Despite this belief there are legal implications for the Christian teacher in the Christian and public school realm. The Christian teacher that practices his/her skill in a public school has more legal implications than his/her counterpart in the Christian school.

The legal implications of the public school vary based upon cultural norms of the religion and sometimes school location in the Bible belt. In locations with a variety of religions, public schools are often limited to introducing God as a historical figure when the Bible is studied as humanities content and during the Pledge of Allegiance. The moment of quiet reflection/silence is not permitted to be called prayer time. In addition, Christian teachers cannot post any religious paraphernalia in the classroom that could influence their faith onto students.

In the Christian school environment, there are legal ramifications if a non-Christian teacher desired to file an employment discrimination suit or a violation of the Equal Opportunity Employer with the Christian school for lack of employment. Historically, this has not shown to be favorable for the plaintiff, as the Christian schools have been able to continue to hire only professing Christian teachers. Another potential legal implication could be that a particular practice, based upon that faith, was performed (corporal

punishment) to an extreme and the faith based school holds to its doctrine that they did not cause maleficence.

Finally, there are some Christian schools that are not part of the main stream beliefs of Christianity and are considered cult like, such as the David Koresh and the Branch Davidians religious sect, committing illegal crimes to its students. Personal Experience In conclusion, I have had personal experience with this topic based upon my current assignment as principal in a religious community. My school is located in a town that has the first school for freed slaves, Penn Center. The history of slavery has a very religious and faith based legacy.

The teachers and parents at my school not only expect, but demand, God to be in everything that is presented in the curriculum and my actions. I am a devout Christian, but I am a private Christian. Coming from a metropolitan city such as Atlanta, I was taught to respect the faiths of others and not to force my Christian views onto others. I am caught off guard when I can find older men and women outside of the school, in prayer circles, and anointing oil on the seats and teachers. When I begin to question the discomfort that I feel about this, I feel uncomfortable and less of a devout Christian than I want to believe that I am.

I am learning that there is a spectrum of Christianity, not just my myopic experiences. However, as the principal, I am held accountable for all interpretations of the school. When my superintendent comes to visit, I am torn between my religious pride and embarrassment at how extreme some of their practices seem to me in that moment. I take liberties to say God

during the Pledge of Allegiance. I tell teachers that I will pray for them when they speak to me in confidence about something plaguing their life.

We say prayers before starting our Board of Education meetings and prior to eating faculty luncheons. I have a Biblical scripture hanging in my office about success. On the contrary, after reading about the responsibilities and commitments that Christian teachers (and administrators) should be modeling, I realize that I have fallen short of His glory. That is the beauty of learning. It is an awakening, and tomorrow is a new day to try all things with an altered belief, hereby proving once more that the curriculum in this course is not neutral.