## FAITH as an 'ISM': What do I know, what do I feel about faith diversity in my school/class?

"For many students, religion is an important part of life, on the other hand, many children come from homes that do not adhere to any faith and may have little or no knowledge of spiritual matters. All students' backgrounds must be respected. Though it is not the role of teachers to promote specific religions or spiritual belief systems, they can help students respect religious diversity and appreciate and celebrate each other's individual identities, worldviews and customs." <u>Safe & Caring Schools for Students of All Faiths: A Guide for Teachers, The Alberta Teachers' Association</u>

Use the following questions to explore specific teaching challenges you may face related to faith as an 'ISM' and diversity.

What are my expectations for my students? Do they differ or shift depending on the faith of a child or his/her family or that they may come from a family that does not belong to any organized faith?

Do I feel comfortable or uncomfortable with this type of diversity?

How do I feel about having students of various faiths in my classroom or parents of my students, or other teachers or colleagues from diverse faiths?

How do I feel about the involvement of parents of faith, or their faith community members in my school? What is the balance for those of no organized faith group?

What values, beliefs, & assumptions do I need to examine critically to challenge my own 'faith privilege' with regard to 'faith as an 'ism'?

How do I feel about having a classroom with very little diversity? (general) Students in my school or classroom all appear to be mostly Christian/Muslim/Hindu etc. Do I consider this to be positive or negative?

What are the benefits of a classroom with students of various faiths or of no organized faith?

How much of my discomfort is rooted in my values, assumptions, beliefs or other sources and influences?

What are the implications for me as a Jewish, Muslim, Christian, or atheist teacher of the presence of students in my classroom who do not belong to any organized religion? How would I respond if one of my students made a discriminatory comment re faith or presented school-work that contains anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, anti-Christian statements? Would I respond differently if the comment or homework had been racist?

Would I respond differently with a colleague or authority figure who demonstrated discriminatory behaviour because of faith or nonfaith?

What efforts have I made to find out about the various faith communities represented in my class or school?

How do I deal with faith in the classroom? Do I accommodate for faith? Do I focus only on celebrations? If so, how is this connected to the curriculum? Is it balanced? Is it respectful and inclusive? Do I give equal time, equal space, equal opportunity and equal emphasis to both faith and non-faith groups?

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Sources- Teaching for Diversity & Social Justice Part1: Examining Ourselves: An Exploratory Activity for Educators adapted from Creating Safer Schools for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Youth: A Resource for Educators Concerned with Equity: Education Wife Assault. 1999; & Zubeda Vahed, Retired Peel Board Equity Officer.

