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The Urgent Need for Teacher Preparation in Religious and Secular Worldview Education

Abstract:

In a world that is becoming increasingly globalized, it is ironic—as well as unfortunate and sometimes tragic—that secular and religious worldview education is decreasing, in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. This paper argues for the immediate need for programs that intentionally prepare teachers for all aspects of the educational workforce to reverse this trend. Teachers who are well-prepared to help students understand, respect, appreciate and learn from others with differing worldviews will help produce a generation of citizens who will promote greater respect, tolerance, harmony, and peace on school campuses (at all levels), in the workplace, in neighborhoods, within nations domestically, and in the global community.

Introduction: The Importance of Religious and Secular Worldview Literacy

Europe has of late experienced a refugee crisis, much of it brought on by the recent Syrian calamity. Some of that has spilled over to North America. Much of the crisis rises from differences in culture, which importantly includes differences in religious and secular views of life. The burkini debacle in France is but one example of clashes rising from differing views of life.

To what extent do tensions arise because of misunderstandings, or worse no understandings, of the other? Since the public schools of the nations are the greater educators of the children, from one generation to the next, have they been negligent in preparing children for a global participation that requires knowledge and understanding of differences? Furthermore, how knowledgeable are educators themselves in preparing students for global participation? In other words, are teachers themselves prepared to prepare students to engage with those who are different; those whose outlook on life is not the same as their own?

In a democratic, multicultural society with a global outlook, awareness of the religious and secular *other* is crucial, as is awareness of the *self*. That awareness must go beyond “foods, fashions and flags,” for it touches on issues that address central beliefs and values – in essence, worldviews. As such, it is imperative that we understand something about the worldviews we embrace, individually and collectively. Worldviews are *visions of life* and *ways of life*, and everyone has a worldview of some kind, whether religious or secular.¹ They constitute the beliefs we have about life -- our perspective on life. They are also the way we live life -- our actions and behaviors. Worldviews, whether religious or secular, impact our individual lives, our communities, and our societies, including our educational systems.²

We support the freedom of conscience for all people and the right to hold and embrace their own perspectives about life in the public sphere, of which public education is a microcosm. The integration of diverse, and occasionally conflicting, worldviews in the public square is an ongoing negotiation that requires a great deal of understanding and dialogue within and across differences and similarities.³ In a globalized and interconnected age, however, understanding and knowledge of religious and secular worldviews, sometimes referred to only as religious literacy, frequently falls short, in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere.⁴ The consequences of these

¹ Sunshine, G. 2009. *Why you think the way you do: The story of western worldviews from Rome to home*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan.

² Valk, J. 2007. A plural public school: Religion, worldviews & moral education.” *British Journal of Religious Education* 29 (September) 3: 273-285.

³ Valk, J. 2009. Religion or worldview: Enhancing dialogue in the public square. *Marburg Journal of Religion* 14 (May) 1:1-16.

⁴ Prothero, S. 2007. *Religious illiteracy: What every American needs to know – and doesn't*. New York: HarperOne; Nord, W. 1995. *Religion in American education: Rethinking a national dilemma*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. Religious literacy is a commonly used term with many possible definitions. The term is used here broadly to include knowledge of the basic tenets and practices of the world's religions, an understanding of the internal diversity of religions, and recognition that religion change across time and space. Secular worldview literacy is not commonly used but encompasses the same elements, and refers to an understanding of and knowledge about the many different secular worldviews that guide and shape people's lives.

illiteracies can be seen locally in classrooms where students are bullied because they are a religious minority, and globally in the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, growing tensions in Europe, and many other regions of the world.⁵ The prevention of these conflicts, large and small, however, is only one argument for devoting more attention to religious and secular worldview literacy (RSWL). Increased RSWL also has the ability to promote greater respect, tolerance, harmony, and peace on school campuses (at all levels), in the workplace, in neighborhoods, within nations domestically, and in the global community.⁶

One approach to building this reality is to focus on improving education about religious and secular worldviews in primary and secondary education. In the United States, 90 percent of students attend public school so an examination of public school climates and curricula is a good place to start. Our schools need to be more than places that prepare students for “college and career readiness.” They should serve the greater purpose of preparing citizens and future leaders to become critical thinkers, and to create a more open and inclusive society. In this view, a broad curriculum of civic understanding and engagement should include a robust understanding of religious and secular worldviews.⁷

Much of the focus to date has centered on teaching about religion as an academic subject, and there is ample literature that addresses this.⁸ Feinberg and Layton have made a respectable case for teaching about religion in public schools as necessary for preparing students for civic engagement in the public square beyond the school campus.⁹ Linda Wertheimer has mentioned the many legitimate challenges to teaching about religion in public schools recently in her book *Faith Ed: Teaching about religion in an age of intolerance*.¹⁰ We will set aside for now sorting

⁵ Chan, A. 2014. Religious literacy and religious bullying in California and Canada: A Teacher-Researcher's Perspective. *The California Three Rs Project Bulletin* 11, no. 4:1–3; Albright, M., and W. Woodward. 2006. *The mighty and the almighty: Reflections on America, God, and world affairs*. New York: HarperCollins.

⁶ Valk, J. 2010. Worldviews of today: Teaching for dialogue and mutual understanding”, in eds. K. Sporre and J. Mannberg. *Values, religions and education in changing societies*. Dordrecht, NL: Springer. 103-120.

⁷ Medefind, J. 2013. Tolerance is not enough: Why only a commitment to robust pluralism can rescue America's civic life. In *Civility, religious pluralism and education*, eds. V. Biondo, and A. Fiala, Routledge Research in Religion and Education New York: Routledge. Patel, E. 2016. Colleges should be nurturing interfaith leaders. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 13, 2016, http://chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Should-Be-Nurturing/236752?cid=cr&utm_source=cr&utm_medium=en&elqTrackId=1ff916968e8e4a679787931bb2fa7522&elq=66234d7a73d849bb80e095363227f5f6&elqaid=9520&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=3376 (accessed August 31, 2016);

⁸ Lester, E. 2011 *Teaching About Religions: A Democratic Approach for Public Schools*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Alexander, H and A.K. Agbaria, eds. 2012 *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious Education in Liberal Democracy*. New York: Routledge; Nord, W. 2010. *Does God Make a Difference?: Taking Religion Seriously in Our Schools and Universities*. New York: Oxford University Press; Feinberg, W. 2006. *For Goodness Sake: Religious Schools and Education for Democratic Citizenry*. New York: Routledge; Feinberg, W. 2014. An Assessment of Arguments for Teaching Religion in Public Schools in the United States. *Religious Education* 109, no. 4): 394–405.

⁹ Feinberg, W., and R. Layton. 2014. For the civic good: The liberal case for teaching religion in the public schools. Ann Arbor: MI: University of Michigan Press.

¹⁰ Wertheimer, L. 2015. *Faith Ed: Teaching About Religion in an Age of Intolerance*. Boston: Beacon Press.

out all the benefits and challenges of teaching about religion in public schools and simply affirm that it has positive impacts. We also recognize that it could be done better. We also affirm that the pioneering work of improving education about religious and secular worldviews can only be accomplished as this pioneering road is being travelled. Bumps in that road can be navigated in a spirit of goodwill and understanding as we all learn together.

Having said this, however, there are still major issues that require considerable attention, and the one on which we will focus is that of training teachers. Our current cultural circumstances make the need for training teachers urgent. National professional associations have worked to develop guidelines for schools and teachers, with attention to both constitutional and pedagogical concerns.¹¹ There has been a clear focus on the role of K-12 education as an essential site for this work, but a site in need of a great deal of guidance in order to get it right. We have now reached the point where the conversation needs to move from the realm of religious studies and curriculum theory to the concrete task of working directly with teachers themselves and ensuring that they have the tools and the knowledge necessary to approach topics of religion with their students. In today's teacher education systems there is little attention given to religion perhaps because all too many feel it is unimportant, too controversial or simply should not be taught in public schools. As a result, teachers are currently not being adequately prepared to discuss and teach about religion in the context of K-12 education.

As we consider ways to increase teacher preparation and attention to religion in public schools more generally, we also want to ensure that we are moving beyond a focus simply on religion as it has traditionally been understood.. The curriculum and climate of K-12 schools, and perhaps even more so in teacher education, needs to be more attentive to not just religious perspectives but also to secular perspectives. In other words, to prepare students for global engagement requires knowledge not only about the religious self and other, but also about the secular self and other. Not everyone is religious or defines their spiritual beliefs or worldviews as religious. Secular perspectives or worldviews are increasingly embraced individually or collectively, and these perspectives in some contexts come to dominate the public square. While France has a national policy of secularism, *laïcité*, Canada and the US do not officially codify secularism although secular worldviews shape and influence the hearts and minds of many individuals and groups. To what degree are teachers aware of the influence of secular worldviews in society, or even in the public schools themselves?¹² To what degree are they sufficiently prepared to teach in ways that include an awareness of religious *and* secular worldviews? As we discuss teaching and education about religion, we also advocate for a more

¹¹ "Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States." Atlanta: American Academy of Religion, 2010. http://www.aarweb.org/Publications/Online_Publications/Curriculum_Guidelines/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelines.pdf; Religion in the Schools Committee. "Study About Religions in the Social Studies Curriculum." *National Council for the Social Studies*, 1998. <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/religion>. The National Council for the Social Studies is currently working on new standards for teaching about religion, to be published in Spring 2017.

¹² Valk, J. 2007. A plural public school: Religion, worldviews & moral education." *British Journal of Religious Education* 29 (September) 3: 273-285.

expansive understanding of a broad range of worldviews and experiences, including religious, spiritual, and secular.

We now turn to a deeper exploration of teacher education in order to better understand the challenges involved in this work. We will then address a few of the important issues that will need to be considered as we move forward, including a more inclusive view of religious and secular worldviews. We will conclude with some promising initiatives that have already begun as well as our recommendations for ongoing work.

Defining the Problem in Teacher Education: Teachers are not prepared to discuss religion in the context of K-12 education

It is impossible to improve education about religion if teachers, the very people responsible for that education, are not educated themselves about religion or are not comfortable talking about it. However, improving teacher education is a complicated task and it is helpful to understand the structures of teacher education if we want to advocate for making additions or changes. We start with a brief overview of the systems and structures of teacher education in order to provide context for the work we are proposing. We then look at the content of teacher education--what teachers need to know in order to be effective educators. By taking the time to understand the structure and content of teacher education, we are able to be mindful of the complexity of what we ask teachers and teacher educators to do. Being grounded in the basics of teacher education can help us to better understand how our work around religious literacy fits into the larger picture of K-12 education.

Structures of Teacher Education

The formal process of teacher education is one of the significant barriers to making changes in how teachers are prepared regarding religious worldviews. The majority of K-12 teachers enter the profession through academic programs at the undergraduate or graduate level. These programs typically require a sequence of coursework, structured practical experiences observing and teaching in classrooms, a series of standardized exams, and a portfolio of evidence that they meet a set of professional competencies. In the United States, these requirements vary by state, levels of teaching and subject, and many of these requirements are regularly changed and revised. These rigorous requirements demand a lot of the students, and teacher education programs are expected to cover a vast range of skills and knowledge domains in a relatively short period of time. There is not a lot of room to add additional requirements for aspiring teachers to master, such as religious literacy, and especially if religion is not part of the general curriculum or not deemed a “teachable subject”, as is the case in the Canadian province of New Brunswick.

Beyond traditional teacher education programs, increasing numbers of teachers are entering the profession through alternative routes (such as Teach for America), teacher residency programs (such as The New Teachers Project) or online programs (such as the American Board

for the Certification of Teacher Excellence).¹³ These teachers receive abbreviated training and learn much of the craft on the job. Residency programs place an emphasis on gaining experience in the field over time spent taking formal courses.¹⁴ While these programs have the potential to bring individuals into the profession who might not otherwise become teachers, they lack the systematic training of traditional programs and tend to focus on the skills and knowledge that are essential for getting into the classroom rather than on theory around the cultural and social aspects of education.

The systems and structures for teacher education are in flux, often connected to the political climate around education.¹⁵ It is within this context that we are seeking to introduce additional material for teachers to master. And this goes beyond simply asking that teachers take an extra world religions course.

Processes of Teacher Education

Teacher education begins long before an individual even formally begins the process of training to become a teacher and it continues over the entire professional life span. Teaching is one of the few professions which almost every person has had the opportunity to observe directly and extensively prior to beginning formal training.¹⁶ During this “apprenticeship of observation,” people see examples of teaching and form ideas about teaching that can impact their professional practice when they become teachers themselves. Many teachers teach in ways similar to how they were taught when they were in school themselves. Unfortunately, because public schools rarely teach about religion or include robust understandings of religious and secular worldviews in the curriculum, current and future teachers have likely not had the experience of observing teaching that appropriately includes religion. This means that we need to find or develop exemplars for teachers to learn from.

There has been extensive research on how teachers learn to teach and what types of knowledge are associated with the most effective teachers. Teachers need knowledge of the education systems and communities in which they are working; they need knowledge about how students learn, classroom management, and pedagogical tools; they must develop a “wisdom of practice” to guide their work; and of course, teachers need knowledge about the content and subject matter that they are teaching.¹⁷ All of these types of knowledge are continually developed over the professional lifespan. We are particularly interested in teachers’ content knowledge, especially since the content knowledge about religion is known to be relatively low throughout

¹³ Darling-Hammond, L. 2010. Teacher Education and the American Future. *Journal of Teacher Education* 61, no. 1–2: 35–47.

¹⁴ Mader, J. 2016. “The promise of teacher-residency programs.” The Atlantic. June 15, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/04/what-happens-when-teachers-spend-more-time-in-a-classroom-before-teaching/478359/> (accessed August 31, 2016).

¹⁵ Cochran-Smith, M., P. Piazza, and C. Power. 2013 The Politics of Accountability: Assessing Teacher Education in the United States. *The Educational Forum*, 77, no. 1: 6–27.

¹⁶ Lortie, D. 1975. *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

¹⁷ Shulman, L. 1987. Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review* 51:1–22.

our society.¹⁸ We cannot expect that teachers will have a considerable content knowledge about religion simply because they are teachers. This is another area of knowledge that needs to be developed.

Content knowledge for teaching involves much more than an encyclopedic knowledge of a subject. It is also crucial for effective teachers to have an understanding of the underlying structures and paradigms of their field as well as how new knowledge is produced or validated and the work of practitioners in the field.¹⁹ Along with a strong understanding of the content, teachers must also know how to teach about that content in ways that students will be able to understand. In this way, the knowledge required of teachers is distinct to that profession. Education researcher Lee Shulman argues that “the key to distinguishing the knowledge base of teaching lies at the intersection of content and pedagogy, in the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful.”²⁰ Finally, teacher’s beliefs about the subject matter can also have an impact on their teaching, influencing what they choose to teach, materials that they use in the classroom, and how they consciously or unconsciously present content to students.²¹

Each of these elements of teacher knowledge comes into play when considering what teachers know about religion, how they learn about religion, and how they teach about religion to their students. As we begin to take steps to help teachers gain knowledge about religious and secular worldviews in an effort to help them improve how they address religion in the curriculum and how they attend to the identities of their students, it is essential that we support them across all of these elements of content knowledge. We must also be mindful that religion is only one of the many content areas that teachers are expected to be fluent in. Beyond the subject matter of the curriculum they teach, whether that is world history or chemistry, teachers are also expected, among other things, to be attentive to the wide range of learning styles and challenges that students bring to class, to be responsive to cultural experiences, and to develop the appropriate accommodations for students who are English-language learners.

Moving Forward

Approaches for increasing teachers’ knowledge about religion must be sensitive to the contexts in which they are being developed and the population of teachers being targeted. Given the extensive requirements placed on teachers and teacher candidates today, we must be strategic in how we frame the argument that religious literacy is yet another domain in which teachers must become competent. In this framing, we will need to be clear about what it is that we are

¹⁸ “U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey.” Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2010/09/religious-knowledge-full-report.pdf>.

¹⁹ Grossman, P. L., Wilson, S. M., & Shulman, L. (1989). Teachers of substance: Subject matter knowledge for teaching. In M. C. Reynolds (Ed.). *Knowledge base for the beginning teacher* (pp. 23-36). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

²⁰ Shulman, L. 1987. Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review* 51:15.

²¹ Grossman, P. L., Wilson, S. M., & Shulman, L. (1989). Teachers of substance: Subject matter knowledge for teaching. In M. C. Reynolds (Ed.). *Knowledge base for the beginning teacher* (pp. 23-36). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

expecting teachers to know or be able to do when it comes to religion in their schools and classrooms. There are several domains in K-12 education where religion is relevant and the priority of these domains may vary for different teachers and schools.

Essential Domains of Knowledge

The first domain is what might be considered basic religious literacy--knowing the appropriate terms for religious groups, a general understanding of beliefs and practices and the diversity of these within given traditions, and perhaps some knowledge of the sacred texts, important figures, and historical development. This is knowledge that allows teachers to counter stereotypes or misunderstandings when they arise and to model using appropriate vocabulary for students. This is not an expectation that teachers become experts in all religious traditions or even in a few. But a basic knowledge about religions of the world, and how they shape and influence individuals, communities and nations, past and present, is necessary in order to function knowledgeably in the world.²² Depending on their contexts and the religious diversity present in their communities, teachers may benefit from gaining a deeper knowledge of some traditions. Teachers of different subjects and levels may also need to have more knowledge of particular traditions if they are represented in the curricula that they teach. In essence, this first domain necessitates a basic awareness of the extent that religious, or religious subject matter, is implicit, explicit, or simply absent from the curriculum of a variety of subject areas for which teachers are responsible. It may come as a surprise to many teachers how often religious matters are excluded, even in subtle ways, from the curriculum, which can convey to students that religion is not important.²³

The second and third domains are more pedagogical. It is unrealistic to expect that all K-12 educators will become religious studies scholars, but it is perfectly reasonable to expect that they are familiar with how religion legally can and cannot be discussed and taught in U.S. public schools. While expecting a familiarity with the legal relationship between religion and public school classrooms may seem like a fairly low bar, there is actually a great deal of confusion about what public school teachers can and cannot do regarding religion. A 2010 survey of U.S. adults found that while 89 percent knew that public school teachers were not permitted to lead students in prayer, only 36 percent knew that public schools could legally offer comparative religions course.²⁴ This confusion generates fear. Teachers avoid religion, even when it is directly related to the curriculum, because they are afraid of how parents or administrators might react. If teachers were confident about what they are legally able to teach about, they might be

²² Parks, S. D. 2011. *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose and Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Smith, H. 2001. *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.

²³ Nord W. and C. Haynes. 1998. *Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; Van Brummelen, H. 1991. "The World Portrayed in Texts: An Analysis of the Context of Elementary School Textbooks" in *Journal of Educational Thought*. Vol. 25 (December): 201-21.

²⁴ "U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2010/09/religious-knowledge-full-report.pdf>.

more willing to take the first steps towards incorporating more about religion into their curriculum. A greater familiarity with the ways in which the First Amendment governs the relationship between religion and public schools can protect teachers, students, parents, and schools from misunderstandings and may help foster a school climate in which religion is not seen as a taboo subject.

The third domain goes beyond knowing what is and is not strictly legal to do or say regarding religion in a public school classroom. There are possible ways to incorporate religion into the curriculum that may technically be legal, but may not be advisable or pedagogically sound. Is it legal to ask a religious leader or a parent to come in and give a talk about the history of a religious holiday or event? Yes. Is this always advisable? It depends greatly on the context: how the visit is framed, if there are other guest speakers, if the students are exposed to a range of voices and experiences.²⁵ Is it legal for students to try on garments or accessories that are associated with how a particular culture practices their tradition? Yes, for the most part. Is this advisable? Probably not.²⁶ While these may seem like engaging lessons that gives students first-hand experience with members of religious communities or objects closely associated with them, they run the risk of creating one-sided understanding in which a single person or object stands in for a diverse and nuanced tradition. Knowing about religions and knowing what is legal to teach must also be accompanied by knowledge about how to appropriately include religion and an understanding of different approaches to teaching about religion. The extent to which teachers need to be knowledgeable in this domain depends largely on the teachers' grades and subjects. A middle or high school English or history teacher is much more likely to have lessons directly about religion than a second grade teacher or a geometry teacher.

Finally, teachers must be knowledgeable about how religious worldviews play a role in the lives of their students, in the school community, and beyond the school walls. Many teachers work to make their teaching responsive to the cultural diversity of their students--bringing in a wider range of voices in literature, recognizing the different "funds of knowledge" that students bring from their lives beyond school.²⁷ Unfortunately, little of this work in culturally responsive or multicultural education has included sufficient attention to religious worldviews. Being attentive to the religious identities of students could range from simply being aware that a student may be fasting for a religious holiday or helping them find accommodations for religious attire to inviting students to share how they interpret a reading through the lens of their religious

²⁵ Some scholars argue that guest speakers, or visits to religious sites or places of worship, are never appropriate. For more on this argument see: Moore, Diane L. 2007. *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education*. New York: Palgrave; Macmillan; and Lester, E. 2011. *Teaching about Religion: A Democratic Approach for Public Schools*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press..

²⁶ For an example of how a lesson involving trying on religious garments went terribly wrong see Chapter 1 in: Wertheimer, Linda K. Faith Ed: Teaching About Religion in an Age of Intolerance. Boston: Beacon Press, 2015.

²⁷ Gonzalez, N., L. Moll, and C. Amanti, eds. 2005. *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*. Mahwah, N.J: Routledge.

experiences or helping a student navigate tensions between the school curriculum and what they have been taught in their religious community.²⁸

The Inclusion of Secular Worldviews

There are significant numbers of individuals, whether teachers, students, law-makers, or ordinary citizens, however, who express no interest in religion. Statistics indicate that the number of “nones”, those who indicate on official forms that they do not identify with or consider themselves religious, are growing. These can range from individuals who want to distance themselves from organized religion while retaining spiritual beliefs and practices to others who are hostile to religion and consider it a negative force in society.²⁹ Opposition to education about religion sometimes comes from individuals and groups who desire to eliminate religion from the school curriculum. There are indeed ideas and activities promoted by religious individuals and groups that have no place in education. Atheists, secularists and others have long pointed to many of these and legitimately so. But proselytizing, in whatever form whether blatant or otherwise, has no place in the schools, whether done by religious or secular people.

There are also those who simply do not wish to speak about religion, and seek to have it removed from the educational system. But does a dislike for certain subject matter constitute grounds for excluding it from the school curriculum? There are also those who dislike politics, art, history, literature and more, but a dislike for certain subject matter is not legitimate reasons to exclude it from the curriculum. They all form important aspects of life and hence are worthy of study.

There is yet one more reason to include education about religious worldviews, and this now leads to why it is also important to include education about secular worldviews. In the public domain, the words faith and beliefs are readily associated with religious people and sometimes almost exclusively so. Those affiliated with the American Humanist Association, as well as others, all too readily assume that religious beliefs are an “add on,” and often an illogical and irrational “add on,” to an otherwise secular way of life. From a secular perspective this may make sense but not to seriously thinking religious people, who will argue that all people have faith and beliefs—they form a constitutive aspect of human life. Secular individuals and groups have faith and beliefs but they are in faith and beliefs systems that exclude any notion of a “transcendent other” (whatever that might be) and scriptures associated with it. A study of both religious and secular worldviews will reveal that beliefs (of whatever kind) form an important part of human life, which in turn shape and influence thought and action.

²⁸ Skerrett, A. 2014 Religious Literacies in a Secular Literacy Classroom. *Reading Research Quarterly* 49, no. 2: 233–50; McBain, D. 2003. Towards a Just Peace: Opening Our Schools to Discussing Worldviews. *Education Canada*. 43 (Winter) 1:26-27.

²⁹ “‘Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation.” 2012. Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Unaffiliated/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf; Hitchens, C. 2007. *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. New York: Twelve.

As such, in a globalized world, an examination of secular perspectives—their philosophical (epistemological, ontological) groundings, their cultural or communal associations, authoritative structures and individuals, and more—are also relevant. Secular worldviews and secular people have contributed vastly to the history of the modern world and in many areas of human life, as have religious worldviews and religious people. Both religious and secular worldviews have the source of great good in the world as well as the source of great harm. Teaching about both helps to paint a fuller picture of human life in which both religious and secular students can see themselves. Teachers can be encouraged more clearly articulate how a range of worldviews play out in history, politics, and social studies curricula. The struggle to eliminate slavery, discrimination, and political oppression was often led by individuals who embraced religious specific worldviews, as in the case of William Wilberforce, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. But no less where these individuals joined by secular people who were not religiously inclined and had a completely different set of beliefs and values, yet who also sought to eliminate the same social scourges. Not to mention this is to unnecessarily withhold, perhaps even distort, important aspects of people’s actions and the beliefs that propel them, whether religious or secular.

Religious and secular perspectives also play a role in the school beyond courses that intentionally target religion, either as the main topic of the class or as a significant focus. Students and teachers bring their religious, spiritual, and secular identities with them to school. They pervade school life. Religious and secular groups play, or can play, a large role in the school community. It is also impossible, or even wrong-headed, to insulate schools from tensions created by the religious-secular divide that are often present in many local communities and across the world. Religious and secular tensions can proliferate when they are ignored. As such, a better approach is to include the teaching about both religious and secular views and expand such teaching by speaking of religious and secular worldview teaching. Such teaching will lead to greater awareness and understanding, and hopefully lead to more peaceful co-existence.

Promising Initiatives and the Need for More Research

Research to Understand what is Happening in Schools

To better understand what teachers are currently experiencing and what types of learning they need to better prepare themselves for religious and secular worldview teaching, the Religious Literacy Project at Harvard Divinity School began an ambitious mapping project for all high schools in the United States.³⁰ Starting in 2015, research interns have been scouring the course catalogues of US high schools to determine which schools offer courses about religion or courses wherein religion is embedded in the curriculum in a significant way. While the research

³⁰ To learn more about the “Religious Studies in Public Schools Mapping Project,” see <http://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/initiatives/religious-studies-in-public-schools-mapping-project> (accessed August 31, 2016).

is still in its preliminary stages and no official results have yet been released, we have observed a couple of general trends.

First, and not surprisingly, course offerings in public high schools about religion or that have religion embedded in them are quite sparse. This is the case in both the United States and Canada, but not so in many countries in Europe where teaching about religious is still an important aspect of the school curriculum. Second, and also probably not surprisingly, students in urban or suburban areas are far more likely to attend a high school where such courses are offered than are students who live in rural areas. However, this actual data is incredibly significant in that it confirms what most leaders in this field have known for a long time: students who attend public high schools in the United States and Canada are not being educated about religious worldviews in a way that prepares them for civic life as adults. While later phases of this study will explore who is teaching these courses, it is suspected that teachers who are teaching such courses have not had the formal preparation that would preserve the constitutionality nor ensure the effectiveness of such education. Anecdotal experience also suggests that while current course offerings are relatively sparse, they are also growing. Teachers across the United States are responding to the desires of students and the perceived problems of society and striving to provide what they can, but they have little pre-service training or in-service support to do so in many instances.

This research has the potential to reveal the full extent of current secondary school religious course offerings and this could serve to support the argument that more formal preparation to teach about religious and secular worldviews is necessary in order for these courses to have the intended impacts on the students. Drawing on the findings of this project, the REA and teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities could offer real leadership that would help prepare teachers who can then play a more impactful role in providing an education for students that can actually help them change the world.

Professional Development Opportunities

Sensitive to the pervasive nature of religious and secular worldviews, and the need to address and educate about both, professional development opportunities focused on teaching about religion or increasing teachers' religious and secular worldview literacy are starting to be offered. These types of professional development opportunities are currently very scattered and range from one day in-service workshops to multi-week summer residency programs. The hosting organizations include non-profits associated with particular religious groups, institutes focused on interfaith work, and public school districts. The teachers participating in these programs do not necessarily teach courses directly focused on religion, but rather, they may have seen the importance of having a better understanding of religious and secular worldviews in order to relate to their students in authentic ways and to accurately deliver the curriculum. At present, the teachers who choose to participate are doing so voluntarily, seeking out this particular type of enrichment, but more research is needed to understand what motivates teachers to attend this sort of professional development.

Workshops on religious literacy or teaching about religion can help teachers become more familiar with the various approaches for teaching about religious and secular worldviews. They can also take teachers out of the classroom and engage in experiential learning. Some of these programs focus on the lived experience of religious communities and may include site visits or multi-faith panels. There is also great potential for including secular organizations in this type of workshop. Inviting organizations such as the American Humanist Association to also participate in these workshops and welcome teachers for visits could help teachers see structural parallels between religious and secular organizations and perspectives, although each has considerably different content. When inviting groups in, whether they are teachers or students, to learn more about their beliefs, practices and experiences, organizations, both secular and religion, and the individuals who represent them, must avoid proselytizing. Such organizations should engage in teaching *about* the beliefs of their faith perspective, just as schools are currently required to teach only *about* religion, and not to foist religious belief onto the students.

While the opportunities for in-service teachers to partake in professional development on teaching about religious and secular worldviews are slowly increasing, little is being done in teacher preparation programs to ensure that new teachers are adequately prepared for the diverse religious and secular worldviews they are likely to encounter in the classroom. A review of programs of study of education programs found no courses solely devoted to teaching about religion or religious literacy.³¹ While many teacher preparation programs require that students take classes in multicultural education or social contexts of education, these courses rarely devote sufficient, if any, time to religious and secular worldviews. A great deal more research is needed on teacher preparation programs and how they are addressing issues of religious and secular worldviews with their teacher candidates.

Conclusions

Clearly there is much that needs to be done in the realm of teacher education to prepare teachers to educate students with authenticity and vision for the increasingly globalized and religiously and secularly diverse world that students come from, learn in, and will live in after leaving our schools. There can be no doubt that the need for our students to be prepared with greater awareness of the *other* and the *self* will only become more vital if education is to have any meaningful influence in developing a more just and civil society that nurtures and fosters human development and potential instead of destructive hostility, violence, and oppression. Thus, teachers have a responsibility to teach about various religious and secular worldviews that swirl in their local or national communities, as well as in the larger global community. It is our hope that teacher education programs all over this country will respond to this urgent call and

³¹ Robinson, J. 2015 Unnatural Exclusion: Devaluing Domestic Religious Diversity in Teacher Training for Social Studies in *Religion and Public Schools: International Perspectives Group*, at American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

take seriously the need to provide the necessary training for these teachers in the field of religious and secular worldview literacy. And may the REA remember and fulfill one of its original purposes to “keep before the public the ideal of Religious Education, and the sense of its need and value” by carrying out its current mission to encourage, promote, and publish research and other literature that will strengthen this endeavor and build and support networks of collaboration that will lead out in accomplishing these aims.

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