Abstract
Attention to diversity is essential in today’s classrooms. But what identities count when we talk about diversity? Multicultural education has worked to better recognize diverse students, reduce prejudices, and build empowering school cultures. However, religious diversity is frequently left out of discussions of diversity in education. This paper presents a literature review of the treatment of religion in multicultural education journals from 2002-2016. The review then serves as a starting point for reflections on the importance of recognizing religious diversity in multicultural education.
Introduction

Students, teachers, and the public continually receive mixed messages when it comes to religion in U.S. public schools. Some common misperceptions say that the First Amendment and the separation of church and state require schools to be religion-free zones (Pew Research Center, 2010). At the same time, various groups campaign to return to an earlier era when the unofficial Protestant establishment dictated daily prayers and Bible reading in public schools. The media alternately touts the United States’ unique position as highly religious when compared to other industrial nations (WIN - Gallup International, 2012) and both celebrates and bemoans the increasing numbers of non-religious Americans. Recent political discourse is filled with religion-related topics, from the ban on immigration from Muslim majority countries to the resurgence of White Christian Nationalism. A survey conducted in the early months of 2017, the first months of the Trump presidency, found that a quarter of Americans believe that Muslims are a danger to their physical safety (Froese, 2017). About half of Evangelicals believe that Atheists’ values are inferior to their own and that Muslims want to limit their religious freedom. At the same time, about half of Jews and almost two thirds of Americans with no religious affiliation see their religious freedom threatened by conservative Christians (Froese, 2017). Within this complex religious culture, teachers are seeing more students from minority religious traditions than they have in the past.

Yet despite this complex religious landscape, teachers receive little to no preparation regarding religion in the public school classroom, from the basics of the legal frameworks that govern religion in U.S. public schools and how to teach about religion academically, to how to respond to religiously diverse students (Aronson, Amatullah, & Laughter, 2016; J. R. Moore, 2009). In turn, students are given few, if any, opportunities to learn about religious diversity. However, without a better understanding of religion, in the United States and around the world, and how to live in a religiously diverse society, classrooms and communities can easily be pulled apart. Students are unable to understand the experiences of their religiously-different classmates and a limited in their ability to interpret the religion-related elements of complex socio-political issues, including reproductive rights, climate change, school choice, and immigration.

The mindset, tools, and resources of multicultural education are one possible starting point for developing a better understanding of religious diversity in public schools. With an emphasis on values of inclusion and respect and goals of prejudice reduction, recognition of diverse identities, challenging dominant social structures, and creating empowering school cultures (Banks, 2004; Bennett, 2001; Gay, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1987), multicultural education should be a natural home for conversations about religious diversity. However, religious diversity has not received substantial attention in the field of multicultural education. While scholars in the field have acknowledged the heavy emphasis on racial and ethnic diversity due to the origins of the field (Sleeter & Grant, 1987), there have also been acknowledgements of the expansion of the purview of multicultural education. Ladson-Billings (2004) writes,
What we now call multicultural education is also a composite. It is no longer solely race, or class, or gender. Rather it is the infinite permutations that come about as a result of the dazzling array of combinations human beings recruit to organize and fulfill themselves….The variety of ‘selves’ we perform have made multicultural education a richer, more complex, and more difficult enterprise to organize and implement than previously envisioned” (p. 50).

For many people, religious identity is one of their central “selves” and is certainly a key element in how individuals and communities “organize and fulfill themselves.” Given the current landscape of religious diversity in the United States is deeply mired in tension and distrust, it is critical that students and teachers are provided with the tools to navigate that landscape.

This review begins from the observation that the multicultural education literature is largely silent when it comes to topics of religion. While religion is frequently listed among other identity categories such as race, gender, and ability, it is not given much attention beyond those initial mentions. Through a detailed review of five multicultural education journals between 2002 and 2016 and a broad review of foundational texts of the field, such as the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks & Banks, 2004), this review both maps the existing, if sparse, discourse about religion in the field of multicultural education and analyzes the ways in which religion is conceptualized by these authors. While there is a fairly limited amount of literature to review, it provides a valuable starting point to understand what religion-related topics scholars of multicultural education have recognized as being in relation to multicultural education and how they portray the relationship of religion to multicultural education. With this understanding, there are opportunities to work toward better understandings of religious diversity in public schools.

**Background**

**Multicultural Education**

For the purposes of this review, I am defining multicultural education very broadly. This review includes literature addressing various approaches to multicultural education as defined by Banks (2004) and also related to concepts such as culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) and other forms of culturally relevant education that have developed out of multicultural education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Although these different strands of work have different and important outlooks, purposes, and approaches, this review seeks to understand how religion is discussed in the broad context of multicultural education and too much focus on specific definitions, approaches, or desired outcomes of multicultural education has the potential to paralyze the conversation (Appelbaum, 2002). However, it is still valuable to outline some of the major definitions of multicultural education and widely used frameworks.

Banks and Banks (2013) characterize multicultural education as “an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process” (p. 3), reinforcing the idea that this is a
multifaceted field that draws on multiple disciplines and methodologies while also seeking a variety of outcomes primarily centered around educational equity for diverse students. Banks (2004) identifies five dimensions of multicultural education: (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) prejudice reduction, (4) equity pedagogy, and (5) an empowering school culture and social structure. The dimensions represent increasingly sophisticated integration of diversity and difference in curriculum and pedagogy. Alternatively, Sleeter and Grant (1987) identify five approaches to multicultural education that describe a range of ways of thinking about difference and approaches to pluralism in the school setting. These dimensions are (1) teaching the culturally different, (2) a human relations approach, (3) single group studies (4) multicultural education, and (5) education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Both of these typologies demonstrate the many approaches to multicultural education and the literature in this review draws on these and other scholars’ approaches to multicultural education.

Locating Religion in U.S. Public Schools

There is substantial misunderstanding about religion in public schools, both regarding the legality of teaching religion as an academic subject and the expression of religious identity, beliefs, and practices. Because the vast majority of the literature reviewed in this article deals with public education in the United States, and because over 90 percent of students in the U.S. attend public schools (McFarland et al., 2017), it is critical to be clear about the relationship between religion and public education before further discussion of religion in multicultural education.

The four domains of knowledge regarding religion in public schools are (1) legal literacy (2) religious literacy (3) pedagogical content knowledge and (4) socio-cultural knowledge (Gardner, Soules, & Valk, 2017). The first two, legal and religious literacy, are somewhat prerequisite for the second two as they provide the foundational legal framework and content knowledge to enable teachers to deliver academically sound instruction about religion and be able to create classrooms that are responsive to students’ diverse religious identities.

Legal Framework

Both the Free Exercise and No Establishment clauses of the First Amendment govern the study and practice of religion in public schools. However, the application of these clauses in schools is widely misunderstood. For example, a 2010 survey of religious knowledge among U.S. adults found that only 36% of respondents knew that public schools could legally offer a comparative religions class and only 23% knew that public school teachers could read from the Bible as an example of literature (Pew Research Center, 2010). To the contrary, the Supreme Court has made it clear that even rulings on the unconstitutionality of school-sponsored prayer do not negate the importance of the academic study of religion. In the landmark case, Abington School District v. Schempp (1963), a case often blamed for “kicking God out of the public schools” (DelFattore, 2004; Laats, 2012), the Court ruled that daily Bible reading and the
recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in public schools was unconstitutional as a violation of the Establishment clause of the First Amendment. However, in the majority opinion, Justice Thomas Clark stated, “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 to the advancement of civilization.” (School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp, 1963). The academic study of religion, discussed in more detail below, is, therefore, not only permitted but encouraged by the courts. While school sponsored, endorsed, or promoted religious activities violate the Establishment clause, individual religious practice as well as accommodations for religion, such as modifications to a dress code, are protected by the Free Exercise clause. While this review is not the place for an extended treatise on the legal frameworks surrounding religion in U.S. public schools, this is an area where educators at all levels could benefit from greater understanding.

Unfortunately, a number of the articles discussed in this review do not appear to have a strong grasp on the application of the First Amendment and recommend or discuss classroom practices that could be interpreted as in violation, such as leading second grade children in Buddhist meditation (Cowhey, 2008) or inviting religious leaders or practitioners as guest speakers¹ (Hossain, 2013; Huber-Warring & Bergman, 2007).

Religious Literacy

Before one can get to the pedagogical content knowledge discussed in the next section, a foundation of content knowledge, in this case religious literacy, is necessary. Religious literacy is, of course, much more complex than simply being able to name the 10 Commandment or the 5 Pillars and various scholars have offered useful definitions (Marcus, Forthcoming; D. L. Moore, 2007; Prothero, 2008). This knowledge required for domain, along with the socio-cultural domain, will be highly contextual, particularly depending on an individual’s role in the school and the religious make-up of the community. For example, a kindergarten teacher in a predominantly Jewish community and a high school history teacher is a predominantly Catholic community with a growing Muslim population will each need different knowledge based on what and who they teach.

Academic Study of Religion in Public Schools

There is substantial agreement among scholars and practitioners in religious studies, law, and education that the academic study of religion in schools is an important part of both students’ understandings of both historical and contemporary events and of their learning to navigate difference (American Academy of Religion, 2010; Haynes & Thomas, 2011; National Council for the Social Studies, 2014). This agreement has been demonstrated through consensus

¹ While inviting guest speakers is not necessarily in violation of the First Amendment, depending on the content of the speaker’s visit, a school could be seen as endorsing religious speech or practice, especially if the speaker takes a particularly partisan stance (Wertheimer, 2015). Teachers should be cautious when turning to religious leaders or practitioners as primary sources for the classroom (Haynes & Thomas, 2011).
documents endorsed by dozens of wide-ranging religious, civic, and educational organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, the National Association of Evangelicals, People for the American Way, and the National Education Association (Haynes & Thomas, 2011). Additionally, the National Council for the Social Studies recently adopted a Religious Studies Supplement as an appendix their College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (2013). The C3 Framework “emphasizes the disciplinary concepts and practices that support students as they develop the capacity to know, analyze, explain, and argue about interdisciplinary challenges in our social world” (p. 6) and the addition of the Religious Studies Supplement reaffirms the importance of the inclusion of religion in that learning process. Despite this consensus in the scholarship and jurisprudence, there is wide-spread confusion in the public, including public school teachers and administrators, about what constitutes appropriate and legal study of religion in America’s public schools.

In light of these misunderstandings and the increasing role religious diversity has taken in American society, it is important to differentiate between the devotional study of religion and the nonsectarian, academic study of religion. The devotional study of religion generally occurs within religious communities and is intended to instill belief and adherence to a particular religious tradition. Also referred to as confessional religious education, devotional study of religion is often led by religious leaders and practitioners, and while it may include the study of other religions, the purpose is to pass on beliefs and traditions to the next generation and build community within a particular tradition. The academic study of religion, on the other hand, introduces students to approaches for thinking about and studying religion from an objective stance and exposes students to different religious traditions. Constitutionally sound education about religion “strives for student awareness of religions, but does not press for student acceptance of any religion…may expose students to a diversity of religious views, but may not impose any particular view…it does not promote or denigrate religion… [and it] informs students about various beliefs; it does not seek to conform students to any particular belief (Haynes & Thomas, 2011, p. 45). This can also be understood as education about many different religions rather than education for a particular religion. While a not bright-line rule to determine if a particular topic or lesson cross the line from academic and constitutional to devotional and sectarian, these distinctions provide a general guide to the legal inclusion of religion in the public school curriculum.

**Socio-Cultural Knowledge**

The final domain recognizes that religion does not get left behind when student and teachers walk into their classrooms each day. This domain is particularly relevant to multicultural education and multicultural educators would do well to focus their energies on developing an understanding of the lived religious experiences of student. Beyond an understanding and recognition of the legal rights surrounding religious identity and expression in schools, the recognition or denial of students’ religious identities can have significant impacts on their experiences of school (Dallavis, 2011; Skerrett, 2014; Webb, 2000). Religious identities can
be invisible, making it easy for teachers, staff, and other students to be dismissive of or disrespectful towards religious students without realizing it. The hidden curricula and underlying structures of public schools can also make it non-Christian students feel marginalized, as discussed in more detail later. While much of the discourse regarding religion and education has been about religion in the curriculum and religious literacy, religious identity and expression has also been long overlooked and can be a substantial part of a student’s experience of school.

Public Schools’ Longstanding Challenge of Religious Diversity

Each of these four areas of knowledge about religion in public schools is interconnected and the emphasis placed on each will vary in different schools and communities. However, it is clear that all four have been largely neglected through the history of American public education. While religious diversity has been present and influential throughout the history of the United States (Gaustad & Schmidt, 2002; Manseau, 2015), public schools and their predecessors have often created structures to suppress that diversity. One of the earliest education laws, the 1647 “Old Deluder Satan Law,” was in part intended to make sure that children were able to read the Bible and thus resist the influences of the “saint-seeming deceivers,” that is, Catholics (Fraser, 2016). The Common Schools of the 19th century were built on a foundation of pan-Protestant theology and values, a compromise to appease the diverse Protestant denominations, but were unwilling to expand that compromise to include Catholics (Fraser, 2016). An extensive system of government supported boarding schools took Native American children away from their families and systematically deprived them of their native traditions while indoctrinating them into Christianity (Adams, 1995). The court cases of the mid-20th century reveal the various tactics that were employed to limit diverse religious expression in public schools, including punishing students for refusing to say the Pledge of Allegiance (Ellis, 2005) and daily Bible reading and prayers (DelFattore, 2004).

While court cases continue to arise to fight for religious freedom in public schools, or against the inappropriate intrusion of religion, public schools today are more open than they have ever been to religious diversity. The question remains, however, if they will take the necessary steps to ensure that religious diversity is recognized and supported rather than pushed aside, or even push out, as is often has been in the past.

Methods

While the formal review looks at literature published in journals, it is also important to take note of how religion and related topics are treated in some of the foundational literature on multicultural education. Reference books and textbooks often serve as an entry point to a field of study and outline the major questions and directions for research. The treatment of religion in these sources is likely to be a significant influence on how religion is treated in other writing on multicultural education. The absence of religion in this foundational literature is telling of what is found in the journals as well.
The second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks & Banks, 2004) has 49 chapters and not one chapter specifically about religion. There are only 22 entries in the index for religion-related terms. Of these, almost half refer to historical discussions and another 5 are the names of religious organizations. There are 4 references to a section on a single religious school which is, as far as I can tell, the only extended discussion related to religion and the focus is on a private Christian school and its role in building an ethno-racial identity (pg. 173-176).

The popular and commonly cited *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Banks & Banks, 2013), now its 9th edition, does include a chapter on religion. In the first through fourth editions, this chapter (Uphoff, 2001) included discussion of definitions of religion, contemporary religious demographics and the significance of religion in U.S. society, and a substantive discussion of the educational implications of religious diversity. Unfortunately, starting with the fifth edition, this chapter has been replaced by a chapter written by Charles Lippy (Lippy, 2013) which is almost entirely historical in focus, concentrating on the history of religious diversity in the United States not discussing contemporary issues of religious diversity in schools. While this history is important for a thorough understanding of the contemporary issues, the pre-service teachers that this book is marketed to also need to understand the present landscape of religious diversity, the educational implications of changing religious diversity, and how this influences the relationship between religion and multicultural education.

On a more encouraging note, the *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education* (Banks, 2012) includes 34 entries on “Religion in Society and Schools,” which is one of 16 topical areas that make up these entries include “Anti-Semitism in Schools and Society,” “Christian Privilege in Schools and Society,” “Religion, Cultural, and Education in the United States,” “Religion, Teaching about in Schools,” and “Religion, the Courts, and Public Schools.” These entries cover pedagogical approaches and curricular issues, as well as the major legal cases and guidance regarding religion in public schools. The positioning of religion as a unique topic in this encyclopedia signifies that religion is a valid form of diversity and is worthy of attention.

So far I have been focusing on the relative silence about religion in the multicultural education literature. But this silence is not only within multicultural education, the problem is part of the broader landscape of educational research. A search of all past issues of the *Review of Educational Research* (RER) returned no articles with the word ‘religion’ in the title, the abstract, or the keywords associated with the article. Further, a broader search of the journal’s archives did not return any articles on religion and education from the past two decades, including any discussions of faith-based education. In fact, the most substantive discussion of religion in *RER* was found in an article from 1961 that examined the questions, “What place, if any, has religion in the public schools? And what position should the American people take toward parochial schools?” (Stanley, 1961, p. 91). Much has changed in both the educational and religious landscapes since 1961 and, while these remain important questions, we need to come up with new answers.
Further, Nelson’s (Nelson, 2010) investigation of the presence of religion-related terms in the six journals published by the American Education Research Association (AERA) between 1931 and 2000 also revealed a very limited number of articles with mentions of religion-related terms in either titles or abstracts. This study was limited because it did not review the content of the articles identified in the search and thus could not comment on the approach to the discussion of religion in these articles. However, even within those limitations, this research demonstrates the dearth of research on religion related topics. While the previous section demonstrated the long history of religious diversity in schools, the gatekeepers of educational research, such as AERA and NAME, do not appear to have recognized the religion in schools as a significant strand of research, either in general or in relation to multicultural education.

In this overview of foundational literature as well as the journal articles reviewed below, I have not found any instances in which authors explicitly stated that religion should be excluded from the purview of multicultural education. The absence of religious appears to result from ignorance, unintentional or intentional, about the place of religion in the school context. However, there is also some evidence of the reluctance to include coverage of religion in both educational research and practice. A study of social studies teacher educators found that only 23% of participants agreed with the statement, “Multicultural education should include exposing students to religious ways of thinking” (Zam & Stone, 2006, p. 96) as well as other evidence of the marginalization of religion. Regardless of the motivations behind the exclusion of religion from multicultural education, the failure to name religion as an important aspect of cultural and identity and give it substantive attention alongside other forms of identity also sends a message about what identities are considered worthy of attention by multicultural education scholars and practitioners. In addition, this silence about religion makes it more challenging to establish and maintain rigorous research agendas, resulting in disconnected and incomplete discussions of religion in multicultural education, as will be demonstrated in this review. Without coherent and targeted lines of inquiry that investigate how multicultural education can attend to religious identity alongside other identities such as race and gender, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers will continue to lack the tools and knowledge to address the increasingly complex religious diversity in U.S. classrooms. From this survey of the foundational literature, I now turn to the review of the literature published in relevant journals between 2002 and 2016.

**Literature Selection**

The events of September 11, 2001 significantly impacted U.S. awareness of religion and the consequences of not understanding religion and produced a shift in the conversation about religion in schools and education about religion (Albright & Woodward, 2006; Duckworth, 2014; Nash & Bishop, 2009; Waggoner, 2013). Given this turning point, I chose to begin this review with literature published in 2002. I identified eight multicultural education journals from the ERIC list of indexed journals. For each journal, I ran searches on 15 religion-related terms (religion, faith, spiritual(ity), sacred, interfaith, multifaith, god, Christianity, Jew, Judaism, Hindu(ism), Muslim, Islam, Buddhist/Buddhism, Sikh(ism)) and through reviewing titles and
abstracts initially yielded just over 100 articles. Closer screening of these articles a final set of 36 articles from five journals: *Intercultural Education, International Journal of Multicultural Education, Journal for Multicultural Education, Multicultural Education,* and *Multicultural Perspectives.* For articles to be included, they had to be about K-12 schools, curriculum, teachers, or pre-service teachers or teacher educators in the United States. Both empirical and conceptual work was included. Articles that were primarily focused on higher education or did not include a substantial discussion of religion. Because many of the religion-related terms used for the search criteria can also appear in descriptions of populations or as non-religion related descriptors, many articles that appeared in the initial search were ultimately excluded for not having a substantial focus on religion. Finally, while literature on religion in U.S. schools frequently differentiates between public and private schools due to the complex restrictions on religion in public schools, this review includes work on both public and private schools as the issues are relevant in both settings and the two studies based on private education both have implications for the broader conversation about religion and multicultural education.

**Findings**

This review is just as much about reviewing what is discussed in the literature as it is about revealing what is not discussed. While I conducted this review in response to my suspicion that there was a lack of discussion about religion in the multicultural education literature, there is obviously a small body of work that has addressed the topic. This limited body of literature provides some insight into how multicultural education scholars are thinking about religion, even in this limited fashion, and provides a starting point for looking toward possible future research trajectories. I will begin with a brief discussion of the themes and topics that are present in the literature before turning to a discussion of what is missing from this literature and the implications for multicultural education.

The 36 articles that I identified for this review represent a very disjointed picture of religious diversity in U.S. public schools and in relation to multicultural education. The vast majority of the work was theoretical rather than empirical and the authors did not draw on common theoretical or conceptual frameworks. These characteristics made it challenging to develop a meaningful organizational framework to analyze the literature. Ultimately, I categorized the articles based on the major topic of inquiry or discussion, resulting in the division of the literature into the categories of (1) curriculum, (2) teachers, and (3) students. While there are some articles that deal with more than one of these categories, those articles were grouped based on the primary focus or with other pieces that took a similar approach or had similar conclusions.

**Curriculum**

Over 60 percent of the articles dealt with the curriculum in one form or another. These include critiques of curricular materials (David & Ayoubly, 2005; Eraqi, 2015; Fontaine, 2010), informational pieces intended to provide teachers with content knowledge (Al-Hazza & Lucking,
2015; Callaway, 2010), and a series discussing Christian privilege and its implications in schools (Clark, 2003, 2003; Clark, Vargas, & Schlosser, 2002). There are also several articles that directly comment on the relationship between religion and multicultural education. These include some very well done articles that should be models for others writing on this topic (Aronson et al., 2016; J. R. Moore, 2009) to those that only serve to further confuse the issue (DeSantis, 2011) or suggest that attention to religious and spiritual identities could somehow compromise a commitment to multicultural education: “How do we, who are multicultural educators, think about and respond to these spiritual and religious aspects of our students’ (and our own) identities but still abide by principles of pursuing justice, advocating inclusion, affirming difference, and ensuring quality education for all?” (Lisi & Rios, 2006, p. 1). Of course, a counter question should be, how can multicultural educators pursue justice, advocate inclusion, and affirm difference without thinking about and responding to the spiritual and religious aspects of students’ identities?

A common theme in this group of articles, and in the reviewed literature overall, is a focus on Islam and discomfort around Islam. All but one of the pieces on curricular materials was about resources for teaching about Islam or the Arab world and all of the informational pieces take teachers’ lack of knowledge about Islam as their starting point. While it is not entirely unexpected given the political climate and international events of the last decades, this emphasis on Islam makes it seem like teachers are already familiar and comfortable with other religious traditions, which we know they are not, or that other religions, since they are not at the center of global conflict, are not worthy of attention. The few pieces that do focus on other traditions, including two pieces that address non-Western traditions (Hendry, 2003; Ho’omanawanui, 2010), are refreshing, but they also generally do not discuss interactions between religious traditions.

**Teachers**

The literature that is focused primarily on teachers can be grouped into those articles on teachers encounters with religion in the classroom, those on the intersections of religious identities and other identities, and those exploring topics of spirituality in relation to being a multicultural education. When religion shows up in the classroom, teachers may have negative reactions and a take a deficit view of religious minority students (Taggar, 2006) or they may become intrigued by the questions themselves and seek out more information to bring back and share with the class (Cowhey, 2008). However, with only two articles on this issue, it is hard to make any generalizations about how teachers will respond when they encounter religion in the classroom.

Teachers are responsible for much more than the delivery of academic content and this group of authors recognize that the many other aspects of teaching, especially those that involve the guidance and care for students, can be draining. It is important to recognize these aspects of teaching that are in the realm of caring and shepherding students and to consider broader definitions of the teacher’s role in both the classroom and the community (Whitfield & Klug, 2004). Bruna Richardson (2010) sought out a religious community whose beliefs and priorities
mirrored her own as a multicultural educator. She deliberately works to cultivate a radical openness and ethic of practice, drawing on her religious and spiritual foundation, that helps her consider challenging questions. Other authors (Wong & Fernández, 2008) include spirituality as one of several dimensions of personal and professional life that multicultural teacher educators should attend to in order to reduce burnout and the negative effects of the resistance to multicultural education that they often encounter from pre-service teachers. Wong and Fernandez (2008) recommend that teacher educators pay attention to how the work of multicultural education impacts their lives and take case to nurture their intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, and ethical well-being. These authors recognize that these dimensions will have different levels of significance for different educators and at different times, but that they are interconnected in helping maintain balance and “good health” while dealing with the challenges that can accompany multicultural education. This article is a good example of the seamless integration of religion and spirituality as an aspect of identity and experience. While the authors (Wong & Fernández, 2008) note that spirituality “was perhaps the most elusive and difficult to articulate of all of the dimensions” (13), they still recognize its role in a holistic approach to well-being rather than singling it out as a separate topic of discussion.

The small set of articles discussing teachers’ religious identities in relation to their racial identities is the only substantial discussion of intersectionality within this literature. This group of articles also is the most diverse in the traditions represented—it includes discussions of Christianity(Lee, 2012), Judaism (Blumenfeld, 2006; Singer, 2008), and Native American (Lajimodiere, 2013) traditions. Compared to the extensive focus on Islam in much of the other literature, there is almost not attention given to Islam in the literature on teachers and none about teacher identities.

**Students**

The literature on students is the smallest group within this literature. All five of the articles on students focus on Islam, although there is some minor differentiation—one piece focused on Arab American students (Tabbah, 2016), another looks at female Somali immigrant students (Oikonomidoy, 2010), one gives a personal account of misunderstanding and discrimination as a Muslim immigrant student (Shatara, 2007), and two look more broadly at the experiences of Muslim students in U.S. classrooms (Merchant, 2016; Sabry & Bruna, 2007). The findings of these studies are unsurprising. Students experience discrimination and bullying from other students. Girls in particular are singled out and subject to assumption and misunderstandings. And beyond the social aspects of school, many of the students studied also experienced a curriculum that was either completely silent about their culture or religion or grossly misrepresented it. Students were often singled out in class to speak on behalf of an entire religion. While the number of studies looking at students is very low, it is clear that there is a great need for more attention to student experiences as religious minorities, which may also include Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, and various Christian groups depending on the community context.
Discussion

This review set out to discover how the multicultural education literature was talking about religion. From both the low number of articles that I found and the content of those articles, it is clear that this has not be a sustained conversation in the field of multicultural education. There are many topics that were simply absent from this literature including a full range of religious diversity—religious traditions beyond the Abrahamic traditions, conservative Christianity, and atheism, agnosticism, and humanism are almost entirely absent. There is also very little empirical research represented in this literature and what is there is mostly small interview studies or single case studies. This literature could also benefit from more attention to intersectionality and the interactions between religious traditions.

The importance of recognizing religious diversity in multicultural education cannot be understated in today’s schools. When religious identities are not recognized or welcomed, students can feel isolated or devalued in the classroom, dramatically impacting their experience of education and even their perceptions of their own worth or the value of their religious tradition (Webb, 2000). Just as much as past and ongoing injustice around race in our school systems is a form of oppression, a lack of recognition of religious identity is harmful and a form of oppression (Taylor, 1994). If multicultural education is to be truly living up to its goals, it must attend to religious identity along with race, gender, sexuality, and all of the other rich identities that students bring to school.

The Way Forward

There is little doubt that religion is an essential part of culture and that public schools in the United States need to be better prepared to address religion both in and outside of the classroom. While significant progress has been made on the academic front, particular with the inclusion of the Religious Studies supplement in the C3 framework, much more needs to be done to include attention to religion as part of the complex identities that students bring to schools. Students and teachers need opportunities to learn how to speak about religion and deeply personal beliefs through civil dialogue. The long silence about religion in public schools has left teachers and administrators without the tools or knowledge to begin conversations about religion. Multicultural education is already present as a field of study and in the pedagogy of many teachers. Drawing on these resources and better integrating religion into conversations about diversity has the potential to make a significant in the experiences of religious diverse students in today’s schools.
References:


