Ryan S. Gardner
Brigham Young University-Idaho
gardnerry@byui.edu
2013 REA Annual Meeting, Nov 8-10

Critical Reflection for Religious Educators In/For Liberal Democracy

Abstract

Despite the predictions of secularization theorists in recent decades, religion continues to play a critical role in people's lives—both privately and publicly. In light of this sustained religious environment, this paper accepts the fundamental premise of the need for increased and improved religious education in/for the public sphere. It is thus imperative that religious educators are better equipped to authentically engage students in a liberal democracy that is also religiously pluralistic. This is especially vital for teachers and students who desire to understand, respect, appreciate, and learn from the various worldviews around them as citizens in democratic societies while simultaneously maintaining commitments to their own faith traditions. Critical reflection, one type of reflection in which teachers consider the social, political, cultural, and moral influence upon and implications of their teaching, is one activity teachers can utilize to increase their capacity and ability to engage in such authentic religious education for the benefit of their students in a pluralistic democracy.

The Climate

At the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1998, Julia Bartkowiak outlined three major objections to religious education in public schools that seem to reflect both public opinion and attitudes of policy makers, both then and now.[1] Each of her points deserves some explanation and response in order to establish the need for the critical professional reflection called for here—reflection that considers social, political, cultural, and moral influences and implications regarding what we teach—that will assist religious educators in doing religious education in/for liberal democracy.[2]

Bartkowiak's first objection to religious education in public schools is that such a proposal is constitutionally unjustifiable. She accurately cites the hallmark cases of *McCollum* (1948) and *Schempp/Murray* (1963) that established the prevailing and persistent judicial doctrine distinguishing "between teaching *about* religion and the teaching *of* religion. They [the

---

[1] Bartkowiak, J.J. (1998, August 10-15). *Religious education in the public schools*. Report of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy. Retrieved from http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Soci/SociBart.htm.

[2] My choice of the term "liberal democracy" comes directly from Hanan Alexander's and Ayman Agbaria's recent work (see *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy*. [2012]. New York, NY: Routledge). Their use of this term embraces both the need for critical thinking and individual autonomy as well as the importance of the virtues and capacities of good citizens (see pp. 1-2). While Walter Feinberg didn't use this term exactly in his earlier work (see *For Goodness Sake: Religious schools and education for democratic citizenry*. (2006). New York, NY: Routledge), his assumptions concerning "liberal pluralism" and an individual's right to choose how to live one's life within a society that embraces many different belief systems and communities seem to have led him to comfortably adopt the term later (see Feinberg, W. [2012]. An inquiry into the justification for full-time religious schools in the liberal democratic state. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria [Eds.], *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* [17-32]. New York: Routledge.)

Supreme Court Justices] deemed only the latter unacceptable and encouraged the former. The Justices declared that while the constitutional right to freedom of religion does not allow religious practices to be forced on children who attend public schools, courses which presented the religious practices of various people in a historical and comparative manner were essential to being well-educated and were constitutionally permissible."[3] Bartkowiak goes on to argue that teachers are incapable of teaching *about* religion without inevitably interjecting their own bias, which would either favor one religion over others or undermine the legitimacy or value of other (or all) religious views. Thus, religious education is constitutional in theory but unconstitutional in practice. I will respond briefly to the "theoretical" aspect of Bartkowiak's objection first and then respond to the "practical" aspect in conjunction with Bartkowiak's second objection.

As far as the constitutionality of religious education is concerned, other advocates for religious education in public spheres have responded to this objection far better than I could.[4] Constitutionality issues could be resolved if more informed and interested direct stakeholders were brought to the table for this discussion. One of Nord's more helpful suggestions in this regard may have come when he wrote, "I might say that I do not believe that courts should attempt to manage (much less micromanage) the curriculum or classroom—though they may need to address egregious injustices. As Justice Brennan said, educators are the experts in these matters, not court justices. (Or, as I said, educators *should* be the experts.) Unfortunately, school and university administrators appear to be totally oblivious to any such responsibility."[5]

Bartkowiak's second objection to religious education in public schools, closely related to the "practical" aspect of her first objection, rests entirely on her assumption that teachers are completely incapable of doing religious education without some sort of teacher bias. Her biggest concern is that teachers would use such courses as opportunities to proselytize students—either overtly or subtly—to the teacher's own religious or moral views. Turning the tables on such secular arguments, Nord has demonstrated that anti-religious bias already exists in the public schools, and that offering courses in religion would simply bring the balance that the Constitution provides for and the Supreme Court has recommended, neither favoring nor opposing religion generally or any one religion specifically.[6] Stephen Monsma offers a "pluralist-liberal model" that might offer teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders a starting point for considering curriculum and methods that might be appropriate for religious education experiences in a public school setting.[7]

---

[3] Bartkowiak, 1998.

[4] See Feinberg, *For Goodness* Sake, xi-xxiv, 189-198; and Nord, W.A. (2010). *Does God Make a Difference? Taking religion seriously in our schools and universities*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc. (see especially the Introduction and chapters 1-4, 7-8).

[5] Nord, *Does God Make a Difference?*, 167.

[6] See again the recommended chapters in footnote 4 in Nord, *Does God Make a Difference?* Nord's argument for balance is also supported by Vryhof, S.C. (2012). Between memory and meaning: Schools as communities of meaning. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (46-59). New York: Routledge.

[7] Monsma, S.V. (2012). State financial support for religious schools: Issues and models. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (33-45). New York: Routledge. His model offers one framework for teachers and students to seek greater understanding of differing religious worldviews in an attempt to prepare them for democratic, pluralistic discourse and citizenship for administrators, teachers, parents, and students who favor a more academic approach to studying religion in public schools. Diane Moore has also outlined in considerable detail her "cultural studies approach to teaching about religion" in Moore, D.L. (2007). *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A cultural studies approach to the study of religion in secondary education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. In other settings where stakeholders may be

In addition to these and many other efforts of public school teachers and religious educators to counter Bartkowiak's concern regarding teacher bias, Bartkowiak's concern may also be rejected due to its *prima facie* assumption of objectivity—in religious subjects or any other school subjects. If we were to apply the principle of Bartkowiak's "teacher bias" objection to all other school subjects and teachers, our current educational system would be quickly annihilated amidst various academic "civil wars." For example, history teachers may have Eurocentric or Afrocentric biases that would be grounds for their dismissal in the eyes of those who don't hold the same bias. Prescriptive grammarians would have a heyday leading the "witch hunt" to expel all the descriptive grammarians in public elementary schools around the nation. The point is that to not offer a subject in schools based solely on our lack of trust in teachers and fear regarding the naiveté and gullibility of students will not promote the interests of pluralist democratic societies. Education for citizenship in a liberal democracy, in which there is a great pluralism of religious viewpoints, must include much more than the mere acquisition of knowledge. Such education must allow for discussion of differing viewpoints between individuals and groups, with their inherent biases, in a way that fosters productive dialogue and community development despite differences.[8]

One final sub-point of Bartkowiak's second objection regarding teacher bias deserves further response. In further asserting the dangers of teacher bias in the classroom, she asserts that "for those teachers who adhere to a religion that believes there is only one correct set of religious beliefs, there is little incentive to accept the validity of alternative beliefs or to present them as alternatives that deserve tolerance and respect."[9] My hope is that this argument is passé and that the "rooted cosmopolitanism" expressed by Stephen Vryhoff is becoming and will become more indicative of national and global attitudes.[10] While my own faith tradition, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has been and still is regarded by some as an exclusivist group, from the beginning of LDS history[11] to the present[12] Latter-day Saints have recognized the reality of

---

[8] While this article focuses on the need for greater religious understanding for primarily political or civic purposes, the need for greater understanding of differing religious worldviews and practices is also needed in such mundane settings as the American workplace. According to a recent survey sponsored by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, increased religious diversity in the workplace is leading to increased conflict and/or perceived persecution. See Brown. M. (September 2, 2013). Religious discrimination in the workplace increases with diversity. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865585613/Religious-discrimination-in-the-workplace-increases-with-diversity.html. Religious education in schools may help dispel bias and fear and increase understanding that would prepare students to enter the adult world of work.

[9] Bartkowiak, 1998.

[10] See Vryhof, Between memory and meaning, 57-59. Vryhoff's "rooted cosmopolitanism" suggests that we can remain firmly rooted in our own world views or faith communities, and at the same time increase our exposure to, understanding of, and appreciation for differing worldviews and religious traditions. Thus, our view of the world and the people who live in it becomes broader and more inclusive. Vryhoff effectively captures the "real-life" nature of such an approach when he quotes Garrison Keillor: "… in a democracy, we need a few reality checkpoints at which we all crowd together, nabob and yahoo, and rub elbows and get a clue about who lives here other than us."

[11] While cultural and political forces, both internally and externally, have sometimes caused the LDS Church and its members to necessarily retreat and isolate—perhaps sometimes unnecessarily so—the desire of Church leaders and members from the beginning has been to respect and protect the religious practices of others. One of the "Articles of Faith" penned by Church founder Joseph Smith in 1842 declares: "We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may" (Articles of Faith 1:11). Joseph Smith also proclaimed personally: "If it has been

pluralism and the need for tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation despite differences in beliefs. Surely, considerable evidence could be gleaned from many religions showing this aspect of Bartkowiak's second objection, at least, to be wholly unfounded. Once again, education in any field inevitably includes hermeneutical differences, contrasts in fundamental assumptions, and some inherent bias. Rather than eliminate any particular branch of learning, including religious education, on such grounds, teachers and students can learn to navigate these differences in a classroom that resembles a world where they are inevitable.

In Bartkowiak's third objection, she acknowledges the religious diversity and need for tolerance within the United States. However, she responds by claiming, "While it may be the case that religious education might, under ideal conditions, serve the State's interest in promoting tolerance in children, there are good reasons to think that under existing conditions within many public schools such courses would fail to promote tolerance. Exposure to a variety of views, by itself, does not automatically result in tolerant children." Aside from declaring religious education a failure before it is even given a chance, the real objection here is that Americans, and by implication citizens of other democratic societies, simply need to accept that fact that religiously-based views are not tenable in the public sphere. And since we can't learn to dialogue and work together despite our differences regarding these deeply cherished beliefs, then we should just ignore them.

Given the work of Feinberg (2006), Nord (2010), and the recent compilation of thoughtful and challenging essays edited by Alexander and Agbaria (2012), such a stance looks like the proverbial (albeit mythical) ostrich with its head stuck in the sand. While it may be true that "exposure to a variety of views, by itself, does not automatically result in tolerant children,"

---

demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a 'Mormon,' I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholics, or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves" (Smith, J.F. & Galbraith, R.C. [1993]. *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Co., 313).

[12] Several recent examples counter Bartkowiak's allegations. In 2001, the Church co-sponsored chapter 7 in Haynes' and Thomas' *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools* (Haynes, C.C. & Thomas, O. [2001]. *Finding Common Ground: A guide to religious liberty in public schools*. Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center, 88). In 2010, Elder Quentin L. Cook, a member of the Church's Quorum of Twelve Apostles, published an article on Patheos.com where he encouraged "mutual respect for each other's beliefs and a desire to collaborate on important issues where we find common ground" (Cook, Q.L. [August 9, 2010]. *Partnering with our friends from other faiths*. Retrieved from http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Partnering-with-Our-Friends-from-Other-Faiths.html). Two months later, Cook more strongly urged members of the Church to "be at the forefront together with all people of goodwill in doing everything we can to preserve light, hope, and morality in our communities" (Cook, Q.L. [2010]. Let there be light. *Ensign, 40*[11], 30). The Church recently published an article on its online "Newsroom" on the relevance and value of religion generally in society (The relevance of religion. [July 25, 2013]. Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/ relevance-religion). While writing this article, I read about the groundbreaking ceremony for the LDS temple in Hartford, Connecticut, in which President of the Church, Thomas S. Monson, and Monsignor Gerard G. Schmidt, of the Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford, wielded shovels side by side in a display of mutual respect and cooperation in support of one another's differing beliefs and systems of worship (Avant, G. (August 19, 2013). President Monson breaks ground for the Hartford Connecticut temple. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/765636163/President-Monson-breaks-ground-for-the-Hartford-Connecticut-Temple-video.html?pg=all). Some may propose that these examples are rare exceptions to LDS patterns of behavior, institutionally or individually. However, it is the opinion of the author that such disparity between what we say and what we do, are inherent qualities of the human condition and not peculiar to any one group of people. Such "gaps," as will be discussed later in the paper, can be resolved through the help of more effective reflection.

it is almost guaranteed that lack of exposure will result in intolerance.[13] If we fail to initiate students into the "ongoing conversation about how to sort out the contending views" in society, "a conversation in which students come to understand the relationship of cultures, traditions, and disciplines to one another"[14] then their education has failed to prepare them to make a significant, transformative contribution in the world in which they live. Given the growing need for civility, mutual understanding, and respect in established and emerging democracies all over the world, any *status quo* approach seems untenable.

Professional Reflection in Religious Education

So what does professional reflection have to do with helping religious educators engage in religious education for liberal democracy? In order to explain, I must—albeit somewhat surprisingly—acknowledge the legitimacy of Bartkowiak's concern about teacher efficacy and bias in religious education in/for liberal democracy. I just happen to disagree with her prognosis—she thinks the condition is incurable, while I believe that caring, deeply passionate, and internally motivated teachers can improve and become more effective at creating space and dialogue for deep student learning and transformation. At least part of that remedy is improving our professional reflection. The well-known educator Herbert Kohl alluded to the core problem of reflection when he confessed, "My beliefs in a free, nonauthoritarian classroom always ran ahead of my personal ability to teach in one."[15] In other words, no matter how much we think we understand our own teaching assumptions and philosophy, no matter how strongly we feel about our mission as teachers, there is often a gap between our educational ideals and our behavior in the classroom. Professional reflection seeks to identify, analyze, and reduce that gap.

My own work with professional reflection rests on the foundation of Chris Argyris and Donald Schön. Their work focused on the discrepancies between "espoused theories" (i.e. what we say we believe/do) and "theories in use" (i.e. what we actually do) and the development of "hybrid theories of practice" (i.e. the ongoing process of trying to bridge the gap between espoused theories and theories in use).[16] I have also relied heavily on models of reflection developed by Neville Hatton and David Smith[17] and Fred Korthagen.[18] Korthagen's "onion model" of reflection invites teachers to make more deliberate connections between the inner

---

[13] For many generations, educators and many other civic leaders have felt that, as President Woodrow Wilson put it, "The schoolhouse is the great melting pot of democracy" and that children who "have grown up and come through the processes of the schools [will] have imbibed the full feeling of American life" (See Wilson, W. [September 2, 1912]. *Labor Day Speech in Buffalo, New York*. Retrieved from http://livefromthetrail.com/about-the-book/speeches/chapter-2/woodrow-wilson). What will that feeling for "American life" be for school children in schools were religion and religiously-based views are neglected, ignored, or rejected? Just a few years after President Wilson's speech, Francis Greenwood Peabody suggested, "An uneducated religion is the root of bigotry, persecution, and hypocrisy" (Tracy, F. et al. (1917). Ideals and Methods for Religious Education for the Coming World Order. *Religious Education, 12*(3), 182. Conversely, I proposed that a "unreligioned education" will have the same effect.

[14] Nord, *Does God Make a Difference?*, 111.

[15] Kohl, H.R. (2001). Ten minutes a day. In F. Schulz (Ed.), *S.O.U.R.C.E.S.: Notable selections in education* (105-109). Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 106.

[16] Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

[17] Hatton, N. & Smith, D. (1995). Reflection in teacher education: Toward definition and implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 11*(1), 33-49.

[18] Korthagen, F. A. J. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 20*, 77-97.

layers of their sense of mission, identity, and beliefs, and the exterior layers of their observable competencies/skills and classroom behaviors. Hatton and Smith describe four types of teacher reflection that help teachers evaluate their pedagogical practice in conjunction with their teaching philosophy: technical reflection (i.e. what happened in the classroom?); descriptive reflection (i.e. why did the teacher make the decisions he/she did?); dialogic reflection (i.e. what interactions with others help the teacher think about and modify his/her practice?); and critical reflection (i.e. what is the reciprocal relationship between teaching and the environment in which it takes place?).

In my dissertation research, I evaluated the reflection practices of a small group of LDS religious educators of secondary students and developed a model of reflection, based primarily on Hatton and Smith's four types of reflection, that simultaneously described professional reflection for these teachers and provided a framework for continued reflection that would help them minimize gaps between teaching philosophy and classroom pedagogy. Participants in this study responded very favorably to the interview questions and reflective process entailed in the study, reporting that it was both enlightening and transformative.[19] One general conclusion from this study was that not only do models of professional educational reflection work quite well in religious education settings, but they are also sorely needed.

Critical Reflection in Religious Education

This is especially true with regard to critical reflection. Hatton and Smith's conception of critical reflection included a teacher's ability to problematize "the goals and practices of one's profession" and "thinking about the effects upon others of one's actions, taking account of social, political, and/or cultural forces."[20] Aside from considering the spiritual impact of their teaching on students (certainly a primary goal considering their setting), teachers in the aforementioned study did not make comments that indicated serious consideration of their teaching as a function of/within the larger social, political, cultural setting of a liberal democracy. While such considerations may not be primary or central to all religious education settings—such as those where faith education within a specific religious tradition is the objective—they are vital in responding to Bartkowiak's objections in an effort to promote religious education in/for liberal democracy.

Alexander and Agbaria's recent edited volume (2012) of sixteen essays provides a broad cross-section of samples of critical reflection for religious educators to consider the social, political, cultural, moral, and religious milieu in which they do religious education. These essays provide thoughtful discussions that encourage religious educators to consider how they might engage professionally[21] (i.e. conferences, publications, public meetings, etc.) and pedagogically[22]

---

[19] Gardner, R. S. (2011). *Teacher reflection among professional seminary faculty in the seminaries and institutes department of the Church Educational System*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Utah State University, Logan, UT. For example, one teacher commented that the reflective process followed during the interview helped him better understand the connections between his own teaching philosophy and his lesson preparation, classroom decisions, and interactions with students: "it's like a puzzle. I'm taking all these fragments and putting them together. It's kind of helpful. Thank you" (178). The other five teachers who participated in the interviews made similar comments.

[20] Hatton & Smith, Reflection in teacher education, 45.

[21] See especially Seymour, J.L. (2012). Constructive, critical, and mutual interfaith religious education for public living: A Christian view. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (226-244). New York: Routledge.

(i.e. their actual praxis in their own religious education settings) in religious education efforts that will promote greater understanding and sincerely respectful dialogue and political cooperation in/for pluralistic democratic societies.

Religious educators seeking to do religious education in/for liberal democracy should seek to create classrooms which mirror at least one major "condition of pluralism [which] is its transparency and the understanding that my freedom to think and worship as I see fit is dependent on your freedom to think and worship as you see fit."[23] Rather than ignoring our differences and pretend that they don't exist, we might even be able to see the world more clearly and appreciate humanity more deeply as we learn from our differing worldviews. While we cannot completely eliminate teacher bias in religious education settings (or, as I have argued above, in any other academic discipline), a critical first step for handling this challenge is to make explicit—to ourselves and to our students, inasmuch as we can—our implicit assumptions and beliefs. This kind of reflection "allows [us] to hear as that audience would truly hear, not as [we] imagine they might" and will mostly likely involve dialogic partners—such as administrators, other teachers, and even students—who can "serve as mirrors, refining the image we have of ourselves and reflecting back to us the way they experience our behavior."[24] One very useful tool for religious educators in this endeavor is the "critical incident questionnaire" developed by past-president of the REA, Mary Hess, and Stephen Brookfield.[25]

Critical Reflection Practices for Religious Educators in/for Liberal Democracies

While I acknowledge Bartkowiak's point that the mere presence of religious education in public or private education settings will not promote or improve liberal democracies, I propose that well-trained, caring, reflective religious educators will. In addition to the resources I have already mentioned herein for encouraging critical reflection among religious educators (and there are others I have not mentioned), I have found that well-constructed questions can assist religious educators in their critical reflection. Here are a few examples of such questions:

1) Which of our institutional goals pertain to preparing students to be productive contributing citizens in a liberal democratic society?
2) What curriculum, practices, or other institutional resources are available to help our students attain these goals?
3) What institutional processes exist that might detract from or deter students from reaching these ideals?
4) What are my personal goals for preparing students to engage in a society with differing worldviews and religious beliefs?

---

[22] See especially Miedema, S. (2012). Maximal citizenship education and interreligious education in common schools. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (96-102). New York: Routledge; Heimbrock, H.G. (2012). Religion, reason, and experience in public education. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (140-152). New York: Routledge; and Thiessen, E.J. (2012). Democratic schooling and the demands of religion. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (161-178). New York: Routledge.

[23] Feinberg, *For Goodness Sake*, 167.

[24] Feinberg, *For Goodness Sake*, 100, 101.

[25] Brookfield, S.D. & Hess, M.E. (2008). "How can we teach authentically?" Reflective practices in the dialogical classroom. In S.D. Brookfield & M.E. Hess (Eds.), *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and contradictions* (1-18). Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.

5) What classroom practices do I implement in order to help students share and support their own religiously-based views in the public sphere?
6) What classroom practices do I implement in order to help students understand, respect, and learn from religiously-based views that are different from their own?
7) What classroom practices invite students to develop skills that will prepare them to engage and work with others in the public sphere when religiously-based worldviews lead to differences in attitudes, priorities, and policies?
8) How is my teaching affected by past and current political, social, cultural, and moral forces?
9) How might my teaching help students make a positive political, social, cultural, and moral contribution in the world, now and in the future?
10) What am I learning from my students about their present political, social, cultural, and moral environment? How is this affecting what I teach and how I teach it?
11) "What is the preferred meaning of respect in a religiously pluralist society, and how can it be promoted in the context of a deep belief in the primacy of one religion?"
12) "How can an education into a faith tradition be maintained while reflective critical thinking about one's own religious tradition is promoted?"[26]

I suggest three ways that teachers can use these questions for regular reflection. All three practices require teachers and administrators to deliberately schedule time for reflection—one of the biggest challenges to consistently doing meaningful reflection. First, teachers could simply write out in-depth answers to these questions appropriate to their own teaching setting. They might not answer all questions, but I suggest that at least a few of the questions would be appropriate in just about any religious education setting. Teachers then review and revise these answers regularly. This document could form the cover-piece for the reflection journal I recommend next. Second, teachers could begin a reflection journal that uses one or two of these questions for self-evaluation at the end of every lesson. After picking one or two questions to focus on for a given period of time, the teacher writes a brief response to each question following each lesson. At the end of the allotted time frame, the teacher searches the journal for patterns or tendencies that reveal helpful insights for one's own praxis. Third, the teacher could discuss their selected questions and responses with a trusted administrator or colleague[27] and then invite that individual to observe the teacher's classroom (I highly recommend regular observations as opposed to a single "snapshot" observation). The observer focuses solely on how the teacher's classroom behavior connects with the questions and answers they have discussed. Teacher and observer then meet to discuss connections and gaps between the teacher's "espoused theory" (i.e. how they answered the questions) and the "theory in use" to continue to improve the teacher's "hybrid theory of practice." It is vital in this reflection process that these observations be strictly formative and not summative in any way.[28]

---

[26] These last two questions come from Feinberg, *For Goodness Sake*, 173.
[27] For more on the critical need for trust between teachers and observers (especially instructional supervisors), see Smith, H.R. (2013). The role of trust in religious education. *Religious Educator, 14*(2), 125-133.
[28] See Glickman, C.D., Gordon, S.P., & Ross-Gordon, J.M. (2004). *SuperVision and Instructional Leadership: A developmental approach*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc., 258-259, 310-314. I highly recommend chapters 12-16 for anyone interested in improving observation and feedback skills. Another excellent source for improving the effectiveness of observation and feedback is Blase, J. & Blase, j. (2004). *Handbook of Instructional Leadership: How successful principals promote teaching and learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

The Challenge

Liberal democracies around the world must renovate their approach to religious education if they are to thrive in an increasingly globalized and religiously pluralistic world. These liberal democracies also need religious educators who have a framework for negotiating the delicate balance necessary to educate students for religious understanding and moral character development within the diverse societies of which they are a part. As we continue to press for increased religious education in the public sphere, religious educators must also accept the increased professional responsibility and competency it will require to do religious education in/for liberal democracies. Critical reflection is one key to that professional development that will help religious educators succeed in accomplishing the religious and civic objectives in this endeavor.

References

Alexander, H. & Agbaria. A. (Eds.) (2012). *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Avant, G. (August 19, 2013). President Monson breaks ground for the Hartford Connecticut temple. *Deseret News*. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/765636163/President-Monson-breaks-ground-for-the-Hartford-Connecticut-Temple-video.html?pg=all.

Bartkowiak, J.J. (1998, August 10-15). *Religious education in the public schools*. Report of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy. Retrieved from http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Soci/ SociBart.htm.

Blase, J. & Blase, j. (2004). *Handbook of Instructional Leadership: How successful principals promote teaching and learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Brookfield, S.D. & Hess, M.E. (2008). "How can we teach authentically?" Reflective practices in the dialogical classroom. In S.D. Brookfield & M.E. Hess (Eds.), *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and contradictions* (1-18). Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.

Brown. M. (September 2, 2013). Religious discrimination in the workplace increases with diversity. Deseret News. Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865585613/Religious-discrimination-in-the-workplace-increases-with-diversity.html.

Cook, Q.L. (August 9, 2010). *Partnering with our friends from other faiths*. Retrieved from http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Partnering-with-Our-Friends-from-Other-Faiths.html.

Cook, Q.L. [2010]. Let there be light. *Ensign, 40*[11], 30

Feinberg, W. (2012). An inquiry into the justification for full-time religious schools in the liberal

democratic state. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (17-32). New York: Routledge.

Feinberg, W. (2006). *For Goodness Sake: Religious schools and education for democratic citizenry*. New York, NY: Routledge

Gardner, R. S. (2011). *Teacher reflection among professional seminary faculty in the seminaries and institutes department of the Church Educational System*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Utah State University, Logan, UT.

Glickman, C.D., Gordon, S.P., & Ross-Gordon, J.M. (2004). *SuperVision and Instructional Leadership: A developmental approach*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Hatton, N. & Smith, D. (1995). Reflection in teacher education: Toward definition and implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 11*(1), 33-49.

Haynes, C.C. & Thomas, O. (2001). *Finding Common Ground: A guide to religious liberty in public schools*. Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center.

Heimbrock, H.G. (2012). Religion, reason, and experience in public education. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (140-152). New York: Routledge.

Kessler. R. (2000). *The Soul of Education: Helping students find connection, compassion, and character at school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kohl, H.R. (2001). Ten minutes a day. In F. Schulz (Ed.), *S.O.U.R.C.E.S.: Notable selections in education* (105-109). Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 106.

Korthagen, F. A. J. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 20*, 77-97.

Miedema, S. (2012). Maximal citizenship education and interreligious education in common schools. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (96-102). New York: Routledge.

Monsma, S.V. (2012). State financial support for religious schools: Issues and models. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (33-45). New York: Routledge.

Moore, D.L. (2007). *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A cultural studies approach to the study of religion in secondary education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nord, W.A. (2010). *Does God Make a Difference? Taking religion seriously in our schools and universities*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Seymour, J.L. (2012). Constructive, critical, and mutual interfaith religious education for public living: A Christian view. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (226-244). New York: Routledge.

Smith, J.F. & Galbraith, R.C. (1993). *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Co.

Smith, H.R. (2013). The role of trust in religious education. *Religious Educator, 14*(2), 125-133.

The relevance of religion. [July 25, 2013]. Retrieved from http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/relevance-religion.

Thiessen, E.J. (2012). Democratic schooling and the demands of religion. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (161-178). New York: Routledge.

Tracy, F. et al. (1917). Ideals and Methods for Religious Education for the Coming World Order. *Religious Education, 12*(3), 181-195.

Vryhof, S.C. (2012). Between memory and meaning: Schools as communities of meaning. In H.A. Alexander & A.K. Agbaria (Eds.), *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious education in liberal democracy* (46-59). New York: Routledge.

Wilson, W. [September 2, 1912]. *Labor Day Speech in Buffalo, New York*. Retrieved from http://livefromthetrail.com/about-the-book/speeches/chapter-2/woodrow-wilson