



The California Three Rs Project

Rights, Responsibility, and Respect

July 2015

BULLETIN

Volume 12, Number 4

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Toward a Global Ethic for Education About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools

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[The following is excerpted from Dr. Grelle's chapter in *The Practices of Global Ethics: Historical Developments, Current Issues, and Future Prospects*, by Frederick Bird, Sumner B. Twiss, Kusumita Pedersen, Clark A. Miller, and Bruce Grelle (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming, 2016). It has been edited for preview here. Citations have been removed.]

The Council of Europe (CoE) has long been engaged with the topic of intercultural education and dialogue. Although the values of freedom of religion or belief and education for tolerance are embedded in Council of Europe documents, it was only post 9/11 that the CoE became directly involved in discussions about the place of religion in public education. Since 2002, the CoE has organized a working group and a series of conferences to consider the "religious dimension" of intercultural education. It has sponsored the production of a

reference book for educators, administrators and policy makers to deal with the issue of religious diversity in schools, and it has cooperated with the government of Norway in the establishment of the interdisciplinary European Wergeland Centre on education for intercultural understanding, human rights and democratic citizenship education that includes attention to the religious dimension of such education. In 2008 the CoE Committee of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education within the member countries, which aims to ensure that governments take into account the religious dimension of intercultural education at the level of educational *policies, institutions, and professional development of teaching staff.*

Meanwhile, in 2007 the Office of Democratic Insti-

tutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) prepared the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools.* The OSCE includes among its 57 members most European States as well as Canada and the United States. The *Toledo Guiding Principles* aimed to contribute to "an improved understanding of the world's increasing religious diversity and the growing presence of religion in the public sphere." The *Guiding Principles* were grounded on two basic assumptions:

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The California Three Rs Project is co-sponsored by Constitutional Rights Foundation, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, and the Religious Freedom Education Project at the Newseum



The AAR *Guidelines* were based on three premises: 1) illiteracy regarding religion is widespread; 2) it fuels prejudice and antagonism; and 3) it can be diminished by teaching about religions in public schools...

“First, that there is positive value in teaching that emphasizes respect for *everyone’s* right to freedom of religion and belief, and second, that teaching *about* religions and beliefs can reduce harmful misunderstandings and stereotypes.” In addition to providing the context and rationale for teaching about religion in public schools, the *Principles* addressed the relationship between religion, education, law, and human rights; curricula and pedagogy; teacher education; and policies for the implementation of religious education programs in ways that respect the rights of students and parents and are consistent with the human rights framework. There are many ways in which the *Toledo Guiding Principles* exemplify recent efforts to develop guidelines for a neutral academic approach to religious education in public schools.

One noteworthy example of how a human rights-based academic approach to religion education has been translated into a specific curriculum is the mandatory course on “Ethics and Religious Culture” (ERC) developed for the elementary and secondary schools in Quebec. The implementation of the ERC program in 2008 was part of Quebec’s shift away from a long history of confessional public schools to a non-denominational school system now identified lin-

guistically as either French or English. Previously, students chose a course in either Catholic or Protestant moral and religious education or a course in secular moral education. Social and intellectual changes associated with globalization and increasing pluralism were among the justifications offered in support of replacing this denominationally-based system of religious education with a common ERC program.

The two main objectives of the ERC program are “recognition of others” and “pursuit of the common good.” The ERC program aims to help students grasp the multiple dimensions of religion – historical, doctrinal, moral, ritualistic, artistic, etc. The historical and cultural importance of Catholicism and Protestantism to Quebec’s religious heritage are highlighted, but attention is also given to the influence of Judaism and Native spirituality, to other religions that are today a part of Quebec’s culture, and to secular expressions and representations of the world and of human beings. “Respecting the fundamental right to the freedom of conscience and religion is the basis of all ethics and religious education.”

In 2010 the American Academy of Religion, a US-based international association of religion scholars, produced one of the most comprehensive statements regarding the fitting role of

education about religion in public schools. The AAR *Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States* were based on three premises: 1) illiteracy regarding religion is widespread; 2) it fuels prejudice and antagonism; and 3) it can be diminished by teaching about religions in public schools using a non-devotional, academic perspective called *religious studies*.

The AAR *Guidelines* were formulated against the backdrop of developments reaching back to the 1980s, when a movement toward greater inclusion of religion in the curriculum of US public schools began to emerge. During this time, both the National Council for the Social Studies (1984) and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1988) issued statements calling for more attention to be given to religion. Subsequently, a series of consensus guidelines based on First Amendment principles and emphasizing the distinction between *academic* and *devotional* approaches have been developed, and several of these have been distributed to every public school in the nation by the United States Department of Education.

When it comes to the *representation of religions*

(See “Global Ethic” on Page 3.)

Global Ethic (cont'd)

and beliefs in teaching and curricula, all of these various documents and initiatives share a number of things in common. They recognize that there are a range of different pedagogical theories and practices that have been developed within the overall context of an academic or religious studies approach religion education. Yet they all seek to cultivate an “empathetic” attitude among learners and, in the words of the Toledo Guidelines, “to genuinely understand what another person is feeling and ... to respectfully communicate another person’s experience.” They all require a school ethos where there is respect for difference and where human rights principles are upheld, and they all require a high degree of professionalism on the part of teachers.

Whatever pedagogical approach is taken, emphasis is placed on fairness, accuracy, and sound scholarship. For example, the *Toledo Guiding Principles* stipulate that “[t]eaching about religions and beliefs should be sensitive, balanced, inclusive, non-doctrinal, impartial, and based on human rights principles relating to freedom of religion or belief.” Moreover, there is the expectation that curricula will adhere to recognized professional standards. “This implies that, among other things, the information contained in curricula is based on reason, is accurate, bias-free, up to date, and does not oversimplify complex issues. It also implies that curricula are age appropriate...”

Beyond this stress on accuracy, scholarship, and professionalism, there is widespread consensus on a number of points having to do with what students should learn about religions in public schools. These

include what the AAR *Guidelines* identify as the “basic premises of religious studies,” namely that 1) religions are internally diverse, 2) religions are dynamic and change over time, and 3) religions are embedded in culture.

[Ed. note: Table One below shows major international statements and initiatives on religious freedom and education. The CA3Rs *Bulletin* is grateful to Dr. Grelle for his kind permission to allow us to reprint this excerpt.]

1981	UN General Assembly: “Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief”
1988	USA “Religion in the Public School Curriculum: Questions and Answers”
1995, 2000, 2003	U.S. Department of Education Guidelines on Religion and Public Education
2001	International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination (Madrid)
2002	Council of Europe launches working group on the Religious Dimensions of Intercultural Education
2005	UN Alliance of Civilizations launches “Clearinghouse on Education about Religions and Beliefs”
2007	UNESCO “Dakar Framework for Action—Education for All”
2007	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe: <i>Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion and Beliefs in Public Schools</i>
2008	Quebec initiates its “Ethics and Religious Culture” program
2008	Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec (2008) 12 on the Dimension of Religions and Non-religious Convictions within Intercultural Education
2010	The American Academy of Religion: <i>Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States</i>

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The California Three Rs Project (CA3Rs) is a program for finding common ground on issues related to religious liberty and the First Amendment in public schools. The CA3Rs' approach is based on the principles of American democracy and citizenship, reflected in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights and applied in a public school setting.

For over a decade, the CA3Rs has provided online resources, professional development, and leadership training for teachers and education professionals in order to disseminate essential information about religious liberty and the history of religion in America.

Common Ground Resources

Haynes, Charles C., and Oliver Thomas. *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in the Public Schools*. Nashville: First Amendment Center, 2007.

< <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/madison/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/FCGcomplete.pdf> >

Religious Freedom Education Project at the Newseum.

< <http://religiousfreedomeducation.org> >

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN SOCIAL STUDIES? FIND OUT!

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TEACHERS!

Review *The Free Exercise of Religion in America* or any other lesson from CRF's Common Core resources page, and you will be entered into a **quarterly drawing for a \$100 gift card**. Access the lesson here: <http://www.crf-usa.org/resources/the-free-exercise-of-religion-in-america>

Complete the quick survey here: <http://www.crf-usa.org/resources/common-core-resources-survey>

News of the 3Rs: Annual Meeting

Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) in Los Angeles was pleased to host the Annual Meeting of the California Three Rs Project (CA3Rs) on May 11, 2015. The Annual Meeting consists of a morning meeting of the Planning Committee and an afternoon meeting of the Advisory Council. Once again, we were joined in the afternoon by Dr. Charles Haynes via video chat.

The CA3Rs co-directors thank all those who participated in person or electronically, and we look forward to working with our committees over the next year.

In 2016, we anticipate a meeting in Orange County to coincide with the California Council for the Social Studies Conference in Costa Mesa. Stay tuned for details!