Religious Diversity and Inclusion:
Policy and Accommodation Practices in
British Columbia's Secular School System

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Abstract

The religious diversity of students and staff within a secular school system may sometimes create tensions. To better understand the possible issues generated by and practical accommodations made with respect to these tensions, interviews were conducted at the district level with key administrators in metropolitan school districts in British Columbia. These interviews aimed to document existing policy related to religious diversity in schools, and understand how school districts address issues related to religious values or beliefs, which may conflict with existing educational values, especially as they relate to curriculum.

Keywords: religious accommodation, school district diversity policies, administrator practices, curriculum

Résumé

La diversité religieuse des étudiants et du personnel soulève parfois des défis. Afin de mieux comprendre ces défis, des entrevues ont été réalisées avec des administrateurs clés dans les commissions scolaires. Ces entrevues visaient à documenter les balises existantes (politiques, règles, procédures, etc.) relatives à l'inclusion de la diversité religieuse à l'école, et de mieux saisir la manière dont les commissions scolaires gèrent les enjeux relatifs à la diversité religieuse ou les croyances, pouvant être en conflit avec d'autres valeurs éducatives du curriculum.

Mots-clés : accommodement à la diversité religieuse, politiques des conseils scolaires sur la diversité, pratiques des administrateurs scolaires, curriculum

Introduction

In Canadian multiethnic public schools of the 21st century, managing religious diversity may be controversial. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) guarantees fundamental freedoms of conscience and religion, as well as thought, belief, and opinion. However, the interpretation of such freedoms, and the extent of accommodation within the context of secular public schools, is not always clear (Shariff, 2006). This lack of clarity may lead to tension between "recognizing religious differences, respecting individual rights, and maintaining the social continuity of the Canadian society" (Maxwell, Waddington, Donough, Cormier, & Schwimmer, 2012). Manifestations of religious beliefs and practices have spurred controversies in some Canadian provinces and in several European countries over the extent to which such manifestations should or should not be accommodated in secular public schools. The "Headscarf Affair" in France and Quebec, where female Muslim students were suspended from their public schools for wearing the hijab (Amiraux, 2009; Ruitenberg, 2008; Cicéri, 1999; McAndrew & Pagé, 1996), the ban on the Sikh kirpan in Quebec (*Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* [2006]), and the controversy about the Crucifix and teachers wearing headscarves in Germany (Schreiner, 2004) are all examples of how religious accommodation in secular public education may be in certain contexts highly controversial, particularly in light of the different interpretations of the term "secular" itself (Baubérot & Milot, 2011; Benson, 2000). Some countries, like France, have closed interpretations of secularism in which expression of religious identity is not accepted in schools (Milot & Estivalèzes, 2008); while others have more open interpretations of secularism. In India and Canada for example, all religions are equally valued (Metha & Pantham, 2006; Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982). However, in some Canadian provinces such as Quebec, the debate around reasonable accommodation and the adoption of a *Charte de la laïcité* put forward by the Parti Québécois shows a much more volatile position to open secularism.

Addressing the inherent tension of "vivre ensemble" in public secular schools is nowhere more difficult to manage than within the curriculum itself. Tensions around curriculum are the result of competing interests between the family and the state (Clarke, 2010) over what should be learned by students, and to what extent the curriculum's content should accommodate and/or reflect students' religious values, beliefs, and/or worldviews. The school system, as a moral education system that contains "rules and maxims

that prescribes to individuals' ways of behaving in different situations" (Durkheim, 1925/1961), must strive to ensure that different cultural or religious values among learners do not impede their participation in school, their achievement of prescribed learning outcomes, or their capacity to become contributing members of society, in addition to respecting their sense of identity and their freedom of conscience and religion.

We explore such decision making in the context of the present-day public school system in BC, with district administrators from three different metropolitan school boards. Earlier research indicated that most *school* administrators deal with these issues on a case-by-case basis (Jacquet, 2007). However, the absence of specific guidelines from school districts designed to support decisions at the school level often contributed to a lack of coherence from one school to another. In addition, unplanned or ethical decisions are most often dealt with at the higher hierarchical level (March & Simon, 1964). Thus, *district* administrators would be more prone to deal with frequent and explosive issues, unresolved at the school level. This exploratory research aims to respond to the following questions: What types of issues related to religious diversity in schools do administrators encounter? How do they interpret these issues? What kinds of solutions do they craft? Finally, what are the specific policies and administrative guidelines that support their decision making?

Secularism in British Columbian Schools

British Columbia has a long history of secular and non-sectarian principles within the public school system, dating back to the mid-1800s (*Common School Act*, 1865).[1] According to this act, schools were to be "conducted strictly upon Non Sectarian Principles," open to children of all denominations, and were *not* to use books "of a Religious Character, teaching Denominational Dogmas" (sections 13 & 15). At the same time the act required that "Books inculcating the highest Morality shall be selected for the Use of such Schools" and allowed for "the Clergy of every Denomination at stated Intervals...to visit such Schools and impart in a separate Room Religious Instruction to the Children of their respective Persuasions" (sections 13 & 14). Thus, the secular nature of these early schools was not the absence of religion but rather that no one Christian denomination

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1 Also titled as *An Act Respecting Common Schools*.

would be allowed to hold sway. In Benson's typology of secularism, this position most closely aligns with "positive" secularity, in which "the state does not affirm religious beliefs of any particular religion but may act to create conditions favourable to religions generally" (Benson, 2000, p. 530).

The exact nature of that secularity has changed over time. For example, issues regarding the appropriateness of Bible Study, Lord's Prayer recitation, or clergy serving official roles in schools have all come under question at different periods (see, for example, British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, 1969; Clément, 2008; Cuthbertson, n.d.; *Russow v. British Columbia*, 1989; Shaw, 2003). The current *School Act* (RSBC, 1996) states, "(1) All schools and Provincial schools must be conducted on strictly secular and non-sectarian principles. (2) The highest morality must be inculcated, but no religious dogma or creed is to be taught in a school or Provincial school" (section 76).

It is worth mentioning that, contrary to the K–12 program in Quebec where Ethics and Religious Culture is a mandatory program in schools, the required public BC curriculum only touches upon world religions through its Social Studies Curriculum (Grades 8 and 12). In Grade 8, students learn about religions—albeit among other subjects—in the chapter "Society and Culture: Civilizations from 500 to 600." In Grade 12, students expand their specific knowledge of the main religions and philosophies in the chapter "Comparative Civilizations." Further, there are three types of secondary courses in the BC system: ministry-required courses, ministry-elective courses, and locally designed "board certified" courses. This final category can and has included such courses as Philosophy or World Religions, which may more deeply touch upon religious philosophy, but they are electives and not available in all districts. Ethics are handled through the *BC Performance Standards—Social Responsibility: A Framework*, which focus on student growth in four dimensions: contributing to the classroom and school community; solving problems in peaceful ways; valuing diversity and defending human rights; and exercising democratic rights and responsibilities (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001), and are not a part of the curriculum per se. Thus, religions are touched upon in the required curriculum, but "no religious dogma or creed" is taught (School Act, RSBC, 1996, section 76).

Tensions around Curriculum

In the last two decades, the ongoing tension between adjusting the curriculum to respect parents' or children's religious rights or views and maintaining the state's educational responsibilities has been discussed by various scholars, in a number of disciplines, including philosophy, law, and education (Ghosh, 2013; Clarke, 2005, 2012; Smith & Foster, 2001; Shariff, 2006; Collins, 2006; Hohl & Normand, 1996; Bourgeault, Gagnon, McAndrew, & Pagé, 1995; Gutmann, 1987). However, the role of school district administrators in resolving these complex issues is often overlooked in the general debate over the recognition of religious identity in school. Indeed, at the school and district level, these tensions can lead to challenging ethical decisions for administrators, such as when they are asked to exclude books, resources, or content from the curriculum that offends the religious beliefs of some of their stakeholders (e.g., *Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36*, 2002).

Diversity in British Columbian Schools

Current federal and provincial legislation (Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982; *Canadian Human Rights Act*, 1985; *Multiculturalism Act*, 1996; Human Rights Code, 1996; *School Act*, RSBC, 1996) provide the broad values framework regarding diversity of religious beliefs, as well as respect of individual rights that shapes district administrators' decision making. Honouring diversity implies "taking into account visible and less visible differences among individuals and cultural groups" as well as "encouraging understanding, acceptance, mutual respect and inclusion, in order to make school communities and society as a whole more equitable for all people (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 7).

The growing impetus for fostering inclusion, intercultural awareness, and dialogue in schools takes place in a context where changing migration patterns have fostered unprecedented religious diversity. While the proportion of individuals in British Columbia reporting Christian affiliations decreased between the 2001 and 2011 (54.9% and 44.6%, respectively), those reporting non-Christian affiliations increased (9.2% in 2001 compared to 11.2% in 2011). In Metro Vancouver, the proportion of those reporting non-Christian faiths is even higher (14.4% in 2001 and 16.9% in 2011). At the same time, British Columbia is also the Canadian province with the highest proportion of individuals

reporting no religious affiliation at 44.1%, compared to 35.9% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2002, 2013a, 2013b).

Role of District Administrators in Accommodating Religious Diversity

Such contextual changes inevitably bring to the forefront important ethical decisions for administrators, who are responsible for implementing the means of recognizing and accommodating religious beliefs or values, while also maintaining an inclusive learning environment for all in their schools. The importance that values play in the decision-making process within educational organizations has been addressed by many authors in the field (McAndrew, Jacquet, & Cicéri, 1997; Poliner Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Begley, 2003; Strike, 2003; Richmon, 2003; Hodgkinson, 1978, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1992). Little of this work captures the intricacy with which district administrators address the tensions and contradictions between recognizing religious differences in schools while maintaining social coherence. Our study of the decision making of administrators allows us to access both the values underpinning their decisions as well as the factual content that supports them (administrative procedures, guidelines, etc.).

Data and Methods

To explore how administrators address these tensions, we have conducted an exploratory study at the district level with key administrators of three anglophone school districts that serve multiethnic school populations in the Vancouver metropolitan area. Data was collected from four different sources: (1) interviews with district personnel; (2) current district and provincial policy documents; (3) newspaper reports on particular issues or cases; and (4) historical policy documents and critical court cases. A total of six interviews were conducted in the Vancouver metropolitan area with administrators (see Table 1). These interviews aimed to document existing guidelines (policies, rules, procedures, etc.) on matters pertaining to the inclusion and accommodation of religious diversity in school, and to better understand how some school districts in the Vancouver metropolitan area address issues related to cultural/religious values or beliefs, which may conflict with existing educational values. Given the localized nature of our data collection, inferences

from our findings may be most pertinent to districts in Metro Vancouver and not neces-
sarily to districts in other parts of the province of British Columbia.

Table 1. Study participants

Position at time of study	Years in current position	Gender	Prior positions
District Communications Manager	7	Female	Began in journalism, followed by media-related work in a small school district, then four years in a health authority before current position.
Assistant Superintendent	5	Male	All 35 years of his work have been in the same school district as a high school teacher, vice-principal, and principal before his current position.
Superintendent	3	Male	Worked in four different school districts, including an early position as a teacher. Has served 17 years as a senior district administrator.
Head Teacher	1	Male	Teacher and head teacher for 12 years, followed by three years as a district program consultant in an area related to diversity prior to resuming a head teacher position.
Superintendent	6–7 months	Male	Has worked in four districts: 10 years as a high school science teacher; and approximately 20 years as an assistant superintendent or as a director of instruction or science curriculum coordinator. Last four years spent in superintendent positions.
Associate Superintendent	Unclear	Female	Has been at the same district for more than 20 years, serving as a curriculum specialist, district principal, director of curriculum, and then associate superintendent.

The interviews served as the initial starting point and were submitted to a content analysis highlighting emerging themes (L'Écuyer, 1987). Where possible, the district and provincial policies implicated in the examples of practices and accommodations provided by the participants were determined and reviewed in comparison to the interviewees' comments regarding those policies. Comparisons across districts were made and the examples provided summarized and categorized. Mainstream news reports for those examples cited by participants were collected for comparison. Finally, a review of historical

provincial policy related to religion in schools was conducted to provide context for the other data collected.

Findings

Present Policies Related to Religious Diversity which Inform Administrator Practice

Religious diversity is not typically singled out as an issue in either current policy or training. Thus, the policies and practices that undergird school and district personnel's decision making are those that inform practices of inclusion and accommodation of diversity more broadly. There are a few overarching policies, or beliefs, that seem to frame the participants' thoughts and school district practice around religious diversity: (1) the *School Act* (RSBC, 1996), which provides for secular public schooling; (2) *Diversity in BC Schools: A Framework* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008), which provides outlines for meeting the needs and fostering the inclusion of diverse students; (3) *BC Performance Standards–Social Responsibility: A Framework* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001), which outlines objectives for the healthy social and emotional development of children in schools; (4) *Alternative Delivery for Health and Career Education Curriculum* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006), which details the means of providing alternative delivery for specific topics (i.e., reproductive biology) that some families wish their children to learn outside of a public context; and (5) a belief that each case is best handled individually and locally in recognition of its unique complexity. This last belief may come as much from a general philosophy of progressive education in North America schools, where the needs of the student stand at the centre of teaching pedagogy, or from a history of creating classrooms inclusive of students with special needs, as it does from policy and practice related to cultural diversity.

The participants in this study indicated that the provincial policies available to them when handling such conflicts are clear, broad, and flexible. Decisions on how to accommodate students or manage conflict tend to be local and are dealt with at the classroom or school level. Disputes that cannot be resolved locally and are taken to the district

or board still tend to be resolved at the school level, with accommodations or compromises made to fit the individual student, parent, or local community.

However, their comments also point to an inherent conflict among provincial policies related to religious diversity. Participants believe that the *School Act* makes it clear that BC schools are to be secular. "This Ministry of Education is quite clear on the fact that you cannot deal with religious stuff…We have to steer clear of it" (Participant-01 August 31, 2010). At the same time, both honouring diversity (*Diversity in BC Schools: A Framework*, BC Ministry of Education, 2008) and building social responsibility among students (*BC Performance Standards–Social Responsibility: A Framework*, BC Ministry of Education, 2001) necessarily bump up against the religious knowledge and beliefs of students and staff, either explicitly or implicitly. "We try to separate religion from the educational process. However, it is difficult to separate multicultural activities and events and issues from religion. They are intertwined… And so there are some challenges with how that unfolds" (Participant-03, September 20, 2010). Moreover, some participants noted that even in a secular school system it is difficult to separate out educational values from their religious underpinnings, not to mention teachers' and administrators' own values, beliefs, or religious identity from the educational process.

Administrators prefer not to set out rigid guidelines but rather allow for flexible and localized solutions, as documented in other research (Jacquet, 2007; McAndrew & Pagé, 1997). "So often these things need to be dealt with on a very individual basis and in close working relationship with the family and those are the kinds of things that if you set out guidelines or policies or legislation, in fact, that can hamper your ability to do the right thing" (Participant-04, September 17, 2010). Such flexibility echoes the vision of an inclusive school's culture that responds to the different social and cultural needs of the communities they serve (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008).

However, remaining sensitive to the religious diversity of school staff and students may be difficult when religious affiliations are unknown. All those interviewed stated that their school districts do not collect information on students' religious affiliations and they do not have a good feel for what religions (and in what proportions) are practised by the students and staff in their schools overall. As one interviewee put it, "There's no need for us to know really… We only require information that is needed for the educational programming for that child" (Participant-05, February 18, 2011). As a result, teachers, principals, and other school and district staff only know the religious

backgrounds of students and their families if they choose to share that information. Thus, teachers and schools may have difficulty being sensitive to the religious backgrounds of their students when awareness is thin.

Issues of Curriculum and the Accommodation of Religious Diversity

In general, the study participants felt that religious diversity was not a strong source of tension or difficulty in their districts. "Typically we will work through the issues so it hasn't been a major sore point. It hasn't been something which causes a great deal of difficulty" (Participant-03, September 20, 2010). They see religious diversity as being a subset of diversity overall and believe their school and district personnel have both experience with, and well-worked out practices for, managing diversity in general. Nonetheless, the interviewees could all recall issues related to religious diversity that had occurred either in their current district, one they had served in earlier in their careers, or from another district that had been discussed in the media.

However, they stressed that such issues were infrequent. In only a few instances were the examples they presented clearly tied to *religious* diversity. For example, some parents take advantage of the alternative delivery option for the reproductive biology section of the Health and Career learning objectives. However, it is never clear to school and district personnel whether parents make such requests for religious reasons or because they simply feel the topic of reproductive biology is best handled at home.

The examples of issues discussed or provided by the respondents largely fell into four main categories. These included ways in which religious diversity created tensions related to (1) *celebrations*, (2) *structures* within the schools (e.g., time or place to pray), (3) *interpersonal conflict* among and between members of the school community, or (4) *curriculum*. Very few examples of *interpersonal conflict* based on tensions related to religious diversity were provided. Issues related to *celebrations* and *structure* were more common, but with the exception of winter holidays, rarely seriously contentious. The area in which competing values were most likely to create serious difficulties was curriculum,

While such issues continue to surface in BC public schools, the district administrators feel they and their school personnel are able to handle such conflicts adroitly. They believe that the current provincial and district policies in place are clear enough to

provide them with principles for decision-making and action, while also flexible enough to adjust their practices to specific needs of each issue as it arises.

Most of the time, this framework for dealing with the complexity of religious diversity in a secular school context feels comfortable and seems to work for the stakeholders involved. However, it breaks down when school and family values are at such odds that one set cannot be upheld without violating the other, or the principles of secularity are in direct conflict with those of respect for religious diversity. Such tensions are most notable around curricular issues, which is where we focus our analysis and discussion.

Generally, the curricular examples provided by the participants were the ones they were the least certain were tied directly to religion. For example, in two of the districts parents or students had concerns about animal dissection, which may have been rooted in religious beliefs or may have been simply about animal rights. In both cases, objections to dissection are handled by allowing students to engage in other activities that enable them to learn about animal anatomy, such as reading about it in a textbook and either watching a video about dissection or doing a computerized simulation of dissection (Participant-01, August 31, 2010; Participant-05, February 18, 2011). In another, a parent objected to a tenth grade field trip to a science exhibit of preserved human bodies, which may or may not have been based in religious concerns about the proper handling of the dead. In this case, the parent was told that as the field trip was optional, any families that objected were free to have their children not participate (Participant-01, August 31, 2010).

Several participants mentioned that health education topics on reproductive biology, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual orientation, and same-sex families caused concern for some families, and a few mentioned issues related to the tension between creationism and evolution. Concerns related to reproductive biology are covered by the BC Ministry of Education's *Alternative Delivery* policy (2006) that outlines a procedure for covering such topics through alternative means. The concerns related to sexual orientation, same-sex families, and evolution are dealt with in a variety of ways on a case-by-case basis, but generally following the same procedures as used in the *Alternative Delivery* policy. Issues related to the selection of books and textbooks from *districts other than their own* were described briefly by several of the participants, including removing books describing same-sex families from school libraries (*Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36*, 2002) or districts removing diagrams of the human body from Grade 10

biology textbooks. Finally, a few participants noted that the elective provincial secondary course called Social Justice 12 raised some concerns from the Catholic Church and some communities in the province due to its content related to homosexuality (Participant-04, September 17, 2010). As this is an elective course in BC, the response has generally been that if families do not want their students to engage with the material covered by the course then they do not need to take it.

The Case of Mindful Breathing

Objection to school instruction in "mindful breathing" as a strategy for self-regulation was one of the few examples provided that was clearly an issue related to religion and curriculum, and so we present it in some detail as an illustrative case. The BC Ministry of Education (2001) sets performance standards for the development of students' social responsibility and requires that educators give students the opportunity to learn and develop related skills. A key component of the students developing a sense of social responsibility is their ability to self-regulate their emotions and their reactions to stress and conflict. In the district in question, "mindful breathing" was being taught to elementary students as a way of supporting their self-regulation skills. As one of the participants described it:

> One of the strategies that has been used, particularly in our elementary schools, is mindful breathing. It is an activity to assist students to deal with conflict and to manage themselves and learn about themselves and how they behave. It's a breathing process that kids learn and, I suppose, is rooted in Buddhist philosophy. But it's a non-religious application of a breathing exercise. (Participant-03, Part B, September 20, 2010)

Mindful breathing can include one of several exercises in which students focus on their breathing, such as by taking deep, slow breaths and paying attention to the way this breathing sounds and feels in their bodies, or counting their breaths during a minute, or attending to what they hear and feel outside their bodies while breathing (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005). Mindful practices such as these are thought to help students calm themselves and focus their attention (e.g., Burke, 2010; Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Lawlor, & Thomson, 2012). They are based in meditation practices of a Buddhist origin that were

adapted for use in a secular, clinical setting in the 1970s and have more recently been applied in school settings (Burke, 2010).

A group of parents objected to the practice of mindful breathing in one school. They argued that teaching mindful breathing was tantamount to teaching Buddhism, and doing so violated provincial law stipulating that schools are secular institutions. This conflict demonstrates how the line between religion and secular education can become difficult to discern.

> Yes, there's no denying that it [mindful breathing] was rooted in Buddhism, but we weren't promoting Buddhist practices. We were promoting a breathing exercise to assist [children with self-regulation] and that to me is a clear example of how things can be muddied. (Participant-03, September 20, 2010)

The issue was discussed in the media (e.g., Ferry, 2008) and caused a fair amount of angst in the school community, where parents became divided into two different positions regarding the program (Participant-03, September 20, 2010). "At the end of the day, we managed to work with the parents to create [a solution]. They could withdraw their child from that exercise, but we continued to perform it [in the school]" (Participant-03, September 20, 2010).

Localization of Decision Making

Study participants reported that, typically, issues related to religion and the curriculum are resolved on a case-by-case basis. "It really is very individual... It is about the school working with the family to find a compromise that is still within the bounds of what we are intending to teach and yet not offending the value systems of the people who are there. It's a very fine line that principals follow" (Particiapnt-04, September 17, 2010). In some cases, those who object to the curriculum or activity can simply choose not to participate. For example, field trips are always optional and Social Justice 12 is an elective course. At times, an accommodation is made to cover the required material through other means. BC's *Alternative Delivery* policy is designed to offer alternative delivery of instruction with regard to specific prescribed learning outcomes in the Health and Career Education Curriculum (K to 7, Grades 8 and 9) and Planning 10 that may offend parents' or students' beliefs or values:

In such instances, students with their parents'/guardians' consent and in consultation with their school, may arrange to address the prescribed learning outcomes by agreed-upon alternative means. It is expected that students will, in consultation with their school, demonstrate their knowledge of the specific prescribed learning outcome(s) they have arranged to address by alternative means. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006)

For example, some parents choose to cover reproductive biology topics at home, although it is not uncommon for them to seek advice from the teacher about how to do so (Participant-06, February 16, 2011). BC educators appear to use the *Alternative Delivery* plan's basic guidelines—that the *goals* of the instruction still be met through other means—for other circumstances. For example, in a high school gym class where religious practices of modesty may come into conflict, essays might be written about the activity to be missed and alternative physical activity found (Participant-05, February 18, 2011), or where a family has concerns related to evolution and creationism, the child might be given alternative work to do at school (Participant-04, September 17, 2010). In other situations, a simple acknowledgment during class discussion that other perspectives exist may be seen as sufficient:

Mr. XX, "My family doesn't believe in evolution," and I would say, "These are ideas and theories about the history of the world and there are other ideas about how people came to be," and I kind of leave it at that and it opens up a discussion about what is a theory. (Participant-06, February 16, 2011)

Finally, in rare cases, the board of education in a particular district may set or change policy to explicitly deal with a concern. For example, one district now has a formal policy regarding alternatives to animal dissection (Participant-01, August 31, 2010).

The BC Ministry of Education is quite clear that its *Alternative Delivery* policy only applies to a specific set of prescribed learning outcomes, as stated in the following "note" on its website:

Note: This policy does not apply to any other prescribed learning outcomes, Health and Career Education K to 7, Health and Career Education 8 and 9 or Planning 10. Nor does it apply to any other British Columbia provincial curriculum. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006)

Yet the general strategy of providing students an alternative means of meeting the prescribed learning outcomes seems prevalent, even when the issue of concern is not related to the PLO's for which the *Alternative Delivery* policy was designed.

Discussion

Canada has aspirations of being a pluralistic and inclusive society. Federal and provincial policy in recent decades demonstrates that desire. Stating the values of respect, tolerance, and inclusion of all provides schools with important foundations upon which to build a civil and respectful society. However, as Clarke (2005) stated, "Simply articulating these values will not make our problems go away. Real conflict and tension confront us continually" (p. 375).

While accommodations related to celebrations may be considered largely "extra-curricular" and those of structure mostly issues of safety and/or logistics, those related to curriculum are where the moral complexities of religious diversity in a secular system most clearly raise confusing conundrums. Curriculum is a statement of what our collective society believes all children should know and learn. Yet we don't all necessarily agree on what our children should know and learn. When that disagreement has a religious basis, it becomes important to strike an appropriate balance between the interests of different actors (parents, child, and the state) who are directly concerned over public education and its control of curriculum. Indeed, as noted by Reich (2002 as cited in Clarke, 2012, p. 10), "no single stakeholder can always claim to have the final say."

At first look, the tendency to accommodate religious diversity by applying the basic guidelines of the *Alternative Delivery* policy to prescribed learning outcomes other than those for which it was intended seems a sound one. For example, if a student objects to animal dissection for ethical reasons and can learn the same material through reading and perhaps conducting a simulated dissection online, doing so seems reasonable. Likewise, for a student who cannot wear a swimsuit in public for religious reasons, reading about swimming and then performing another aerobic exercise to take the place of swimming seem reasonable.

However, at what point do such accommodations constitute circumnavigating the curriculum rather than addressing it through alternative means? What if the purpose of

learning to swim was not aerobic exercise in general, but learning to swim in particular, in order to be safe on and near the water? Will the student who has done another form of exercise and only read about swimming have met this goal? If a student does "alternative work" in the principal's office during a unit on evolution, is he or she really able to "demonstrate knowledge of the specific prescribed learning outcomes" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006) related to evolution? Have they learned to *understand* the theory (whether or not the student and his/her family take issue with it)? Likewise, if children are given alternative work to do during a unit on diverse families, is one moral position (homosexuality is a sin) being accommodated to the detriment of another (we accept and welcome diverse families)? Can the child who missed that unit "demonstrate knowledge of the specific prescribed learning outcomes" related to "valuing diversity and defending human rights?" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 4).

While the specific examples cited differed by district, overall, the decision-making heuristics used and practices employed related to religious diversity were very similar across the three districts. Interviews with administrators show how school districts work out the tension without turning necessarily to the law, and that "little quiet negotiations" (Beaman, 2013) take place in the day-to-day practice. And they feel comfortable that for the most part, these negotiations work out well.

However, contrary to France and Quebec where accommodating religious identity in schools often raises significant concerns and public debate (Amiraux, 2009; Bouchard & Taylor, 2008), in British Columbia such issues are not often debated in the public space. Because so many decisions happen at the local level and even in the ephemeral interactions between teacher and student, they are often invisible to the community as a whole. Other children and parents do not necessarily know what can or could be requested or what kinds of accommodations are possible. Educators don't necessarily know how others have handled similar situations in the past and what the long-term ramifications of particular choices are. There is no specific training for handling such complex issues, nor any kind of casebook of past resolutions (beyond the handful of court cases) to which the collective body can refer. For the ephemeral classroom interactions especially, this lack of deep understanding and preparedness is particularly concerning. It is too easy to dismiss conflict with simple phases such as "Evolution is just a theory" that may show respect for students' religious beliefs but may cloud their understanding of the material being learned (i.e., a scientific theory is not a guess, nor a hypothesis nor a belief, but rather an

intellectual framework with predictive power and substantial supporting evidence). Ideally, a more nuanced response would be preferred.

Moreover, there is no clear collective sense of what the limits of such accommodations are. Administrators should ensure that the school system's educational goals continue to be met. For example, if a student cannot wear a swimsuit in public, the appropriate accommodation must be based on whether the goal is *exercise* or *learning to swim*. In the former case, the option of reading about swimming along with engaging in an alternative physical exercise might be reasonable. But in the latter case, perhaps private swim lessons under acceptable conditions could be arranged and documentation provided to the school of the goal being met.

In this vein, a common solution for activities to which there is a religion-related objection is to allow students to "opt-out." These chosen alternatives might be deemed "satisfactory" according to Simon's bounded rationality model (Simon, 1957). However, opting out may be problematic on two fronts. On the one hand, it may not enable the student to achieve the required educational goals. On the other, the social stigma associated with lack of participation may make such requests difficult for students and families to make (e.g., *Russow v. British Columbia*, 1989). With some kind of case base available, teachers and school and district administrators would have an easier time coming up with possible solutions within acceptable parameters without necessarily codifying such approaches in rigid policy. Training educational administrators using Hodgkinson's typology of values might be helpful to reflect on how values (personal and professional) impact their decision making in such situations. Three motivational levels of values are described in this typology: type I values (transrational) are grounded in metaphysical principles; type II values (rational) are grounded in either consequence (Type IIa) or consensus (Type IIb); amd type III values (subrational) are grounded in preference (Hodgkinson, 1978, 1991).

Finally, there are some conflicts that are irresolvable. For example, it is not possible to simultaneously meet the school system's goal of respecting diverse families, while also respecting an individual student's or family's religious belief that homosexuality is a sin. In such situations, the school system needs to be clear and consistent about where they stand. As demonstrated by the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada (*Chamberlain v. Surrey School District No. 36*, 2002), decision is a *Moral Art* (Hodgkinson, 1978, 1991). A decision implies choosing one preferable course of action over another: "Each

day and each hour provides the occasion for values judgment, and each choice has a de-termining effect on the value options for the future" (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 93).

In a context of international migration, the demand for recognition of religious identity in schools is a demand for authenticity and equal worth (Taylor, 1992). Indeed, Taylor (1992) argues:

> Identity is partly shaped by recognition and its absence, so often misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demean-ing or contemptible picture of themselves. (p. 25)

Therefore, as some have argued, acknowledging students' religious identity in public school is a "way to expose [students] to the plurality of worldviews, belief systems, values, practices and forms of community that make up the various religion of the world" (Seljak, 2009, p. 179). Others argue it is a way to promote "true dialogue" (tolerance, understanding, and compromise), and to "outweigh the harm to be avoided (indoctri-nation and fundamentalism) by consigning religious expression to the purely private sphere" (Clarke, 2005, p. 352).

However, these conversations are not easy. Administrators in our research are aware that distancing oneself from religious identity is difficult, as it is integral to our moral (Durkheim, 1925/1961) and ethical selves. It is not something that can be neatly "left out of the door" when entering school (Beaman, 2013). The wide variety of beliefs individuals hold and the depth of emotion connected to these beliefs can create intercul-tural minefields. We found, that in navigating this space, administrators walk a delicate balance in their efforts to recognize religion as part of individual and community identity while maintaining the distance required in a secular system.

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