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Creating a Faith-Friendly School Culture in Religiously Plural Communities: A Neglected Facet of Diversity

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Cover Page Footnote

We thank Stuart Allen for his insightful critique of an earlier version of this manuscript. The reviewers and editor input was also helpful in the final revision.

The fundamental issue, in the end, is the mixing of people: people of diverse experiences and complex identities; … people whose commitments shape their choice to dress, act, or serve differently than others do … Americans are living 'on common ground,'... Despite the shared landscape, however, different individuals and communities are following their respective religious pathways. … What happens when the paths inevitably cross? (Hicks, 2009, pp. 79-80).

Religion in public schools is a sensitive if not contentious topic. Many school leaders serve religiously diverse communities, engaging with staff and parents from various backgrounds to serve the academic and development needs of all the children. For school leaders to collaborate across these multi-faceted differences they need cultural competence, and even then the potential for conflict and misunderstanding inspires anxiety and stress. Eck (2001) noted over twenty years ago the increased diversity in the broader school community, pointing out that the USA had become the most religiously diverse country in the world; yet, school leaders receive little guidance on navigating the religious and spiritual landscape of their community (Soules & Jafralie, 2021). The purpose of this conceptual article is to provide guidance for school leaders to create a workplace and school culture hospitable to employees from all religious, spiritual, and non-religious backgrounds.

In addition to the growing religious diversity in the USA, scholars have noted that adults in the workplace are less willing to compartmentalize aspects of their identity, making religious expressions at work (e.g., dress, speech, holidays) more apparent and common (Hickman, 1998; Hicks, 2003; Allen & Williams, 2018). The compartmentalization of personal and professional selves dominated 20th century workplaces, and the growing unwillingness to leave parts of one's identity at home brings opportunities, resources, and challenges to today's workplaces. However, while educator preparation and development often includes some instruction in cultural competence, religious diversity gets little attention (Soules & Jafralie, 2021) and is also neglected in most cultural diversity related professional development (Schaeffer & Mattis, 2012). At a time public education is under stress with educator attrition drawing attention from journalists and politicians (Rash, 2022; Thompson, 2022), it is worth noting the lack of scholarly attention to the healthy management of religious expression in the schoolhouse. This lack is in spite of the ample evidence that people's religio-spiritual (including non-religious) belief systems are foundational to their identity (Allen, et al., 2018; Hicks, 2003), with recent research (Park & Martinez, 2022) suggesting that faith-friendly workplaces are related to positive employee outcomes including job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

Indeed, school leaders, responsible for creating a school culture that values the many cultures in the local community, have little or no guidance on how to address religious and spiritual diversity. Without sufficient guidance, educators tend to avoid the topic, defaulting to the prevailing view that religion does not belong in the schoolhouse (Hicks, 2013). Hicks notes, however, that if you have people in the workplace, you also have their religious and spiritual worldviews and expressions in the workplace (Allen, et al., 2015). Could it be that when educators ostensibly check their faith and spirituality at the door, they leave part of themselves behind that could energize them, give their work meaning and purpose, and otherwise sustain them in challenging times? This "divorce of our so-called spiritual life from our daily activities is a fatal dualism" (Follett, 1924, p. 87). This "fatal dualism" permeated American workplaces (including schools) throughout the twentieth century.

The purpose of this conceptual paper, then, is to synthesize findings from the management literature on workplace spirituality including the sparse empirical literature on

religious expression in the school (as a workplace) and from case law on employment-related religious expression in schools to chart a path for school leaders to create a faith-safe or faith-friendly workplace (Miller & Ewest, 2015) and school culture. We synthesize the concepts and findings into actionable recommendations for school leaders to guide them in creating inclusive, religiously plural, healthy workplaces where educators can flourish and thrive by bringing their whole selves to work.

We begin with definitions and assumptions followed by a rationale for considering this potentially contentious topic. Then, we review case law on religion in public schools, focusing on employment (as opposed to teacher-student interaction, e.g., Kennedy v. Bremerton School District; Bremerton, 2021) and synthesize principles to clarify the law as it stands currently. We next draw insight and guidance from the management research literature on workplace spirituality and psychological well-being, and we apply it to the work life of educators. Then, to begin charting a path forward, we introduce Miller and Ewest's (2015) Faith and Work Organizational framework (FWOF, see Table 1) to provide language and categories for organizational approaches to faith at work. Finally, we make recommendations for practice. We suggest several steps educators can take to create a faith-safe and potentially faith-friendly school community. This path forward includes identifying the various religions and spiritualities represented in the school community, and the adoption of norms for interactions about faith (e.g., respectful pluralism) for creating a faith-friendly workplace in which all educators can flourish in synchrony with the broader school community.

Definitions and Assumptions

We note two boundaries of this article. First, we focus on the school culture and values concerning religion and spirituality and their expression by employees in the workplace; we do not cover the educator-student relationship. Second, laws against religious discrimination in the workplace are based on the idea that religious beliefs (or non-religious spirituality) are part of a person's core identity and a person should not have to abandon those beliefs to get or maintain employment (Hicks, 2003). This concept underpins and bounds the discussion that follows.

We refer to religion and spirituality as distinct but overlapping concepts. Black's Law Dictionary (1992) defines religion as "a [human's] relation to Divinity, to reverence, worship, obedience, and submission to mandates and precepts of supernatural or superior beings" (p. 1292). Tanyi (2002) defined spirituality as "A personal search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to religion . . . [that] brings faith, hope, peace, and empowerment . . . joy, forgiveness of oneself and others, awareness and acceptance of hardship and mortality, a heightened sense of physical and emotional well- being, and the ability to transcend" (p. 506).

While religion usually refers to affiliation with an identified world religion, and being religious overlaps with being spiritual, many people identify as spiritual but not religious (Pew Research Center, 2021). In this paper, we include both in recognition that local communities are becoming more religiously and spiritually diverse, and this diversity includes those who describe themselves as "none" of the above, or neither religious nor spiritual (Pew Research Center, 2021). For ease of expression, we will often refer to spirituality or religion (SR) together to be both succinct and as inclusive as possible.

Also, we acknowledge that as authors we write from our Christian worldview, and in spite of our attempts to the contrary, we may unintentionally privilege our views. Our intention is to stimulate thoughtful dialog and practice, and to that end, we welcome alternate perspectives.

The Rationale for Discussing Faith in Schools

SR topics are often considered taboo in public and professional contexts (Allen & Williams, 2015; Hicks, 2003) and inter-faith conflict is not unusual (Allen & Williams, 2018; Lund Dean, et al., 2014). As such, SR is usually an ignored diversity in many school communities, left to the personal sphere. However, even in seemingly mono-religious communities, differences among diverse sects or denominations within a single religion can be challenging to navigate. Miller and Ewest (2015) state clearly, "Mismanagement of the presence of religious expression in the workplace can bring not only marginalizing effects upon some members of the workforce, but also potential lawsuits and litigation on the organization itself" (p. 306).

These are highly stressful times for educators and while teacher attrition has always been an issue of concern, it is critical now (Thompson, 2022). Educators frequently refer to their career choice as a calling (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012) yet many leave the profession in the first five years and are prone to burnout at any point (Houston, 2019; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021; Malesic, 2022). DeMatthews, et al. (2021) found a connection between principal and teacher turnover and refer to it as the "principal-teacher churn" (p. 76). Educators' resilience is being tested in spite of their expressed vocational calling which often has SR roots. Given the religious roots of the concept of vocation and calling, it is no surprise to note the evidence that educators' faith and spirituality may contribute to their resilience (Mahipalan & Sheena, 2019).

Developing human capital is a primary function of school leaders (e.g., Tex. Admin. Code, Title 19 §241.15d). The leader can recognize and even encourage faculty and staff to draw from the rich well of their own faith tradition (Allen, et al., 2015; Delbecq, 2005) to grow and develop; indeed, this can be a key aspect of a school culture that is developmental, that values learning and growth in humility, respect, forgiveness, love, hope, and in regard for others. Growing a school culture with these values can be seen as a human resource strategy that contributes to a healthy work environment, educator well-being and retention, and ultimately to improved student outcomes. Leaders have to balance this focus on developing human capacity inclusive of SR with the need to avoid unnecessary litigation. This raises the question, how do we create a school culture and climate in which educators can draw on the deep wellsprings of their faith tradition without fear of retribution, marginalization, or litigation? What are the boundaries of such SR expression? Can the school culture enable a workplace where employees can thrive with the inherent tension of SR differences?

Employment Law on SR in Public Education

Public school employees usually steer clear of discussion of religion due to the belief that religion has no place in schools (Natsis, 2016; Soules & Jafralie, 2021). One of the more difficult questions raised by public school employees is to what extent they may exercise their religious faith while engaged in their duties as an employee (Rippner & Linkous, 2021). A key distinction is that exercising one's SR at work includes both the *experiencing* and the *expression* of SR. Experiencing the spiritual nature of one's work might include the awareness of and appreciation for the transcendent nature of relationships, participating in a purpose greater than oneself, or in the sense of connection to the greater community. In the Christian tradition, one might recognize teaching children as a response to Jesus' example when he corrected his disciples and said, "let the children come to me" (Matthew 19:14). SR experience, then, is one aspect of SR in the workplace that is often primarily internal and related to one's sense of purpose and meaning. The other aspect, SR expression, however, is more complicated, as it is the outward manifestation of SR. Below, we review several legal decisions related to religious expression among school

employees. We purposefully do not include cases related to students as these cases involve a different body of legal literature.

School districts and thus school employees in their professional roles experience a tension related to SR: they are prohibited from imposing religious choice on others under the Establishment Clause, but they are also prohibited from interfering with a public employee's private religious expression under the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses. Educators do not give up their individual religious freedoms when employed by a public school district (Rippner & Linkous, 2021). A school district cannot infringe on an employee's religious freedoms based solely on a fear of an Establishment Clause violation. As noted in *Freshwater* (2013), an infringement on an employee's rights "must be grounded in reality" and the "district's mere fear of an Establishment Clause violation" is not justification to deny an employee First Amendment protections.

The tension between the Establishment Clause, on one hand, with the Free Exercise and Free Speech Clauses, on the other, causes a lot of confusion. A school district employee's religious rights are often misunderstood and misconstrued despite the consistent court rulings that private religious expression is protected from unwarranted governmental interference (Dayton, et al., 2018).

The Establishment Clause in the First Amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" (U.S. Cons. Amend 1). The Fourteenth Amendment applies the Establishment Clause to state and local governments, such as school districts. The Establishment Clause prohibits government officials from establishing any favored or disfavored religions (Dayton et al., 2018). The Free Exercise Clause is also part of the First Amendment, and it states Congress may not pass a law "prohibiting the free exercise" of religion (U.S. Cons. Amend 1). The free exercise of religion means, first and foremost, the right to believe and profess whatever religious doctrine one desires (Sherbert, 1963).

As McCarthy *et al.* state, "Public school educators enjoy a constitutional right to their religious beliefs, but they do not have a right to freely express those beliefs to their students." It is well established law that when instructing students or when acting in their official duties, public school employees must remain neutral concerning religion. Rippner and Linkous (2021) note that court cases involving government employee free speech rights suggest that most, if not all, speech that occurs in school districts during the scope of work duties is not private speech protected by the First Amendment but, instead, is speech related to their position as a school employee.

The question remains as to how an employee, not acting in their official duties, may practice their faith in a public school setting. In *Garcetti v. Ceballos* (2005), the Supreme Court held that speech by a public official is only protected if it is engaged in as a private citizen, not if it is expressed as part of the official's public duties. A public employee speaks "pursuant to their official duties," (p. 1) they do not speak as citizens and their speech is not protected by the First Amendment. The key determining factor is whether the public school employee is participating in their official capacity.

Employees may take part in religious activities where the overall context makes clear that they are not participating in their official capacities (Rippner & Linkous, 2021). Employees' official duties are their roles and responsibilities as school district employees. In evaluating official duties, courts consider the manner of speech, the time speech occurred, and the place of the speech, as well as whether a reasonable observer would perceive the employee as acting as

part of the school district (Bremerton, 2018). When instructing students or when acting in their official duties, public school employees must remain neutral concerning religion.

Guidance from the Department of Education states an employee may engage in private religious speech so long as it does not appear to proselytize or rise to the level of a school endorsement of religion. Teachers also may take part in religious activities, such as prayer, even during their workday at a time when it is permissible to engage in other private conduct such as making a personal telephone call. Before school or during lunch, for example, teachers may meet with other teachers for prayer or religious (e.g., Bible or other scripture) study to the same extent that they may engage in other conversation or nonreligious activities. Similarly, teachers may participate in their personal capacities in privately sponsored baccalaureate ceremonies or similar events. School employees' rights under the free exercise clause become less concerning if students are not involved. However, they become concerning if there is a power differential such as when principals engage with teachers and the perception of even subtle coercion exists.

Conceptual Framework

To describe the various types of organizational approaches vis-à-vis religious expression in the workplace, we adopt Miller and Ewest's (2015) Faith and Work Organizational Framework (FWOF). The FWOF delineates four types of approaches organizations can take to faith at work: faith-avoidant, faith-based, faith-safe, and faith-friendly (see Table 1). Miller and Ewest (2015) explain the need for the FWOF "in light of the faith-at-work movement, Title VII claims, and human rights theory" (p. 306). They note that in spite of the growing religious diversity in the workplace, rising EEOC claims related to religious practices (mostly related to time off and dress), and increased employee interest in integrating faith and work, "many companies still lack a comprehensive language and organization framework to understand and address the changing faith and work climate" (p. 309). It appears that leaders' hesitance in addressing expressions of faith at work, while understandable, is becoming even more problematic.

Table 1

Organizations' Faith Orientations (adapted from Miller & Ewest, 2015)

Orientation	Religious accommodation	Formal policies	Fatal dualism
Faith-avoiding	Requests suppressed or not accommodated, company practices secularization theory. May not be meeting Title VII requirements. Holidays, while they follow Christian calendar, are given secular names, unwittingly institutionalizing Christian traditions.	Proactively embrace faith and work are rejected. Expression is prohibited by policy, religious objects, rituals, expressed religious religion as motivation as behavior is questioned, secular neutrality is championed. Religious expression is associated with	Is often practiced, as management signals that faith/spirituality is solely a personal matter with no role or place in the workplace. Positive effects of spirituality and religion such as organizational commitment, productivity, job satisfaction and job retention may be in

Orientation	Religious accommodation	Formal policies	Fatal dualism
	No diversity frame is used to manage or guide the organizational culture	harassment, fundamentalism or extremism. Secular neutrality is believed to ensure equal footing for all religious traditions	jeopardy, for those with strong religious convictions
Faith-based	Requests are accommodated and promoted but often appear to favor one religious tradition. Themes from the promoted religion are used to incentivize activities, including sales and employee gatherings. Diversity frames focus on tolerance of those outside the predominant religious tradition, and greater adherence to the predominant frame	Are proactively embraced, yet typically privileging one tradition over others. Many of the policies can be tacitly rooted within the tradition such as days taken off, garb expectations, religious expression and personal motivation are anchored in the dominant faith tradition	Is avoided for some by promoting the privileged tradition, while those from other traditions might feel compelled to practice compartmentalization . For those within the promoted faith tradition there are increased positive effects of organizational commitment, productivity, job satisfaction and job retention
Faith-safe	Requests are met as necessitated by law, with priority given to avoiding undue burden on or disruption to the business and avoiding costly litigation. Diversity frames focus on tolerance of and understanding of those with varying religious traditions, encouraging greater identity with the predominant faith	Accommodate religious practices as necessitated by law, but fall short of embracing it. Policies are designed to avoid litigation, and provide accommodation for most issues providing they do not put an undue burden on the workplace. Most policies unwittingly support institutionalized Christian traditions in	May be less likely for those whose faith/spiritual needs are satisfied through some religious accommodations. Positive effects of spiritualty and religion are mediated by religious adherence and expectations rooted in religious self-identity. For those with low adherence and religious

Orientation	Religious accommodation	Formal policies	Fatal dualism
	tradition	regards to holidays, professional dress, and religious practice	expectations, there is minimal mediating (negative) effect
Faith-friendly	Accommodation requests are respected, as employers value employees' faith. Employers seek out and accommodate the religious and spiritual needs of employees, going beyond the letter of the law, seeing multifaceted workplace benefits. Diversity frames focus on understanding and agreements between those with varying religious traditions	Support practices that proactively embrace all religious faith traditions, with equal respect and consideration given to each, including atheists. Formal policies are constructed, reviewed and updated by employees who represent various faith traditions	Avoided by encouraging the integration of faith and work for all religious/spiritual employees from various traditions. Positive effects of spirituality and religion are clearly seen: organizational commitment, productivity, job satisfaction

The school as a workplace has evolved in the same context as corporate America: "secular neutrality is underpinning the American workplace and its so-called secularization has unwittingly institutionalized Christian traditions (e.g. a bifurcated work life, religious holidays, and structure of the workday)" (Miller & Ewest, 2015, p. 312). The result is a dualism of work life and personal life: work life where faith is not expressed and personal life where faith is expressed. Fatal dualism (Table 1) refers to faith-avoiding organizations' practice of "forcing employees to leave their faith, and therefore part of their identity, outside the workplace" (Miller & Ewest, 2015, p. 316).

In the FWOF framework, we note that the faith-based organizations category seldom changes without an overt shift in the usually private school's DNA, mission, and vision. Faith-avoiding organizations discourage expressions of faith at work based on the erroneous assumption that faith expression inevitably will lead to conflict or even litigation. In public schools, the faith-avoiding culture may be due also to the perception and interpretation of the separation of church and state. The other categories (besides faith-based) may be influenced, though, through leadership practices, policy, and procedure, potentially shifting from a faith-avoiding to a faith-safe or even faith-friendly school culture. Faith-friendly organizations create more positive job outcomes over faith-avoiding organizations (Park & Martinez, 2022), providing religious accommodations and enacting policies to promote religious inclusion. We also note that the FWOF does not describe how an organization might shift from being faith-

avoidant to being faith-friendly. As such, we use the FWOF framework as a typology and associated vocabulary to discuss this sensitive topic.

Well-Being At Work

The nurturing of educators' holistic health and well-being seems idealistic and perhaps even unrealistic as public educators are scrambling to figure out how to help kids catch up after two years of hastily implemented hybrid and online teaching due to the COVID-19 inspired school shut-downs. The increased stress on teachers and administrators is exacerbated by the persistent emphasis on accountability via standardized test scores and the heightened racial unrest and accompanying community polarization. With depleted energy in the face of unrelenting demands on emotional, social, and mental resources, educator turnover which has been high could increase even more (DeMatthews, et al., 2022; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022).

Many educators have a personal SR-based belief system and derive their life and work purpose, meaning, and vocational calling from their SR worldview. Even educators who are not religious may express a sense of calling to teach, and so relate their work to a transcendent purpose. Yet at the same time educators are often unsure of or uneasy with expressions of faith and spirituality in the school house. This uneasiness reflects the overall social attitudes towards faith expressions in public places, acknowledged and described by Hicks (2003, 2009) and Miller and Ewest (2015) and others (Allen & Williams, 2018; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Miller (2006) states that the prevailing attitude in the 1980s and 1990s was that religion at work was illegal (outside of faith-based organizations).

Since the 1990s, however, there has been rising interest among management scholars in exploring faith at work and the dynamics of spirituality and leadership (Allen & Williams, 2018; Benefiel, et al., 2014; Delbecq, 2005; Williams & Allen, 2020). Part of this spirituality at work movement revolves around finding meaning and purpose in work and the mounting evidence that shows a sense of meaning and purpose drives workplace engagement and performance (Van der Walt, 2018).

There is also growing interest in leadership's role in helping facilitate healthy, humane workplaces that encourage thriving (Bolman & Deal, 2009; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013; Kleine, et al, 2019; Spreitzer, et al., 2012). Spreitzer, et al. (2012) defined workplace thriving as including both learning and vitality. Kleine, et al. did a meta-analysis and found thriving at work helps mitigate burnout, and is associated with workplace engagement, task performance, and subjective health. Van der Walt (2018) found that an organizational culture that encourages spirituality also promotes thriving at work and is associated with performance and engagement, "by valuing relationships between employees and by creating compassionate working environments….in such a way that they fulfill employees' need for meaning and purpose in their work, rather than focusing only on enhancement of motivation and satisfaction" (p. 8).

These values (or virtues) span most formal religions (and spiritualities), and may allow employees to bring their SR identities into the workplace under the guise of generic virtues. There is a risk, however, of losing the richness of a religious tradition in the translation to generic language (Theodore, 2010). Management scholar, Andre Delbecq, suggested that, "workplace spirituality…should avoid 'closing the door on the centuries of wisdom that is possessed in a religious tradition'" (Allen & Williams, 2017, p. 220). Delbecq was referring to the tendency exclude faith-specific expressions and terminology and thus risk losing the very rich vocabulary of the different religious traditions (see also, Bergdahl, 2009).

Allen and Fry (2022) also tie spirituality to learning in the workplace, arguing with ample support, "Approaches to LD [leader development] and MD [moral development] that overlook

spirituality's essential role in leaders' worldviews, needs, development, and identities are incomplete" (p. 13). In their review and synthesis of separate bodies of research, they interweave leadership, moral, and spiritual development models, suggesting leader development can be enhanced by adopting practices that enhance the inner life of leaders. Allen and Fry draw insight from various religious traditions into leader development and suggest the incorporation of contemplative practices, practices of discernment, and the awareness of the nature of spiritual crisis.

In public education, however, discussions of personal faith and religion are often considered problematic and have become politicized to the point of increasing educator stress and anxiety instead of being a source of vitality. Recently, a few researchers have investigated educators' spirituality. Gibson (2014) studied principals in New Zealand and concluded, in part, that it is valuable for school leaders to "reflect on their own meanings of spirituality and how their spirituality contributes to their professional beliefs, values, attitudes and practice" (p. 526). This intentional reflection contributed to the clarification of purpose and meaning for the diverse group of principals in Gibson's study.

In their systematic review of research on effective interventions for teacher resilience, Kangas-Dick and O'Shaughnessy (2020) suggest that "teachers with a robust understanding of their own identities appear to fare better when faced with challenging work experiences" (p. 134). Barnes (2019) found in his qualitative study in Africa that "autographical vignettes" (p. 14), stories shared to communicate values are effective in promoting teacher resilience, as well as having values-based discussions. Their study further clarified that such stories and discussions often includes expressions of faith, calling, and vocation that contributed to teachers' resilience.

Evidence suggests that educators' resilience is enhanced by connecting their SR to their work. We suggest that in a faith-friendly school culture educators who are not afraid of including faith in describing their own experiences can draw energy, meaning and purpose and potentially reinforce their resilience. But faith expression in religiously plural communities requires some thought.

Changing Contexts: Communities

Even while school communities include people of many SR backgrounds, educators have had little training and experience with interfaith dialogue (Soules & Jafralie, 2021). The default approach in many public spaces and organizations has been to either avoid religious talk, sometimes inferring a prohibition where none exists, or to assume a Christian worldview is shared by most and allow Christian expressions but not others (Hicks, 2013). Yet, most local school communities are filled with people of faith from a variety of religious and nonreligious backgrounds (Pew Research Center, 2021).

While communities will have different proportions of various religions that the local school leaders should be aware of, in a nationwide survey in 2021, Pew Research Center (2021) noted that approximately 6% reported belonging to other religions (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and others), the ongoing upward trend of religious "nones" and decreasing proportions of Christian protestants: "Currently, about three-in-ten U.S. adults (29%) are religious "nones" – people who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or "nothing in particular" when asked about their religious identity. Self-identified Christians of all varieties (including Protestants, Catholics, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Orthodox Christians) make up 63% of the adult population compared to 78% in 2007. Christians now outnumber religious "nones" by a ratio of a little more than two-to-one, trending downward; in 2007, "Christians outnumbered "nones" by almost five-to-one (78% vs. 16%)" (Pew Research Center,

2021). These are national trends, and though in each community the proportions and trends will vary, these nationwide numbers highlight the changing demographics of our schools and the surrounding communities in which educators serve. In the recommendations, below, we encourage educators to become familiar with the religious makeup of their school communities.

Changing Attitudes about SR at Work

Lund Dean, et al., (2014) suggested that many employees assumed that any expression of religious belief or practice would be interpreted by others as threatening to others' faith identity, either hostile or proselytizing. This attitude across workplaces in general may have given rise to the inaccurate perception that there could be no prayer in schools, which has been promulgated informally. Theodore (2010) suggests the proposed neutrality of educators toward SR is problematic, unattainable, and can be a way to inadvertently elevate a secular materialism that does not allow for any sort of non-material reality. It seems, though, that attitudes about SR in the public sphere are changing in some quarters.

Writing about higher education, and we believe it applies to common education as well, Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) suggested: "Religion has 'returned' to higher education in the last 2 decades … but we add the qualification that the religion that has returned to universities in recent years is not the same kind of religion that dominated higher learning in America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries … [it] is more pluriform than it was in the past and much less easily distinguished from other lifestances that formerly have been called secular" (p. 153).

Discussion: The Road Ahead

The default historical preference for Western protestant Christian values and observances is deeply embedded in the U.S.A. culture. However, the mono-cultural communities many grew up in did not prepare them for the multi-cultural school contexts in which they work. Allen and Williams (2017) suggest, moreover, that faith communities themselves have not prepared their members for healthy and hospitable interaction with people of other faiths, although faith leaders engage in interfaith collaboration and dialog in many communities (e.g., The Pluralism Project at Harvard, https://pluralism.org/interfaith-dialogue). The new pluralism in our local school communities in which we have various faith (and nonfaith) groups represented will cause some discomfort. We suggest that this discomfort can contribute to learning and growth if it is handled respectfully and productively by educators.

Aiming towards Pluralism: Learning to work productively, not just tolerating or co-existing, with people of other faiths and spiritualities is workplace pluralism. It is not relativism, nor does it mean changing one's religious beliefs or accepting other belief systems as equivalent. Eck (2003), writing from a Christian theologian's perspective, explains pluralism, distinguishing it from the oft-confused concept of relativism, that: "we not limit God to the God we know or the particular language and image through which we know God … it is our confidence in Jesus, the Christ, who was open to all people regardless of religion or status, that pushes Christians into the wider world of faith" (p. 185; see also Eck, 2006).

This new pluralism begins with respect for and active engagement with all SR backgrounds represented in the school community without one dominating others. This opens up opportunities for richer learning about others. Adapting to the growing religious diversity in the local community includes school leaders recognizing the inherited default preference for Christian Protestantism (Allen & Williams, 2017). More thoughtful reflection will result in an intentionally hospitable school culture with fewer misunderstandings that come from

unquestioned assumptions (e.g., that everyone has a Western Christian, mainly protestant, world view).

Hicks (2009) suggests the Spanish concept of *convivencia*: "Convivencia has the more active meaning of mutual encounter… reciprocal engagement. People who have to eat, work, shop and ride the bus together must develop norms and routines of interaction that are more than simply acknowledging each others' existence… a valuing of active interactions among people from many backgrounds" (p. 85). Questions of how to enact convivencia, or operationalize pluralism, in a school setting remain. In the following section, we address some of those questions.

Recommendations for Practice

The first recommendation is important for establishing a faith-safe school culture. The subsequent recommendations build on the first and go beyond it to contribute to a faith-friendly culture.

Review Policy and Procedures: As noted earlier, many organization do not have policy about accomodations for SR related time off, dress, and other forms of SR expression (e.g., displaying religious objects on desk). At a minimum, school leaders should review existing policies to identify ways to make expectations and procedures clear. Any policy revisions should be promulgated through regular communication channels and incorporated into training.

Adopt community norms of interaction and respectful pluralism: To operationalize pluralism in a respectful and productive way in the school community, the respectful pluralism model explained by Hicks (2003) provides norms of interaction based on shared values of human dignity and worthy of equal respect. These procedural norms also represent Hicks' (2003) rejection of a generic SR vocabulary of values which has "the effect of reducing more substantive resources of religious traditions to a common denominator belief" (p. 166). Instead, he claims respectful pluralism norms "encourage pluralistic debate and the inclusion of multiple perspectives" (p. 166) with their rich vocabulary, traditions, and stories.

Hicks (2003) describes respectful pluralism as follows: "To the greatest extent, workplace organizations should allow employees to express their religious, spiritual, cultural, political, and other commitments at work, subject to the limiting norms of noncoercion, nondegradation, and nonestablishment, and in consideration of the reasonable instrumental demands of the … enterprise" (p. 173). The presumption of inclusion (people's right to dignity, respect, and expression of their identity) communicates to employees of all faiths (and non-faiths), "you are welcome here and your version of religion and spirituality is welcome, insofar as it is 1) not coercive (avoidance of persuasion via threat or force, both implicit and explicit); 2) not degrading (avoidance of acts or speech that disrespect others); and 3) not established (no institutionally imposed spiritual or religious position)" (Hicks, in Allen, et al., 2015; Hicks, 2003). This framework, embedded in the school culture, gives permission to employees to discuss with each other their moral commitments that are based in their faith-based worldview. We note here that the norms of respectful pluralism are more expansive than Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (as amended) in that they invite different faith expressions and do not only (perhaps grudgingly) accommodate them.

Religious Literacy: Become familiar with the faith expressions of the various faiths and non-faiths in the community. Walker, et al., (2021) suggest religious literacy is a "fundamental civic competency" (p. 1) that should be taught as part of the social studies curriculum in public schools. Soules & Jafralie (2021) make a case for including religious literacy in teacher

preparation programs, to better prepare them to teach children from other religious (and nonreligious) backgrounds. They also suggest it is an important step in becoming a religiously literate society. One way to become more literate in SR is to connect with other faith groups in the local community.

Proactively connect with different faith communities: Hicks (2009) suggests that we "build new forms of social connections" and "stretch our comfort zones" (pp. 164-165) such as neighborhood groups, interfaith coalitions, and other ways of building ties with people of different faith groups and cultural backgrounds. Often it is in these personal encounters where one learns to talk about religious differences with respect, appreciation, and curiosity. While many who are in the SR majority have not experienced interfaith dialogue, several Christian faith groups have published guidance. President and Fellows of Harvard College (2020) state, "As America becomes increasingly multireligious, interfaith dialogue will only become more important to American private and public life" (p. 3). They also mention "A Common Word Between Us and You" (https://www.acommonword.com/) and the Roman Catholic *Nostra Aetate*, published during Vatican II. In addition, several Protestant denominations have developed guidelines to help Christians reflect on their own faith in the context of interfaith encounters. For example, the United Methodist Church has published 'Called to be Neighbors and Witnesses' and the Presbyterian Church USA has published 'Interfaith Guidelines on Dialogue'."

Encourage SR Experience: Discussions of meaning and purpose at work, connection with others and deriving lasting meaning from one's work are important aspects of a workplace and should be encouraged by leaders. The language used to describe such SR experience will vary among different religions (and perspectives), but the fact that educators' work makes a difference in the world and may flow from a core SR belief system can be acknowledged and encouraged. An appreciation for the value of SR experience and tactful expression in the workplace can be taught (Allen, et al., 2020).

Practice respectful interfaith dialog: Many people grew up in mono-religious contexts with little exposure to and substantive interaction with people of other SR backgrounds, and so they have a certain discomfort and unease. It takes positive practice in having discussions about faith, religion, spirituality, and deeply held belief systems with people outside our own group.

Develop a culture of faith-friendly interaction (Miller & Ewest, 2015), so it is safe to mention one's faith, inquire about faith of others and grow everyone's understanding. In a faith-friendly culture, the mention of SR is understood as non-threatening given observance of respectful pluralism principles (as a sort of social contract or group norms). A culture of psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006) begins with leaders who promote are accessible, invite positive and negative input, and express gratitude for constructive feedback (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Psychological safety leads to greater employee engagement and performance.

Recognize power differentials in the supervisory relationships. "The issue," Dayton et al. (2018) suggest, "is whether as state agents educators in fact used their state positions, power, and prestige to endorse religion or coerce others concerning religion, thereby denying citizens' rights to make their own free will choices on matters of faith and to be free from state establishment of a favored religion" (p. 693). Recognizing one's own power to influence or coerce requires some degree of self and social awareness. The positional power in the organization is related to a leader's ability to make employment related decisions including but not limited to hiring, dismissal, assignments, and work load. Andre Delbecq addressed this

potential for coercion in his management classroom on leadership spirituality and modeled an inclusive, non-coercive approach to faith expression, by first "referencing all the traditions present, and since I've referenced all the traditions, I'm very comfortable saying, 'in my own tradition…'" (in Allen, et al., 2015, 14:50ff). By inviting others into the dialog space first through direct inclusion of their traditions, leaders can set the stage for mentioning their own faith perspective.

Conclusion

A school leader's goal is to create a school culture, embedded in and reflective of the local community, where all employees can flourish. With a faith-friendly work culture and a knowledge of the current state of case law related to religious expression in schools, educators may feel comfortable to bring their whole selves, engage in SR experience at work, and learn to engage productively with their colleagues. Such a learning community is a healthy step forward for a demanding profession in a chaotic time. While we do not claim that a faith-friendly workplace is a solution to all the complex issues and challenges in education, it is a healthy environment in which educators can draw on all aspects of their identities to deal with the high stress of job.

We note, also, the need for further research including exploring the relationship of faith-friendly school workplace on educator well-being. Researchers might conduct positive deviance case studies (Bisel, et al., 2020) of schools in religiously diverse communities that have established a faith-friendly workplace. In this article, we have reviewed the literature on spirituality at work and case law, included resources and provided concrete guidance for school leaders and leader educators to inform their practice of creating a faith-friendly school culture: a learning community in which educators do not have to check their faith at the door.

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