



Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

Addressing and Celebrating Religious Diversity in a Culturally Responsive Classroom

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Abstract

This project is a professional development program for PK-12 educators in a public school setting, to consider and undertake teaching about religion and culture in their various disciplines and capacities. The workshop is designed to encourage educators to engage in discourse about religious and cultural diversity across the United States, and within their own communities, so that they may facilitate and foster an inclusive environment that acknowledges and values distinct beliefs and practices amongst our student populations. With this framework in mind, this program will better enable educators and students to respect individuals from various cultural, faith and non-faith traditions and simultaneously empower them to cultivate a society that embraces knowledge and empathy.

In an increasingly globalized world, where one individual can reach, hear and be exposed to another individual from a vastly different culture, our role as educators has become even more dynamic. How do we respond to these shifts? What are age-appropriate avenues and pedagogical methodologies to address and comprehend the diversity that surrounds us? To what extent can we instill young people with the tools and skill-sets to effectively communicate, understand and reflect upon cultural differences amongst our peers? This course will seek to help educators navigate these questions and share professional strategies and resources, including those centered on “lived religion,” to ensure culture is central to our learning as students and teachers. Additionally, we will look to broaden our professional conversations about student access and equity for all learners from all cultures within our educational structures, while engaging in a dialogue that encourages teachers and students to share and discuss religious and ethnic diversity for all student learners within our community and around the world. Moreover, the course will emphasize pedagogies to enhance and supplement the existing academic and socio-emotional curriculum offered by all grade levels and disciplines throughout the district, ultimately promoting a culturally responsive classroom.

Curricular and Community Context

The goal of this professional development is to examine religious and cultural diversity through an academic lens, across disciplines and grade levels. The course will examine and incorporate aspects of the “lived religion” pedagogy and encourage educators to develop curricular materials that provide students with authentic and experiential learning opportunities. In turn, this will contribute to the development of social and emotional skills, such as empathy, while simultaneously aligning with various state and national learning standards.

Contextually speaking, this project was designed for a suburban, public school district outside of New York City, which may serve grades PK-12. While individual school districts develop professional learning opportunities for their faculty and staff, they may focus on a variety of pedagogical, curricular and content-based topics. Many of these programs are open to all professionals within an organization, and look to support the mission statements and educational philosophies developed by their communities. However, this course hopes to provide educators, from a variety of educational levels and institutions, both public and private, to embrace religious and cultural diversity, and offer school professionals with an initial framework to engage their colleagues in more critical conversations centered on the teaching about religion in a context that diverges from the traditional World Religions Paradigm. The learning objectives associated with the “lived religion” approach align with various state learning standards and serves as a strategy to promote and instill the values and mission expressed by schools and districts around the country. Ultimately, this approach lends itself to a more nurturing and inclusive academic and social-emotional environment, embodying the ideals of understanding, respect and empathy.

Professional Development Agenda

Please note, the following schedule was developed for an in-service institute for a suburban public school district, for educators from all levels. The agenda below may be modified to meet the needs of various educators, school professionals and contexts in order to most appropriately address specific populations and effectively operate within various logistical constructs.

Course Schedule, Readings and Activities

8:00 Welcome and Overview

- Introductions
- Community Reflections: Participants will be divided into small groups to identify and discuss prevailing sentiments about their school, the district and larger community
 - What words come to mind when you think about your students, school, the district and larger community?
 - Groups will collaborate to identify words or phrases they believe characterize their populations and the district
 - Responses can be shared via polleverywhere.com, by using cell phones, which can in turn generate a visual depiction of responses through the construction of a word cloud
 - Briefly observe the responses and as a large group, analyze what these words relate to us as educators in the district
- Analysis of District Mission Statement/Educational Philosophy and cultural connections: Small groups will interpret the district’s vision and its significance on pedagogical frameworks and classroom instruction when considering culture and religion
- Goals of teaching about religious and cultural diversity in PK-12 education

9:00 Teaching about World Religions, Challenges and the First Amendment

- [Dreams, World Peace, and Freshmen; Why I Teach World Religions | Sherry McIntyre | TEDxModesto](#)
 - Group Screening of Ted Talk and General Discussion
- Challenges to Teaching about Religion: Small Group Discussion
- Analysis of the First Amendment and Ramifications on Public Schools
 - What is the significance of Establishment Clause in the First Amendment?
 - Brief Discussion of [Abington v. Schempp](#)
 - To what extent does this impact public education?

10:00 Break

10:15 Frameworks for Teaching About Religion and Addressing Stakeholders

- [A Teacher's Guide to Religion in Public Schools – First Amendment Center](#)
 - Small Group Analysis and Debrief
- [From World Religions to Lived Religion – Henry Goldschmidt \(with Matthew Weiner\)](#)
 - Analysis of excerpts
- [Being There: What do Students Learn by Visiting Houses of Worship? – Henry Goldschmidt](#)
 - Analysis of excerpts
- [Teaching Lived Religion through Literature: Classroom Strategies for Community-Based Learning – Henry Goldschmidt](#)
 - Analysis of excerpts
- Questions to Consider – Who are your advocates? What stakeholders do you have to consider?

11:30 Pedagogical Frameworks and Curriculum Development

- Addressing Standards and Curriculum
 - Small Group Discussions (based on grade level and/or content), identifying learning objectives and standards that draw connections to Lived Religion Pedagogy
 - [New York State Education Department Standards and Curriculum Resources](#)
 - [New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core](#)
- Group Research
 - Small Groups/Individuals will research and discuss methodologies that may be appropriate to undertake religious literacy for their specific classrooms (i.e. site visits, texts, virtual field trips, etc.)
 - Examination of Scope and Sequence/Curriculum Map: Identify areas where students may engage with content through Lived Religion

12:30 Lunch

1:00 Individual Research and Curriculum Development

- Resource Library and Google Drive Folder
- Independent Time for Research and Individual Assistance
- Create One Lesson Plan and Upload to Google Drive Folder

3:30 Break

3:45 Debrief

- Small Groups Share lessons with content and level counterparts
- Large Group Debrief: Reflections, Foreshadowing and Implications for District
- Google Drive as a Communal Resource

4:15 Evaluations

***For information about the Religious Worlds of New York
summer institute for teachers, and more resources to enrich your teaching
on religious diversity, see: www.religiousworldsnyc.org.***