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Curriculum as Theology: A Framework for Analyzing Curriculum as Theological Text

Russell Miller, West Texas A&M University

The idea of curriculum as a separate entity from theology was once unimaginable. The inseparability of curriculum with the belief system of society was understood as fundamental to education, and the concept of a neutral, or nonreligious, curriculum was scarcely even contemplated. In the “Western world,” from the thirteenth century into the eighteenth century, theological understanding was considered the single justification for education (Postman, 1995). Young students were taught the tenets of the Bible, while learning basic literacy skills from the Bible as the primary curricular text. Then, as students completed their childhood education, they entered the workforce, or a select few might then enter the university. Many of the early universities were inherently created as a means of educating future ministers. For many centuries, higher education was almost exclusively developed with the intent of promoting a better understanding of the theological texts – even while students studied nontheological pursuits. Education existed as an overtly theological activity.

Even today, this remains true for some, though significantly fewer, universities in the “West.” However, in many Islamic communities, modern universities are still considered places of education for the expressed purpose of serving and celebrating the glory of God (Postman, 1995). Speaking of such religiously-based institutes of education, Neil Postman (1995), noted, “at the core of such schools, there is a transcendent, spiritual idea that gives purpose and clarity to learning” (p. 2).

Few doubt the impact of religion upon society and culture, yet in the

education of American youth, U.S. public schools have more recently sought to eliminate organized religion from the curriculum. In a desperate pursuit of neutrality and desire for both national unity and religious freedom, the United States educational system sought to secularize public education. Perhaps the most influential Supreme Court ruling addressing religion within the context of U.S. public education system remains *Engel v. Vitale* (1962). This case brought to the forefront the establishment clause in the U.S. Constitution and the interaction between the clause and public schools. Often, the court of public opinion outweighs that of the actual ruling, and in the case of the separation of church and public arena, Marsden (1997) stated, “... in the popular view and among journalists the idea of ‘separation of church and state’ is read as the ‘separation of all religion from the state’” (p. 41). Although the argument made from this case represents one that is primarily based within the political arena, it highlights the historical and ongoing struggle within America to determine the extent to which education is considered a theological endeavor. In order to fully investigate this quandary, one must view the curriculum as a theological text.

Curriculum as Theological Text

As previously noted, education was historically viewed as inseparable from religion in the western nations, especially in the United States. In fact, in 1600’s and 1700’s, religion-infused curriculum was even supported by established law. For example, the “Old Deluder Satan Law” sought to “... ensure that everyone in the Commonwealth was able to read and understand the principles of religion and capital law, thereby combatting moral evil and social unrest” (Pinar et al., 1995, p.

607). This strikingly overt desire for religion and morality as a designated purpose for schooling lies in stark contrast to the modern professed purposes of education.

Warren Nord (2010) illuminated this piece of the theological debate on curriculum in his argument against the secularization of the American public school system's current curricular focus. Nord argued that the current curriculum is far from neutral and favors "secular indoctrination" over religious literacy. Secular, in this instance refers to a lack of any religious or theological consideration that elevates non-religious aspects of life over religion. Due to the favored position of secularism in the curriculum, secularism has become the default theology of the school system. Since religious explanations for topics in school are ignored due to the fear of controversy, only the scientific and secular topics are allowed. However, this fear has created a curriculum that dismisses religion in obvious favor of atheism as advanced through secularism. Thus, as Nord illustrated, merely ignoring religion does not eliminate the idea of curriculum as a theological text; rather, it reinforces that natural tendency of man to develop theology. Postman (1995) said it best, "... people need gods as much as food" (p. 24).

However, the overt sanction of curriculum as a religious endeavor and the overt exclusion of religion from the curriculum both miss an important point in the argument as made by Pinar et al. (1995), "... curriculum understood as theological text can be regarded as involving a blend of the teacher as individual and the class as community" (p. 637). Pinar et al. looked at more than just the overt curriculum, and instead also focused on other aspects of curriculum beyond merely the written curriculum produced by a board of education.

Curriculum cannot be Neutral

Pinar et al. (1995) helped to establish the concept of curriculum as a "moral and ethical project, grounded theologically" (p. 638). His argument is founded on the human characteristics of education. Pinar et al. noticed that no curriculum, developed by humans and for humans, should, or even could, exist without considering the socio-cultural impacts of spirituality. Modern curriculum may be written in such a way as to ignore the prevalence of religion in the context of subject-specific learning, but this denies the realities of the classroom and the individual teacher, combined with the community of learners. When the teacher is viewed as an inseparable component of the curriculum, then the teacher's beliefs and culture, including religious beliefs, will make their presence known in the classroom even when the overt desire to do so is not present.

Pinar et al. are not alone in their focus on the human elements of curriculum and the impact of the teacher. Schlein and Schwartz (2012) also discussed the outsized impact of the teacher upon the classroom curriculum. As much as neutrality may be emphasized, the beliefs of the teacher herself cannot be easily ignored. The educator creates curriculum based on belief without even trying to push their own influence. Likewise, the community of learners represent their own cultural and religious identities, and are unrestrained by policies that seek to limit religion in the classroom. Instead, students are allowed to express their religious beliefs within their understanding of the material being learned.

Similarly, in his critique of commonly used language textbooks of his time, C. S. Lewis (1943) argued that the responsibility of the curriculum lies in large part within the control of the individual teacher. If the teacher functions within the

standardized machinery of the modern curriculum, meaning and importance are removed from students' education; however, if the teacher is allowed to function as curriculum, he or she is capable of exposing the universal truths and overarching beliefs of society to students. Anne Haas Dyson (2008) illustrated the influence of the teacher in her study of first graders and their writing.

Dyson (2008) studied the experiences of first grade students in the public school setting through their various teacher-directed writing assignments. However, Dyson noticed that the act of writing was not the only lesson presented by the teacher, knowingly or unknowingly, the teacher also presented the students with the literacy of the school culture and her own cultural background. Dyson noted that the students mirrored their teacher's writing, even when they had not had similar experiences themselves, and they placed value according to the teacher's value system. Dyson situated all school activities as events saturated in cultural practice and ideological meaning (p. 122).

Dyson's (2008) article reflected on curriculum and school environment both in what was overtly taught, yet also bound by what is experienced. Students experience the world as presented by their teachers, and their teachers' deeply held convictions and beliefs. Students might learn to value travel as a worthwhile experience, as was the case in Dyson's research, even if they had never left their own community. This secondary process of literacy helped to establish a hidden curriculum that markedly interacted with students' identities. This hidden curriculum is heavily influenced by the teacher and the funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992, p. 132) they carry with them. Thus, curriculum, both overt and hidden, intentional and accidental, impact the

development of student identity and curricular theology.

Student Identity

The student does not come into the school classroom as a blank slate, molded completely by, or in absence of, the educational institution. Instead, students make sense of the school culture through the lens of their own cultural and theological understanding. Freire (1983) substantiated much of his framework of literacy and identity as a responsive, actionable undertaking based on a child's connection to the wider world of time and space within the sphere of their particular reality. Freire noted that if curriculum were to have any meaning to the student, it must be constructed within the context and sociocultural understandings already present in the student's world.

A child's identity is heavily influenced by the often-unseen curriculum of the school. Henders and Thornton (2017) argued that a student learns just as much from their school experiences as they do from the formal curriculum. Hence, the hidden curriculum equals, if not surpasses, the impact on students and their identities as the overt curriculum. Although the overt curriculum often receives the majority of attention from the public and politicians, it remains only one component of the overall school experience of a child. Thus, the experience of the child is remarkably influenced by the culture and systems of the school as propagated by the deeply held beliefs and convictions of the school personnel themselves. Theology as curriculum, both overt and hidden, cannot be ignored in the identity development of students.

Morality in the Curriculum

The current theological approach to curriculum does not only deny religious literacy; thus, favoring secularism (Nord, 2010), it also denies basic human morality in the areas of critical social issues (Pinar et al., 1995). Pinar et al. (1995) make the case that as a human endeavor, education must acknowledge basic human morality. Additionally, Pinar et al. note that one must understand that modern curriculum is shaped by the exclusion of care for other humans. Although many unfortunate historical exceptions abound in practice, many religions hold a similar position in favor of caring for humanity. Shapiro et al.'s (1995) study (as cited in Pinar et al., 1995) states, "For education to become a humanly vital, ethically responsible endeavor, infused with a serious commitment to democratic values, we must understand its connection to urgent and pressing issues" (p. 633).

The argument that curriculum may be viewed as theological text remains strong, yet to deny this, as modern public education has sought to accomplish, ignores the human element involved in education. Nord's (2010) proposed solution involves religious literacy and moral education classes, and Pinar et al. (1995) advocate for, at minimum, an awareness and acknowledgment of the teacher and class community's religious identities and beliefs. In both examples, the option to ignore the theological impact of curriculum seems detrimental to all those involved in the educational system.

Neil Postman

Neil Postman (1995), in similar fashion, explored the nature of curriculum as theological text through his discussion of the "gods" of education in his spectacular examination of the American public

education system in *The End of Education*. Postman not only argued for the concept of curriculum as a theological text, he also examined what theological perspectives are inherent in the public school curriculum.

Narratives of Education

Narratives may be many things, but trivial they are not. Neil Postman (1995) made the case for the importance of an overarching narrative in public schools as a means of both maintaining the public school system and to offer meaning to the learning. As is often the case, education reform centers on the improvement of the methods and mechanics of learning, but this focus trivializes learning as merely a skill to be acquired (Postman, 1995). Postman argued that for public schools to remain relevant, they must have an end goal, or specified purpose, otherwise they will ultimately fail. If public schools fail to maintain an end goal, then privatization of schooling will overtake public schools in the U.S. Hence, Postman wrote a purposefully ambiguous title in his book *The End of Education*. This title makes the reader wonder whether public education will soon end as a viable option, or whether the book is about the end goal of education. In fact, Postman saw the two as intricately interwoven and inseparable.

Postman (1995) argued that in the past, America had a purpose for public schools, and it was well known by the public. This purpose was the embrace of the great narrative of democracy and freedom (Postman, 1995). Moreover, Postman saw America, and its version of democracy, as a grand experiment in rule by the people. More pointedly, Postman stated that public schools do not exist to serve the public; rather, they create a public. Postman argued that our current public education system serves only to create "angry, soulless masses

... [and] indifferent, confused citizens” (p. 19). Due to the non-narrative that currently exists in our schools exhibited by the lack of purpose and the lack of curriculum as a theological imperative, students have become disinterested and disenchanting (Pinar et al., 1995) with both their schooling and their nation. Postman (1995) instead argues that a shared narrative allows for an “inspired reason for schooling” (p. 19).

Narratives of the gods

Postman (1995) noted that people need gods to serve. He purposely used the lowercase “g” when referring to these gods as they are not necessarily of divine nature. Though it may indeed be true in some cases, it is not necessary for the gods of curriculum to be divine; however, their theological impact is no less diminished by their lack of divinity. Postman’s word choice reflects his belief in the power of overarching ideas. He offered his readers a few examples of failed gods that might impede the narrative for a lasting and meaningful education. These gods may be worshiped by educational institutions; however, because they lack a true theological ideology, they have failed to inspire student learning.

The first of the failed gods that Postman (1995) critiqued was the god of economic utility. He argued that this god offers a passionless existence. The theology of the god of economic utility remains strong in the political and corporate arenas (Postman, 1995), imbued with the ethics of the puritans of long ago, it prizes education for its ability to create efficient workers. Economic utility remains nearly as popular amongst politicians as it did upon its creation during the industrial revolution. Even Ivan Illich (1971) argued against the institutional nature of education as it relates to producing students capable of entering the “rat race for productive work” (p. 2). Illich

(1971) and Postman (1995) both worried that students would endure their education only as a means to an end. Learning would be considered a suffering in the present so that one may enjoy the future when learning ceases – mirroring the narrative of earthly suffering and eventual paradise exhibited in the Bible (James 1:12). Postman (1995) feared that people would worship the god of economic utility by living lives of material abundance, but with little or no meaning. Postman (1995) went so far as to say that education for the expressed purpose of economic utility “mocks one’s humanity, and at the very least, it diminishes the idea of what a good learner is” (p. 29).

Postman (1995) also railed against the information age as another failed god of education. For this god, computers and their software represent the emblems of salvation (Postman, 1995). Circuits and algorithms replace critical thinking and spiritual awareness, leading to a society capable of doing much, but not understanding life. Postman (1995) stated, “schooling can be about how to make a life, which is quite different from how to make a living” (p. 5). Of course, the almost omnipresent nature of technology in modern humans’ personal, professional, and educational environments has only grown in the two and a half decades since Postman’s critique. If Postman worried about the cult of information in 1995, how much more so would he consider the era of mobile phones, tablets, big data, and cloud computing as a danger to the narrative of meaningful education?

Multiculturalism and Diversity

Postman (1995) also took on a serious theologically embedded critique of the multiculturalism exhibited in modern schools, as opposed to cultural plurality. He

argued that in multiculturalism, as he defines it, the oppressed are inherently *good*, while the dominant culture is inherently *bad*. Thus, multiculturalism posits a moral value on race and power. Instead, Postman argues that America, and the democratic government proposed by the founders, has always been an experiment in freedom and rule by the people – all people. Although the beginning of the experiment excluded many, the experiment has since been expanded to include all peoples. Postman claimed that the penchant for Americans to argue through social and political issues is the true strength of democracy. He advised that all points of view are welcome and that they all contribute to the discussion. Therefore, Postman, too, pronounced a moral statement about diversity and pluralism as it contributes to democracy.

Postman (1995) may have some interesting and opinionated ideas on multiculturalism, but he does not lean so far as to embrace E. D. Hirsch (1987). In fact, Postman (1995) spent a considerable amount of his time criticizing Hirsch's (1987) idea that there is a finite set of American vocabulary crucial to American culture and ethics. Instead, Postman (1995) argues for diversity and plurality, which he situates as separate from multiculturalism, as capable of bringing more to the table of discussion in the grand experiment that is America. He believes that Americans do indeed need an overarching narrative, similar to the overarching narrative that theology grants to religion, for public schools and even praised Hirsch for also considering this idea. However, he explains that the common narrative must be that of the grand experiment in freedom and democracy (Postman, 1995). Therefore, Postman strays from more common religious theological texts, and positions the ideals of democracy and freedom as spiritually relevant to people and society – especially the public school

system. Even Postman notes the spiritual nature of humanity, but one could argue that Postman's theology centers on democratic ideals and rule by the people.

Language and Theology

Postman's (1995) thoughts on the intricacy of linguistic histories and the spectacular ability of language to create meaning, even to "create the world" (p. 70), offer an excellent view on the importance of literacy as more than just reading and writing skills. In fact, Postman's view of language is not so far removed from Freire's (1983) views of language as both reflecting and creating literacy. Additionally, Postman (1995) argues for the theological lens of curriculum through the use of language; he stated that language inherently contains a moral dimension. Postman held a belief in the language of the soul as expressed in linguistics, art, and creativity. He presented the expression of soulful language as a defense against tyranny (Liss, 2016). Again, Postman (1995) emphasized democratic rule by the people as a moral prerogative. He even lamented the fact that some teachers in the modern public school system seem to miss this concept entirely (Postman, 1995).

Postman (1995) further analyzed language noting that when we change our patterns of speech, we indeed, change the very meaning conveyed. He warned that our way of naming things, when changed, actually changes our moral response as well (Postman, 1995). Postman even remarked that all school subjects are actually a form of discourse; thus, all learning is language learning (Moran, 2004), and because language is so uniquely intertwined with history and culture, learning about subjects in absence of their histories is an incomplete means of teaching the subject (Postman, 1995). Postman (1995) made the case for language and literacy instruction as an

unavoidably theological endeavor. One cannot teach language without capturing the narratives of the people who utilize that language, and inherent in their narratives will be the overarching themes of religion and beliefs.

Postman and Pinar

Thus, Postman (1995) advocated for a view of curriculum that is synonymous with Pinar et al.'s theological lens of curriculum. In Postman's (1995) view, one cannot disassociate public schools and learning from morality and inspiration. To do so, would mean the end of public schools themselves. Postman emphasized the extent to which humans give meaning to their lives through the various 'gods' they create – especially in relation to the purposes of education. Postman (1995) mirrors Pinar et al.'s (1995) view of the inherent moral obligation of education. Pinar et al. advocated for the morality involved in the curriculum while Postman (1995) delivered a similar message in arguing for equality in the discussion of rule by the people. Postman believed education should be an inherently moral obligation designed to promote the grand experiment of democracy in the United States.

A Theological Case for Humanizing the Curriculum

A thorough analysis of curriculum as a theological text cannot be complete without a discussion of the spirituality of humanity as involved in curriculum. Humans are by nature spiritual beings that dwell in both the physical world and the metaphysical realm. One cannot separate the two as both exist simultaneously within the human experience. Postman (1995), and C. S. Lewis (1965) before him, made the case that education remains a critical piece of

human society as education helps to develop, or extinguish, the spiritual ambition of young people. They explained the importance of viewing curriculum as a purposeful endeavor that includes theological practice. According to Lewis (1965) and Postman (1995), curriculum development is an actionable response to human spirituality.

C.S. Lewis

The revered Christian apologist and literary scholar C. S. Lewis took it a step further in *The Abolition of Man* (1943) - a devastatingly profound rebuke on learning as disassociated with objective value. Lewis (1943) chastised the authors of a secondary language arts text that, knowingly or unknowingly, advocated for emotion without context. The text, he argued, placed emphasis on subjective emotion over objective value. This emphasis produced confusion about the appropriate expressing of emotions, and eventually this line of thinking leads to a contemptable view toward sentiment itself (Lewis, 1943). Lewis argued that the English text assumed no objective value was necessary in their curriculum. Lewis disagreed. He stated:

The very power of [the textbook authors] depends on the fact that they are dealing with a boy: a boy who thinks he is 'doing' his 'English prep' and has no notion that ethics, theology, and politics are all at stake. It is not a theory that they put into his mind, but an assumption, which ten years hence, its origins forgotten and its presence unconscious, will condition him to take one side in a controversy which he has never recognized as a controversy at all. (Lewis, 1943, p. 5)

To appreciate Lewis' (1943) line of thinking, one must understand what he means by the term objective value. Lewis explained objective value as a uniquely human quality, as opposed to instinct, based on "*Tao*" – from the Chinese word meaning "the way." Lewis defined the *Tao* as "Natural Law or Traditional Morality or the First Principles of Practical Reason ... It is the sole source of all value judgements" (Lewis, 1943, p. 18). Uncharacteristically, Lewis' argument for objective value is not within the realm of Christian apologetics, and he instead relayed the logic behind the *Tao* as a set of implicitly recognized values that span religions and cultures throughout humanity and history. Although the truths of the *Tao* may not be expressly Christian, they are indicative of a theology nonetheless. Unfortunately, the authors of the secondary text that Lewis critiqued offered no such theological perspective. Instead, the concept was an appeal to emotion, any emotion. However, looking again to earlier periods in various civilizations, one sees the ubiquitous belief of the *Tao* interlaced within societies. In the United States, this concept of intrinsic, or self-evident, truths were exemplified in the United States Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident..." (The Declaration of Independence, U.S., 1776, para. 2). Lewis established the *Tao* as the foundational truth, or in similar fashion to Postman, the overarching narrative of humankind.

Lewis (1943) warned humanity about the danger of becoming "men without chests" in their conquest over nature (p. 1). The history of mankind is the history of man's ever-increasing dominion over nature, even to the conquest of human nature, or the *Tao* itself. He warned that humanity is speeding towards inhumanity, or the abolition of that which makes us human, hence the title of his book *The Abolition of Man* (1943). Humanity, without the *Tao*, is

not really humanity at all (Lewis 1943). Lewis (1945) further illustrates this terrifying dystopian future, based on humanity's conquest of that which makes us human in his fiction *That Hideous Strength*. Lewis' (1945) phrase, "men without chests," expressed his fear of humanity losing their theological lens on life, and that loss began with the curriculum present in the public schools of his day.

Lewis (1943) made the claim that the universal truths expressed in the *Tao* resonate with humanity across diverse cultures and religions. Lewis then argued that the story of mankind is the story of man's dominion over nature – including human nature. Mankind has sought to eliminate human nature and replace this with natural law as determined only by science. His greatest fear, expressed in *The Abolition of Man* (1943), is that humans will continue to oppress each other to the point at which they are no longer human. In fact, he stated that, in the 1940's, mankind was already well on its way to sinking into the abyss of the machine mind (Lewis, 1943). Given the rise of cult-like fascism plaguing Europe at the time, one may well understand how Lewis came to such a conclusion. He feared that humanity would fall into inhumanity without ever realizing it, and this would, in turn, prevent humans from ever coming back to a place of spiritual humanity. Lewis warned that if humans oppress their spirituality to the point of extinguishing the *Tao*, the *Tao* cannot be reestablished because it will become unknown. Lewis wonders how humanity could ever relocate what they do not know they have lost. This decline into inhumanity is initiated by the absence of theology and meaning within the school curriculum. Although Lewis may move on from his critique of the high school texts, he never strays far from the impact of purposeless education upon the individual child and society at large.

A Call to Action

Postman (1995), too, lamented the siren call of technology with its mechanized nature as a replacement for human nature and spirituality. In fact, he bemoaned the ever-increasing dominance of technology upon the curriculum, calling technology a “god” currently worshiped by education. One may wonder if Lewis’ (1943) concept of “men without chests” (p. 1) is not fulfilled by the irresistible allure of technology, as cautioned by Postman (1995). However, technology cannot be spiritual in and of itself, rather it remains a construct of the physical world and performs functions according to programming, not innate spirituality. Postman worried that the god of technology serves the same purpose as the purely scientific god. These combined gods of education create a curriculum that disallows meaning-making and humanity. Postman (1995) wrote:

Nonetheless, like all gods, it is imperfect. Its story of our origins and of our end is, to say the least, unsatisfactory. To the question, How did it all begin?, science answers, Probably by an accident. To the question, How will it all end?, science answers, Probably by accident. And to many people, the accidental life is not worth living. (p. 13)

Of course, Postman cuts straight to the heart of the argument – does education prepare students for a life worth living? Therein lies the responsibility of acknowledging curriculum as a theological text.

Lewis’ (1943) critique of the school system was not merely a critique but is also a call to action. He advocated for a system of education that gives equal value to the humanities, creative arts, and spiritual

development of the child as it does the productive skills for earning a living. Lewis sought not only to acknowledge that curriculum involves theology, but to embrace the theological lens. Lewis, in similarity to Postman (1995), argued for theological curriculum as foundational to democracy. He stated, “A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery” (Lewis, 1943, p. 73.) Lewis, writing in the shadow of a global war on fascism, relayed to his readers the spectacular importance of maintaining objective value in their own lives, and for ensuring that public schools do not attempt to ignore objective value in favor of a more whimsical and baseless emotion.

Postman’s (1995) defense of the narrative nature of education and the power of stories to provide meaning in education emphasized his commitment to the theological imperative of the curriculum. Pinar et al. (1995) also situated the theological lens of curriculum as an unmistakable sociocultural activity. Pinar et al. emphasized that education was a moral and spiritual endeavor and that it paved the way for social understanding. As human beings constitute the moral objective inherent in the curriculum, the people who engage in the curriculum itself both shape and are formed by the curriculum in a manner that disputes neutrality. The idea of a neutral curriculum, or one that ignores human spirituality and morality, simply cannot exist (Pinar et al., 1995; Postman, 1995). Postman (1995) states, “Without a narrative, life has no meaning. Without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are houses of detention, not attention” (p. 11).

A Modern Example

Recently, the Texas legislator passed a bill (S.B. 763, 2023) allowing Texas public school districts to employ chaplains as a means of resisting the secular-only nature of public schools. The law states, "... a school district may employ a chaplain instead of a school counselor to perform the duties required of a school counselor ..." (S.B. 763, 2023). While the exact nature of the bill and its eventual ramifications for students may be debated, the author of the bill, Sen. Mayes Middleton, is quoted as saying the legislation was needed in order to ensure, "schools are not God-free zones" (Carter, 2023). Carter's perceived intent may align with the nature of the proposed theological lens for curriculum in spirit, if not in reality.

The argument against this bill stems from the fear that one specific religion will be favored over others, or that children who need the specific skillset of a certified school counselor will no longer have such access (Carter, 2023). However, the nature of the chaplain debate does align with the curricular debate in many ways and may be an attempt to acknowledge the spirituality of humanity and the need for schools to acknowledge that spirituality; however, the law misses the overarching narrative. Instead, the new law seeks to run spirituality in an adjacent manner to the secular curriculum.

As with most legislative items in the modern era, there are many who support and many who oppose this newly enacted law. Many of those opposed argue that the idea of separation of church and state is diminished by the law as there is no specific wording to prevent chaplains from evangelizing students (Dowden, 2023). This idea may be debated for some time, and will likely find formal debate through the court system if one of the many purposed lawsuits

receives traction. Unlike some perceptions of the new Texas law; however, the theological framework proposed in this paper does not advocate specifically for any one religious viewpoint on which to create the overarching narrative. Rather, this framework seeks to question whether education prepares students for a life worth living.

The Framework in Practice

Drawing on the ideas represented through this framework, educators may utilize the lens of theology to reflect upon their approach to the curriculum. An extensive examination of what it means to be human may lie outside the scope of this article; however, the universal truth of human spirituality should not escape the creation and delivery of curriculum. It must be noted that this framework – viewing curriculum as theology, does not posit theology against the scientific method, nor the myriad of theories established through the use of the scientific method to better understand the world, humans, and social interaction. Further, this framework does not deny the benefits of modern technology, nor does it position technology as evil. Postman (1995) warned against the inhumane nature of technology, but neither did he go so far as to call for a moratorium on technological advancement. Instead, this framework calls for the acknowledgement of the very nature of humanity to create narratives, explore meaning, and to interact socially as well as spiritually.

Therefore, the framework may help educators examine their own interaction between the *Tao*, and their curriculum and instruction. It encourages educators to explore opportunities for increasing the human element within the often-mechanized systems of public school and even private schools. The framework may help educators

to defend against the sterile, inhumane nature of high-stakes assessments, monetized skill sets, and secular instruction. Although the idea of secular instruction began as a means of inclusivity and religious tolerance, it has grown, changed, and devolved the atmosphere of learning – reducing the culture of education to labor-related skills rather than a quest for understanding and a yearning for knowledge. To exclude the *Tao* from the educational experience lessens both the educational experience, and the overall meaning of the human experience. In practice, this framework may be implemented when an educator asks themselves the following questions as they develop their curriculum: Do the objectives relate back to the human experience? How does my curriculum support the spirituality of my students? Does the lesson favor secularism over religion (not a specific religion, unless teaching in a school designed to support one particular religious view)?

Thus, this framework encourages educators to reflect upon the spiritual element that exists within themselves and within their students. It exists as a means of drawing out the narratives of the individual while also drawing on the great narratives of humanity throughout the past and present. Further, the framework allows for educators to investigate the correlation between theology and curriculum - including culture, religion, ethics, and morality. The framework establishes curriculum as intrinsically theological in nature due to the inseparable interaction between learning and spiritual development.

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