

RELIGIOUS LITERACY: A WAY FORWARD FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION?

The meanings of
'religious literacy'



Our key metaphor:
Literacy as navigation

Historical observations:
Emergence of "literacy" in the C.18 *Literati*

Literacy is a *complex* concept which overlaps with a cluster of others, including 'literature', illiteracy, non-literary, non-literate. 'Literacy' is also a *ubiquitous* concept.

What is literacy?

The sociology of literacy:
Original emphasis: the 'Consequences of literacy' (highly positive).

New Literacy Studies:
Rather than an autonomous set of skills, literacy is better regarded as something more akin to a social practice. Multiple literacies.

Historical observations:
Emergence of "literacy" in the C.18 as a 'person of letters' *Literati* ... and ... then an emergence of 'illiteracy' as a 'problem' (... but ... what is the problem? for whom is it a problem?)

The politics of literacy:
Initiation of children into a specified literacy.
The relationship between 'compulsory' school and the rise of literacy: issues of power and control

Cultural literacy and core knowledge:
For Hirsch, there is no specialised phenomenon of religious literacy, rather the general phenomenon of cultural literacy includes religious content and thus the inclusion of some of this content on the school curriculum is justified.

Powerful knowledge:
Literacy in the curriculum is developed (Young) in response to young people's entitlement to an appropriate foundation in powerful knowledge.

Rosa Parks example



Literacy and education

what kind of educational 'project' is entailed in the idea of literacy and, more specifically, in the ambition to make students literate or help them to become literate? The metaphor we wish to use here is that of 'navigation' to highlight that being literate means that one is able find one's way around in a particular domain or terrain. This is visible in the many domain-specific notions of literacy that have emerged in the educational discourse, including that of religious literacy itself. It is also assumed in the idea of literacy itself, which refers to the ability to navigate the domain of (written) language or of (a) discourse more generally.

Power Socialisation Raising awareness:
a difference between 'how' to navigate and 'whether or not it is desirable' to navigate such a domain

The relationships between RE and religious literacy

A way forward for RE? ... the answer depends how 'religion' is framed

How is religion conceptualized?

The tendency has been to characterise 'religion' and being 'religious' as an object of study. For a long time it has been classified primarily as something private and separate to the public sphere of life. However, in the post-secular context there has been a reframing of religion and this could allow for the focus to be shifted away from the object of religion and onto the subject of education (the child).

How might an(y) educator answer the question of what does it mean to live life religiously?

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All welcome
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