



Religious Education for Developing Religious Competency in Dealing with Pluralism

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Challenges for Latvia

- Latvia are involved is designing a New National Curriculum based on
 - the Competency Based approach
- **How can Religious Education be integrated in the new National Curriculum?**
 - **What is the best approach of integrating Religious Education into the new curriculum in order to develop religious competency/literacy?**

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT



- The main religious denominations in Latvia are Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Russian Orthodox, Baptists, Old Believers and some smaller denominations.
- **Latvia is a predominantly Christian country.**
- During the Soviet rule the Church **was isolated from the secular world.**
- The whole generation grew up without any religious affiliation.
- Religious experience was developed in families as taught by the older generation.
- Since 1991, when Latvia has regained its independence, one could evidence a revival of a religious life; people tried to regain their lost Christian values.

The least religious countries in the world

- A study called “***The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050***” (Pew Research Centre’):
- Latvia is one of *the least religious countries in the world*. The authority is shifting from external structures to the inner life of an individual.

Religious landscape today



- Decline of traditional authority;
- The authority is shifting from external structures to the inner life of an individual,
- Interest in alternative religious practice and leave traditional Christian forms of religion behind
- *Religiously diverse* rather than secular

Religious landscape today

- We need to accept the new situation in which we find people who are
- **the products of a secular society** and who have not been related to Christianity by their socialization.

Religious landscape in Latvia

- In Latvia **two thirds** of population believe in God (Eurobarometer, 2017);
- 26% believe in some kind of higher power that directs one's life,
- 20% of those surveyed denied believing in God or any other higher power.
- Contemporary youth are freed from any institutionalized forms of structured religions.
- With the fall of great grand narratives, they pay more attention to **narratives connected to their everyday life and experiences.**
- They get attracted more to **various offerings from the spiritual marketplace** that **do not require much of commitment.**

RE in Schools

- Most of the schools choose **Ethics** as a subject in the elementary school;
- Few schools choose **Christian Ethics** or **Christian faith** if 10 parents sign up.
 - Teaching **Ethics in grades 4-9**
- On the secondary school level religious issues and value education should be integrated in all subject areas.
- **VALUE based education**: teaching such values as responsibility, diligence, courage, honesty, wisdom, kindness, compassion, modesty, self-control, solidarity, justice, tolerance as integrated in all subject areas.

Spiritual orientation of youth:

Their search for a spirituality most often is **not related** to traditional denomination;

- each person creates and develops **his/her meaning structures** and is involved in his/her spiritual growth;
- this is not enough to believe to what one has told to believe; they need to feel and to discover a sense and a meaning for themselves.

They want to embrace a **spirituality in a more personal and experiential way;**



Religious affiliation of youth

- “**Believing without belonging**” with an existence of **hybrid religious identities** that allows flexible forms and expression of religiousness;

Youth do not define their spirituality and religiosity in terms of traditional religious denominations, but view it in a **much broader perspective**.

- Today we can talk about a ‘**trans-locational positionality**’ (Anthias, 2002) where individual see oneself at an interplay of a range of locations.

Demand of Developing an Open and Relational Christian Worldview

- Abraham (12:1), who received God's command to leave his country and to go to the unknown land by facing new challenges, new language, culture and ways of living and obtaining new friendships.
- This is a challenge to leave one's comfort zone and customary ways of seeing the world and doing things, thus discovering new things about oneself and the different Other.
- This symbolizes the challenge of the pilgrimage of a person from one's own spiritual tradition to understand the values in common with the people presenting different religious traditions, while examining one's biases, stereotypes and generalizations.

Potential of a Worldview Education for Latvia

- RE needs to encourage pupils to explore and deepen their personal identities and
 - to **question anything what becomes a boundary setting experience.**
- Five big questions what the students need to acquire:*
- (Who I am?), Ultimate meaning (What is important? What is worth caring?), Vocation (What I am called to do?) and Service (What can I do for others?).

Religious identity in a process of evolving

- Seeing one's religious identity as constantly evolving and as a subject to change;
- It is in a constant **process of continuous negotiation of boundaries** (Brock, 1998) until one becomes
 - a “subject of oneself” (Harrison, 1999).

Methodology and participants:

- Participants: university students enrolled in the program “Education,” particularly, “Primary school teacher,” “Kindergarten teacher” and “The Teacher of sport” (n=64).
- Methodology: Focus groups interviews on the possibility and the impossibility “to live together.”

Research findings:

- **Source of knowledge about religious issues :**
 - 1) family 2) encounter with others, 3) media;
- **Students: The desired content of religious education :**
 - about different religions, rituals, religious movements, widening one's perspectives and understanding about the religions of others.
- **Teachers: The desired content of religious education:**

Research findings: Religious competency to ‘living together” in a pluralistic society

- **Contributing factors:**

- Encounter with people of different cultures and religious traditions;
- Experience trips, student exchange programs that provided direct encounter with the stranger;
- High tolerance to religious pluralism due to their general indifference to religion; “*Why should anyone bother about other’s religion?*” They see religion as too marginal and too secondary to cause troubles and conflicts in general.
- In overall, students want representatives of different religions to live together in peace, and consider this as a possible option. There is longing for harmony and tolerance towards others.

Research findings: Religious competency «**to live together**» in a pluralistic society

- Discouraging factors:
- limited contacts with people of different religions, then their tolerance stays unchallenged;
- bad experiences of intercultural partnerships and related problems;
- negative arguments in regards muslims **with whom they did not have any direct encounters** but instead, stereotypes gained from media in relation to terrorist attacks;
- negative sentiments in regards to religious sects:
 - **“I do not like them (Sects) to impose what I should believe. I will choose myself to whom and what shall I believe.”**

Conclusions

Schools needs to provide a safe space for thinking and for discussing life's existential questions, **questions about the meaning of life, the questions that are manifold and require time, reflection and deep and critical thinking.**

- Increasing diversity in the world requires talking about a variety of worldviews, both, religious and non-religious.
- The worldview education allows **discussion about religious and secular identities, and includes people with no religious affiliation at all.**
- **Life questions** need to be inclusive and needs to provide space for integrating new epistemologies into existing beliefs.

Concluding remarks

- The exclusion of religions, the idiosyncratic bias of teachers and students, and the failure to account for intra-religious diversity can contribute to the misrepresentation of what counts as a valid religion.
- **RE** should offer **opportunities of the dialogue** among different ethnic and cultural groups, religious and secular discourses. Encounter with pupils from diverse religious backgrounds and listening to their experiences allows to deconstruct the practices of exclusion and othering.

Thank You!

