

Worldview Literacy as Intercultural Citizenship Education: A framework for critical, reflexive engagement in plural democracy.

Abstract

Within plural democracies, the concept of ‘religious literacy’ is commonly understood as denoting the knowledge, skills and understanding *vis-à-vis* religious diversity required of the citizen. In schools across Europe such learning is traditionally housed within Religious Education (RE), the aims of which are increasingly framed in terms of citizenship education, yet the two school subjects are often unhelpfully siloed, and both criticised for lack of criticality and an over-focus on knowledge acquisition. This article introduces the concept of ‘worldview literacy’ as a reworking of ‘religious literacy’ that addresses concerns around inclusivity and criticality. Rather than a product of good RE or citizenship education, worldview literacy is envisaged as a transformational process of educational praxis through encounter in plurality, that forges a pathway between the two school subjects and contributes to the broader educational endeavour of engagement in social life.

Key Words: worldview literacy, religious literacy, hermeneutics, active citizenship, praxis, plurality

Introduction

The importance of understanding about religion/worldviews to engagement in plural democracies is more apparent now than ever (Nussbaum, 2012). Over the last few decades religion has ‘reappeared’ in the public sphere, often in violent ways and the role of religion in public life is a matter of continued debate (Dinham, 2020; Mendieta and VanAntwerpen eds, 2011). With increased migration and human mobility, the religious landscape of Western and Northern Europe has changed dramatically reflecting both a decline in institutionalised Christianity and increased religious diversity (Davie, 2015a; Woodhead, 2012a&b; Woodhead and Catto, 2012). At the same time public debate around religion is often ill-mannered and ill-informed (Davie, 2015b, Dinham, 2017), reflecting a wider lack of religious literacy (Dinham and Francis, 2016). It has been noted that in this context, religious symbols and acts may be more visible and considered more emotionally challenging signs of a changing reality than other markers of difference (Johannessen and Skeie, 2019). This is reflected in increased hostility, marginalisation and prejudice experienced by religious minorities (Nussbaum, 2012; UK Home Office, 2021). It is well recognised that as part of the increased diversification and interaction that comes with globalisation, identities become more complex, hybrid and fluid (Appiah, 2006; Modood, 1998), with religion or worldview often an important component therein (Osler & Starkey, 2003; Moulin-Stozek and Schirr 2017).

Based on John Dewey’s pragmatic conception of education as participation in social life (Dewey, 1909), understanding of religion/worldviews in society and in the lives of its members is then an important aspect of the educational endeavour. The concept of religious literacy is often used to denote such understanding and has found popularity in relation to both Religious Education (RE) and education for citizenship. Within related discourses, religious literacy is increasingly seen as an important prerequisite for positive engagement in plural democracies (XX, 2017; Jackson, 2014; Moore, 2007; O’Grady, 2019). Alongside other literacies such as political, cultural and financial, having an understanding of religion, and the skills to engage positively with religious diversity, is considered an important part of education for the 21st century (COE, 2008; Eurydice, 2017; UNESCO, 2015). Yet the term and the concept of

‘religious literacy’ are often understood in reductive terms as the acquisition of substantive knowledge of the majority religions, alongside the development of certain skills and attitudes *vis-à-vis* religious diversity. This conception is challenged along the lines of content by those who stress the diversity and fluidity of religions and non-religious worldviews (XX, 2017; Hannam et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2021) and by those who stress the importance of the critical dimension. The latter highlight the need for an understanding of the socio-political dimension of religion, the role (good and bad) that religion plays in history and contemporary society (Davie, 2015b; Moore, 2007). Others stress the power dimension and the need for critical deconstruction of the very notion of ‘religion’ and its representation in society, including in education (Goldburg, 2010; XX, 2018, 2020).

These critiques can be broadly characterised by a commitment to inclusivity, reflexivity and transformative pedagogy, and reflect a set of wider educational concerns; how to create an acceptance and appreciation of difference in the context of rising popularism and xenophobia, the need to challenge the historic Westernisation of knowledge, and the dominance of content-based, transmissive approaches to education within a system governed by performativity. These concerns are played out in varying degrees across national and supranational education policy and practice, and of course, depending upon where you look. Relevant to all school subjects and to education as a whole, I argue that these concerns have a particular significance for RE and for citizenship education as educative spaces with potential to address the challenges they pose. To use the broad descriptors ‘RE’ and ‘Citizenship’ does not of course give recognition to the range of approaches and perspectives that inform practice within each. Both have been subject to criticism for being exclusivist, reductionist and lacking in criticality and both are subject to the influence of broader knowledge focused, transmissive approaches that dominate teaching and learning in education systems across Europe. However, progressive, critical approaches¹ within both areas share a commitment to a more inclusive, reflexive and transformative education. In addition, whilst in England both subjects must be provided by law, each faces marginalisation within the current curriculum (Castelli and Chater, 2018; Chater, 2020; Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, 2018) and are excluded from the suite of examined subjects that contribute to performance measures². Sitting outside the performativity agenda in this sense may strengthen their potential as educative spaces in which to develop more human-centred, transformational approaches.

It is in this space that worldview literacy has much to contribute. Beyond ‘religious literacy’, understood as knowledge and skills or competencies for engagement with religious diversity, I argue that ‘worldview literacy’ should be understood as a transformative process of critical engagement *in* plurality. Rather than an outcome of education, worldview literacy can be understood as a process of dialogical encounter with difference, an educational praxis that brings the pupil to a greater understanding of the diversity and dynamism of worldviews and of themselves as social actors therein. Understood in this way, worldview literacy forges a pathway between the aims of Religious Education and citizenship education as an enactment of democracy (Biesta, 2011) that develops pupils’ critical awareness and understanding of difference and skills in intercultural competency. The concept of worldview literacy, so

¹ Whilst ‘critical citizenship education’ is a recognised field, the term ‘critical’ is not used in a homogenous way and its meaning ranges from the development of critical thinking skills to transformative action rooted in critical pedagogy (see Johnson and Morris, 2010).

² English Baccalaureate (EBacc).

understood, draws on ‘progressive’³ approaches within RE and citizenship education to make an important contribution to the broader aim of education as the space in which young people become actors in plurality (Hannam, 2019) and practice democracy (Biesta, 2010).

Religious Literacy: Normative – functional – critical.

The concept of ‘religious literacy’ has become a firm part of discussions around RE (APPG, 2016; Biesta et. al, 2019; XX, 2017, 2019) and more generally in relation to a range of professions and settings (Dinham & Francis, 2015; Dinham, 2017; Walker et al., 2021). Analysis of the history and usage of the concept ‘religious literacy’ is explored elsewhere (Biesta et al., 2019; Dinham, 2020; XX, 2019, 2020) and need not be rehearsed at length here. It is important however to the argument presented that religious literacy has often been understood in reductive terms as knowledge about the ‘main’ religious traditions and the skills to be able to engage with them, reflecting a functional and normative interpretation.

Understandings outside RE reflect concern around a broad social phenomenon of religious illiteracy. For example, Prothero (2007) draws on Hirsch’s (1987) ideas on cultural literacy, arguing that Americans have lost their understanding about religion and proposes a set of normative ‘building blocks’ of religious traditions that the religiously literate person should know in order to “participate fully in social, political and economic life in a nation and a world in which religion counts” (Prothero, 2007:15). Taking a cultural studies approach, Moore (2007) expands the focus to include understanding the social and historical manifestations of religions and defines religious literacy as, “the ability to discern and analyse the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses” (Moore, 2007:56). Here religion is viewed alongside other markers of difference such as ethnicity, gender and class as a concept central to an understanding of society and its history, and religious literacy as central to the peaceful functioning of a plural democracy.

Within RE, aside from Wright’s understanding which concerns skills of theological and philosophical reflection in coming to understand the nature of reality (Wright, 1993), the concept of ‘religious literacy’ is generally employed to denote a functional literacy – a level of knowledge and understanding about the diverse religion and worldview landscape and the skills to be able to engage with that diversity in a positive way. It is with such an understanding that the English Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) called in 2010 for a stronger focus in RE on deepening pupils’ understanding of the nature, diversity and impact of religion and belief in the contemporary world (Ofsted, 2010:7). Part of this concerns pupils’ response to religion(s) and implies a positive disposition toward difference. For example, the Religious Education Council for England and Wales’s 2013 review of RE promotes religious literacy that enables pupils to “respond to religions and worldviews in an informed, rational and insightful way” (REC, 2013:10). Likewise in the report presented by the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on religious literacy, (APPG, 2016), the concept includes knowledge about the ‘main’ traditions and the changing religious landscape and how they might be interpreted in the lives of individuals, alongside the ability to respond with critical awareness to questions raised by

³ Transformative approaches are not progressive in the sense that they are new to either RE or citizenship education. The term is used here in a broad sense to indicate approaches that challenge transmissive models of education.

religion and the ability to engage with religious groups in a way which promotes respect and plurality (APPG, 2016).

A more comprehensive understanding is reflected in Dinham's (2017) framework which suggests religious literacy should involve four phases; *category*, *disposition*, *knowledge* and *skills*. Intentionally broad, Dinham's framework is applicable to a wide range of professional and practice settings including schools (Dinham and Jones, 2012; Davie and Dinham, 2016) with the acknowledgment that the knowledge and skills required to be 'religiously literate' are context specific and will vary from one setting to another (Dinham and Francis, 2016). Alongside knowledge and skills, Dinham's framework draws on a sociological perspective and incorporates a critical dimension through a focus on *category*, which implies thinking critically about the concept of religion in relation to the secular. It suggests too a reflexive element through *disposition* which involves the questioning of one's assumptions about or prejudices towards religion, non-religion or another's worldview.

Critical literacy has its roots in the work of Paulo Freire (1970), which promotes the challenging of received ideas in a dialectic and transformative process. Goldberg draws on a Freirean approach to advocate an expanded idea of religious literacy to include the functional, cultural and critical dimensions. This involves the questioning of received knowledge about religion; "What knowledge is revered? Whose histories are legitimated? Whose voices are silenced? What religions are marginalised or excluded within dominant discourses?" (Goldberg, 2010:353). Critical religious literacy requires that "students are encouraged and enabled to identify, examine and critique problematic, contradictory and multiple ways of seeing the world" (Goldberg, 2010:352). The student is brought into a dialectic relationship with the subject matter, emphasising student agency. Here the idea of "self-critical scholarship" (Goldberg, 2010:352) is important in emphasising the reflexive element of critical literacy, which is central to the transformational pedagogy underpinning a Freirean approach.

Religious literacy is an evolving concept, yet, as I have argued elsewhere (xx, 2019, 2020), remains insufficiently theorised in relation to the classroom context. In my theorisation of 'worldview literacy', I draw upon ideas of critical religious literacy to suggest a framework for a pedagogical model that; a) makes explicit the extension of 'religion' to 'worldview' to better categorise lived reality and diversity, b) explicitly focuses on the construction and deconstruction of knowledge, c) foregrounds the reflexive element in understanding and d) moves from a linear to a circular model of praxis (see xx, 2020).

In this expanded theorisation the critical and reflexive dimensions are what takes worldview literacy beyond a functional literacy and gives it truly educational potential. Rather than objective knowledge about religion(s), along with a set of skills and attitudes that can be learnt, 'worldview literacy' can be understood as a process of educational praxis in which understanding, application and interpretation are interwoven and interdependent dimensions of an *I-Thou* dialogue (Gadamer, 1975).

This conceptualisation differs from most conceptualisations of religious literacy in its explicit focus on *interpretation*, *categorisation*, *reflexivity*, and *transformation through encounter*. These components build on 'critical-progressive' approaches within RE & citizenship education to form a framework for learning about worldviews that contributes to the aims of both school subjects and to the broader educational aim of participation in social life (Dewey, 1909). Having provided a background to the idea of worldview literacy and its roots in critical literacy, the following section explores these dimensions and their contribution to this endeavour.

Interpretability

In a notable shift from ‘religious literacy’, the use of the term ‘worldview’ widens the scope to explicitly include religious and non-religious ways of understanding the world and one’s place within it. Although debates around terminology can often be an unhelpful distraction from broader issues around the aims and purposes of education, this change in terminology is important, both in that it broadens the scope beyond religions and challenges that categorisation, and because it reflects the direction of Religious Education in England and other European countries that are embracing a ‘worldviews approach’ (CoRE, 2018; Cooling et al, 2020).

The term ‘worldview’ is employed in a number of ways across academic disciplines (Benoit et al., 2020) and is gaining popularity within RE, although it remains contested both within and across national contexts (Braten and Everington, 2019). In England the recent national Commission on RE proposed ‘Religion and Worldviews’ as the way forward for the subject (CoRE, 2018). Here the term is inclusive of religious and non-religious, ‘institutional’ and ‘personal’ worldviews, alongside the recognition that worldviews are interpreted in different ways. This ‘paradigm shift’ in RE is both a recognition of the changing religion and belief landscape (XX, 2020) and a response to long standing critique of the world religions paradigm that has dominated the school subject. A key criticism of the latter rests on the representation of worldviews as static blocks of belief and practice (Barnes, 2012; XX, 2017; Jackson, 2004) that ignores the diversity within worldviews and the dynamism of worldviews as both traditions and identity.

Worldview literacy, in keeping with the ‘worldviews approach’, as articulated by its proponents (see Cooling et al, 2020), assumes an understanding of worldviews as diverse, dynamic and interpretable. As evidenced in sociological research, worldviews are internally contested and fuzzy-edged and the boundaries between religion/non-religion, public/private often blurred (Lee, 2015; Woodhead, 2012b). This draws on approaches within RE that focus on the centrality of interpretation, key among which is the work of Robert Jackson and his ‘interpretive approach’ developed in the 1980s and 90s at the University of Warwick (Jackson, 1997). Based on ethnographic research into transmission of religious culture, this approach reflects the dynamic nature of the changing landscape and an understanding of culture as ‘demotic discourse’ (Bauman, 1999). Rather than static entities, worldviews can then be understood as ‘traditions in transition’ (Meijer, 2006) being constantly modified through processes of interpretation in which individuals reshape culture through their “personal syntheses which might draw from a wide range of cultural resources, including their own ancestral traditions” (Jackson, 2009:1). This draws on Gadamer and Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of historical consciousness to understand how “traditions are developing and evolving historically – in and through the historical interpretations and actions of human beings over time, and of how the vitality of traditions depends on such constant reinterpretation” (Meijer, 2006:12). Within such an understanding, personal identity is also seen as a process of interpretation, which actively draws on and negotiates aspects of tradition; “Like any interpretation, [this] personal identity is not unchanging and universally valid. It is, like any interpretation, tentative and open to deliberation” (Meijer, 2006:8). In this sense, tradition and identity are interwoven through a continual process of interpretation. People “live in and from and through tradition” (Meijer, 2006:13).

Understanding that worldviews are interpretable is essential to comprehending the complexity of identity in global democracies and is characteristic of the worldviews dimension of intercultural education (Jackson, 2019). Whilst appreciation of difference, and religion and belief identity as part of this, is a key part of citizenship education in most European democracies (Eurydice, 2017) the cultural dimension of citizenship is often sidelined within a ‘soft’ (Andreotti, 2006) or ‘minimal’ conception of citizenship (McLaughlin, 1992). Within the English Citizenship curriculum for example, ‘religion and belief’ feature as an aspect of diversity which pupils are expected to understand, yet the complexities of identity and belonging in plurality are left unexplored amidst a focus on knowledge of national civic processes and the promotion of ‘British Values’⁴ (DfE, 2014). This can be seen as the result of the struggle faced by schools to promote acceptance of diversity alongside national unity (Banks, 2009; Osler and Starkey, 2006; Starkey, 2018), yet a ‘global turn’ in curricula, encouraged at the supranational level (COE 2017; OECD, 2016; UNESCO, 2015) promotes education for global citizenship which requires pupils to “think critically, transcend local loyalties, and sympathetically imagine the situation of others” (Bamber et al., 2018). Worldview literacy contributes to this endeavour and to understandings of ‘global’ or ‘cosmopolitan’⁵ citizenship which emphasise the liquidity, historicity and evolution of difference (Bamber et al., 2018). Religion is increasingly an important identity marker, particularly for minority groups and is often the marker of difference and hostility (Johannessen and Skeie, 2019; Kessler and Hargreaves, 2020). Understanding worldview identity as dynamic and socially contingent challenges zero-sum conceptions of identity (Kymlicka, 2004) that underpin nationalist or assimilationist notions of citizenship. Rather than seeing allegiance to a religious group as a threat to national identity, one’s worldview is understood as one aspect of a complex and dynamic set of loyalties and allegiances that make up peoples’ sense of belonging. It can therefore contribute to ideas of cosmopolitan citizenship and the “recognition that British identity, for example, may be experienced differently by different people” (Osler, 2011:3).

Categorisation

A key critique of both traditional approaches within RE and ‘soft’ approaches to citizenship education is the failure to engage in issues of power and its relationship to representation of the ‘other’ (see Andreotti, 2006; Gearon, 2002). Scholars of critical citizenship education emphasise the need to address the normalising of Western ‘ways of knowing’ as global, without laying bare the colonial history, power inequality that sustains Western dominance (see for example Andreotti, 2006; Dobson, 2006). The focus on interpretability that is central to worldview literacy challenges stereotypes which are often based on the representation of religion/worldviews in broader society, notably the media, and perpetuated by misrepresentation in curricula. Despite anti-essentialism being long established within identity studies (Modood, 1998), many issues persist in curricula, particularly in relation to religion. Many scholars have noted the essentialist and reductionist ways in which religion and particularly minority religions are represented within RE (Revell, 2012; XX, 2018, Smith et al., 2018; Throbani, 2017). Critique focuses on the Western, secular framing of the ‘world

⁴ The duty on English schools to promote Fundamental British Values is not part of the Citizenship curriculum but a whole school duty as part of a broad education for citizenship.

⁵ Whilst the terms ‘global’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ citizenship are often used interchangeably, there are distinct features of both in relation to citizenship as identity and belonging, political and legal status (See Osler and Starkey, 2005)

religions' paradigm, that has dominated school RE and that in practice often ignores non-religious worldviews and minority religions (Throboni, 2017). Revell for example argues that a focus on 'the big 6' religions perpetuates the 'otherness' of minority religions that do not fit a framework based on themes drawn from the study of Christianity such as 'founding fathers' or 'holy books' (Revell, 2012). Such a framework sits uncomfortably with the reality of the changing landscape; the rise of spirituality (see Woodhead 2012a, 2012b), the changing relationship between the formal and the informal (Davie 1994) and the complexity and bricolage (Hervieu-Léger 2000) of personal faith that make up the 'lived-ness' of worldviews.

These analyses draw on established scholarship within religious studies which question the category 'religion' (Asad, 1993; Smith, 1982) and its Western, colonial origins (Fitzgerald, 2007; Flood, 1999; Nongbri, 2013; Nye, 2017). Developments within RE place increased emphasis on the study of religion as a conceptual category (XX, 2015; Earl, 2015), now a key part of the proposed National Entitlement in England (CoRE, 2018). These developments reflect the need identified by Freathy and John (2019) for approaches to learning about religion and worldviews that highlight epistemological concerns and Goldberg's suggestion that a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' is applied to textbooks depicting the world religions (Goldberg, 2010). They mirror concerns within critical citizenship education around challenging cultural assumptions in knowledge production (Banks, 2009) and the exploration of knowledge as power as part of decolonisation of the curriculum (Andreotti, 2006).

With a focus on 'categorisation', the development of worldview literacy necessarily involves challenging 'knowledge' about religions through an exploration of knowledge construction and the power relationships embedded in representations of religion and worldviews. This goes beyond exploring worldviews in their complexity and fluidity, although this is important, to an explicit deconstruction of traditional representations. As suggested by Nye, (2019) this entails working "from the present backwards — through looking at the postcolonial present and how that has been created by the forces of the past". As such, it can be part of much needed strategies to support the maintenance of anti-essentialist categorisations of religion in the classroom setting (Skeie, 2015) through the deconstruction of Western, colonial framings of knowledge and the development of critical consciousness.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a central component of intercultural (Jackson, 2019) and critical global citizenship education (Johnson and Morris, 2010) that is gaining increasing focus within RE across Europe (Franken, 2021; O'Grady, 2019; Ubani et al., 2020). As the 'worldviews approach' is gaining momentum in the English context, and its implications for classrooms explored, it is associated with hermeneutic approaches in which understanding is the result of a dialogic, reflexive process. This reflects a longstanding focus amongst some scholars, notably David Aldridge (2011, 2015) on hermeneutic understanding in RE and builds on Jackson's interpretivist approach which is rooted in reflexive encounter (Jackson, 1997) and has been influential at the European level as a basis of the religion/worldviews dimension of intercultural education promoted by the Council of Europe (COE, 2008). Jackson's *Signposts* (Jackson, 2014) and related research emphasise the value of interreligious dialogue and dialogical approaches for exploring difference as a key contribution to citizenship and human rights education (Council of Europe, 2016; Jackson, 2016; O'Grady, 2019; Weisse, 2019).

As O'Grady explains "the meaning of a dialogue with difference, distinct from simply learning about difference is that the pupils are enabled to reflect on their own beliefs and values in relation to their studies, as part of their identity development" (O'Grady, 2019:120). Dialogue

between the pupil and the subject matter necessarily involves the pupils' exploration of their own worldview (Cooling et al., 2020). This reflects Gadamer's argument that when encountering religion and worldviews as 'other', students can understand best when this 'other' is explored in relation to their own 'fore-meanings' (Gadamer, 1975). As Gadamer explains this sensitivity to alterity "involves neither 'neutrality' with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices" (Gadamer, 1975:271). Within the idea of worldview literacy, the epistemic awareness nurtured through a focus on categorisation is mirrored at the personal level through the challenging of pupils' own 'knowledge' about worldviews. As research from the ReDi⁶ project has shown, challenging students' stereotypes about religions and worldviews through personal encounter contributes to the development of "deeper and more nuanced subject knowledge" (Vikdahl and Skeie, 2019:126) and contributes to a critical consciousness in relation to religion/worldviews (Gearon, 2002).

Such critical literacy is central to critical citizenship education (Johnson & Morris, 2010), combining critical thinking and autobiography (Giroux, 2003) and reflection upon one's own positionality and cultural context (Andreotti, 2006). As Andreotti highlights, this critical literacy is "not about 'unveiling' the 'truth' for the learners, but about providing the space for them to reflect on their context and their own and others' epistemological and ontological assumptions: how we came to think/be/feel/act the way we do and the implications of our systems of belief in local/global terms" (Andreotti, 2006:49). This metacognition is an essential part of 'self-critical scholarship' (Goldburg, 2010) that develops critical awareness and open-mindedness and is central to the practice of worldview literacy in the classroom context.

Transformative encounter

Dialogical approaches are distinguished from traditional transmissive approaches by the focus on transformative encounter with the subject matter. Rather than the acquisition of knowledge, dialogical encounter emphasises the connection between subject (or substantive) knowledge and relational knowledge (learning about each other) and the dialectical nature of understanding (O'Grady, 2019).

Understood in this way, worldview literacy is about more than the simple acquisition of knowledge or socialisation into a set of desired attributes or dispositions. With a focus on encounter, learning about worldviews and developing the skills to engage in worldview diversity are inseparable from interpretation of others' and one's own worldview. Worldview literacy can then be understood as engagement with difference and different ways of understanding the world through which one's own self is put into question and ultimately transformed. This transformative element echoes Jackson's concept of 'edification' (Jackson 1997) to point out the potential for gaining a new perspective on one's own religious tradition or worldview through learning about other belief systems and may involve what Biesta calls 'transcendental violence', an experience of disintegration and reconstruction (Biesta 2006:26).

Understood in this way, the practice of worldview literacy goes beyond critical thinking, which is mostly understood as related to the realm of thought (Johnson and Morris, 2010), to include critical self-reflection (metacognition) and critical action (Barnett, 1997). As such it is aligned with critical pedagogy within RE such as Baumfield's (2003) 'community of enquiry approach'

⁶ Religion and Dialogue in Modern Societies: <https://www.awr.uni-hamburg.de/website-content/pdfs-flyer/redi-flyer-englisch.pdf>

and transformational approaches to critical citizenship. Transformational approaches are recognised as making an important contribution to global citizenship education (UNESCO, 2015), yet as argued by Bamber et al. (2018) there is little evidence of what this looks like in practice or the theoretical ideas that underpin it. Bamber et al. (2018) assert that “transformative education involves an ontological process that elevates the importance of existential change for the learner, as regards both their way of being in the world and ways of knowing that world” (Bamber 2016, cited in Bamber et al., 2018:217). They draw on Palmer (1980) and Barnett (2011) to foreground education as ‘being’ rather than simply knowledge acquisition, quoting Palmer’s assertion that “we don’t think our way into a new kind of living; rather we live our way into a new kind of thinking” (Palmer 1980, cited in Bamber et al., 2018:218).

The reflexive, dialogical encounter inherent in the development of worldview literacy can be best understood as a process of educational *praxis* in which the three elements of hermeneutics; *understanding*, *interpretation* and *application* (Bernstein, 1983), operate in a continual spiral (XX, 2019). This highlights Gadamer’s assertion that these are not three separate elements, but that “they are internally related; every act of understanding involves interpretation, and all interpretation involves application” (Bernstein, 1983:39). The emphasis is on encounter as a process of reflection and action through which students develop a critical understanding of worldviews and of their own position in relation to difference as actors in plurality. This is inseparable from the application and development of skills and dispositions of intercultural navigation (self-awareness, sensitivity, discernment) required of active global citizens.

Understanding worldview literacy as praxis highlights the inseparability of knowledge, skills and dispositions, or the academic and formational. RE has traditionally been seen as playing a particular role in pupils’ personal development. Grimmit’s (1987) influential framing of the central aims of RE as *learning about* and *learning from* religion have shaped the school subject since. Yet these two aims are often seen as in tension and personal development considered by many as a by-product rather than an explicit goal of RE (xx, 2015; Wright, 1993; White, 2004). Such debates sit within an ongoing lack of consensus over the aims of RE and its intrinsic or instrumental worth (see Castelli & Chater, 2018; Conroy *et al.*, 2013; Jackson, 2015; Lundie, 2018; Ofsted, 2010). In relation to these debates, the conceptualisation of worldview literacy presented here reconciles the intrinsic and instrumental value of studying worldviews. Whilst personal identity formation is not a central aim of the practice of worldview literacy, transformation of the self and one’s perception of the world is an intrinsic part of the hermeneutic process of understanding through encounter.

Encounter as engagement in democracy

Conceptualised as a transformative process of encounter in plurality, worldview literacy contributes to understandings of citizenship as practice (Biesta, 2011). Despite longstanding recognition of the importance of practice to citizenship education (Apple and Beane, 1995, Davies, 2012; Osler and Starkey, 2006), education policy and curricula across much of Europe frame citizenship as “first and foremost a matter of individuals and their knowledge, skills, dispositions and individual responsibilities” (Biesta, 2011:2) and children as future citizens, or ‘citizens-in-waiting’ (Osler and Starkey, 2003). This conceptualisation is reflected in educational approaches and frameworks based on the transmission of knowledge and socialisation into values and attitudes required of the ‘good citizen’. Rather than an outcome of education, Biesta argues that citizenship should be understood as something that people

continuously do (Biesta, 2010, 2011) and draws out the significance to education of Arendt's conception of the political as being. Thus rather than seeing education as preparation for engagement in political life, through the learning of skills and moral attitudes, the process of understanding (through interaction with others) itself is foregrounded as living politically which "allows for a way of connecting education and democratic politics rather than in terms of preparation or developmentalism" (Biesta, 2011:571).

Based on John Dewey's principle of education as the practice of democracy the focus of citizenship education should be on "individuals-in-interaction and individuals-in-context and on the crucial role that people's 'actual condition of citizenship' plays in the ways in which they learn and enact their democratic citizenship" (Biesta, 2011:2). If we take Biesta's argument that citizenship is strengthened through investing in young people's 'condition of citizenship', reflexive, self-aware and critical engagement with diverging ways of being in the world (worldviews) is an essential part of their 'civic learning'. It is an example of "engagement, contestation, deliberation and participation" (Biesta, 2011:85) in democracy that is crucial to its foundation and good health.

There is much in Biesta's description of civic learning that chimes with the idea worldview literacy as *praxis*. Rather than a linear process (as religious literacy has been imagined) in which worldview literacy is somehow achieved as an end-product, the hermeneutic element of worldview literacy is key to recognising this as a practice, rather than a product of good RE, citizenship, or any other education. Rather than preparation for engagement with diversity, worldview literacy should, as in the case of Biesta's notion of wider 'civic learning', be conceived of as *recursive* and *cumulative* (Biesta, 2011).

I have argued that worldview literacy can be understood as an interwoven practice of understanding, interpretation and application that operates in a hermeneutic spiral. In this process understanding is constantly applied (as *phronesis*⁷) and re-evaluated through dialogical encounter. The developing understanding of oneself and others and actual experience of encounter with difference that is its source, will have a bearing on future learning and interaction. As argued by Biesta, "reflective engagement with the experience of democracy requires that we learn from, in and through our engagement with it" (Biesta, 2011:3). Worldview literacy can then be part of schools' endeavour to "insert processes of reflection and learning into attempts to exist politically" (Biesta, 2011:571) as a contribution to the process of 'subjectfication', empowering young people to "come into the world", and enabling them to engage with it (Biesta, 2013).

Bridging RE and Intercultural Citizenship Education

I have shown that understood as a process of reflexive dialogical encounter with difference, worldview literacy draws together and reflects the aims of 'progressive-critical' approaches within both RE and citizenship education. As such it can provide a useful framework for thinking about the crossover between these fields and for a more integrated approach to the place of worldviews in curricula.

The compatibility between RE and citizenship education has long been recognised (Gearon, 2003; Jackson, 2003) and is most obvious in approaches to intercultural education (Jackson,

⁷ Practical wisdom.

2014, 2019; Johannessen and Skeie, 2019). Across Europe, the aims of RE are increasingly couched in terms of its contribution to positive engagement in multicultural society (XX, 2015; Franken, 2021; Gunnarsson, 2021; O’Grady, 2019; Ubani et al., 2020). Likewise, there is growing recognition that RE has a role in developing students as global citizens (Sarbicki, 2020). This is reflected in national curriculum reforms that draw the subjects closer together, for example in Norway (see Skeie and Braten, 2020), Luxemburg (see Franken, 2021), Iceland (see Gunnarsson, 2021) and Quebec (see Boisvert, 2016).

Despite the convergence of aims, in the English context, the school subjects RE and Citizenship share a history of ‘reciprocal neglect’ (Gearon, 2009) rooted in secular assumptions about public life and outdated understandings of RE as moral education (Jackson, 2003). Whilst existing as two separate subjects, in practice the boundaries are often blurred, if more at primary (ages 5-11) than secondary level (ages 11-18), yet thinking about curriculum development in the two is often unhelpfully siloed. Where RE’s contribution to citizenship education is recognised, it is often sustained by the idea that “if one fails to understand the world’s beliefs and practices, then one fails to understand the world” (Sarbicki, 2020:44). This echoes traditional notions of ‘religious literacy’ that rest on the value of substantive knowledge along with the skills and dispositions to engage positively with religious diversity. The concept of worldview literacy presented in this article builds on these notions of religious literacy and on the growing emphasis on dialogical encounter evident in approaches to RE across Europe to suggest that ‘learning about worldviews’ can make a much broader contribution to intercultural citizenship and the wider educational endeavour of engagement in social life as a process of transformational engagement *in* plurality.

I have argued that the understanding of tradition and identity as hybrid, complex and evolving contributes to ideas of global and ‘cosmopolitan’ citizenship and supports comprehension of the complexities of citizenship as identity and belonging. Furthermore, I have made the case that worldview literacy should entail the critical deconstruction of unjust/ skewed understanding of religious and cultural identity and thereby contribute to a critical consciousness in relation to the ‘other’ that is a key part of critical global citizenship education. Crucial to understanding this contribution, is that culture and identity are not explored as entities ‘out there’ but as living through human interpretation. Through a focus on the interpretability of worldviews as tradition and identity, the personal, or private is inherently entwined with the public as worldviews are lived through interaction. This challenges the false dichotomy between public and private that underpins both much representation of religion in curricula and its historical neglect within citizenship education.

Worldview literacy can provide a framework for strengthening the cultural/personal dimension of citizenship education that, whilst developed in some European models such as that of the Council of Europe (2008, 2016) and recognised as essential to effectively engage learners (Osler and Starkey, 2006), is often subordinate to a focus on knowledge about political processes. Moreover, the focus on reflexivity and encounter highlights the inseparability of the personal and the public as one is transformed through engagement in plurality. This process of transformation brings the subjective into the classroom. As Hannam (Biesta and Hannam, 2021) contends, this is nothing new and as I have outlined, is a firm focus of many approaches to RE and intercultural/critical citizenship education, but it is something that is perhaps neglected in (particularly secondary) schooling, with focus on accumulation of substantive

knowledge and on critical thinking at the expense of critical reflection (Biesta and Hannam, 2021).

As with Biesta's 'subjectification', it is the centrality of praxis that makes worldview literacy 'educational'. As noted by Hannam and Biesta (2019) this 'educational' dimension is not explicit in RE policy and curriculum development, although reflexive pedagogies are increasingly understood as central to the 'worldviews approach' as translated to the classroom (Cooling et al., 2020). Likewise, Nussbaum (2006) calls for increased focus on pedagogy alongside content within education policy relating to the capacities essential to democracy. Worldview literacy as presented here can contribute to a stronger theorisation underpinning pedagogy in these fields and provide a framework for thinking more broadly about the significance of worldview in both understanding of and in the practice of citizenship.

Concluding Remarks

In the English school system, both RE and Citizenship compete for curriculum time and both face challenges in terms of pupil perception⁸ and in relation to their status within the wider educational offer (Castelli and Chater, 2018; Chater, 2020; Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, 2018), due in no small part to their exclusion from the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) framework of core, examined academic subjects. Often seen to be lacking in academic rigour, the response in both has been to bolster the 'knowledge' content, as reflected in the revised curriculum for Citizenship (DfE, 2013) and the most recent exam specifications for RE⁹. Whilst such developments are in keeping with the rest of the curriculum and its prioritisation of content, they diminish the potential for transformative learning that is a key strength of both subjects. The concept of worldview literacy, as outlined in this article reframes 'learning about' and 'learning from'¹⁰ religion/worldviews as intertwined within a process of praxis through reflexive engagement in plurality, an educational experience that is often side-lined amidst a focus on outcomes, yet central to its very purpose. As global education policy looks towards more 'regenerative' approaches that challenge received 'knowledge' through human interaction, dialogue and exchange (UNESCO, 2021), the idea of worldview literacy as a process of critical engagement in lived plurality provides a framework for both re-thinking the crossover between RE and citizenship education and for strengthening the inclusivity, criticality and transformative potential of both.

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⁸ In a recent YouGov survey only 12% of pupils said they enjoy RE and only 6% Citizenship. See www.yougov.co.uk/topics/education/articles-reports/2018/09/03/which-school-subjects-do-boys-and-girls-enjoy-more

⁹ See for example QCR. (2020) GCSE (9-1) specification, religious studies J625. Available at: <https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/240547-specification-accredited-gcse-religious-studies-j625.pdf>

¹⁰ Interconnected aims of RE as formulated by Michael Grimmit (1987)

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