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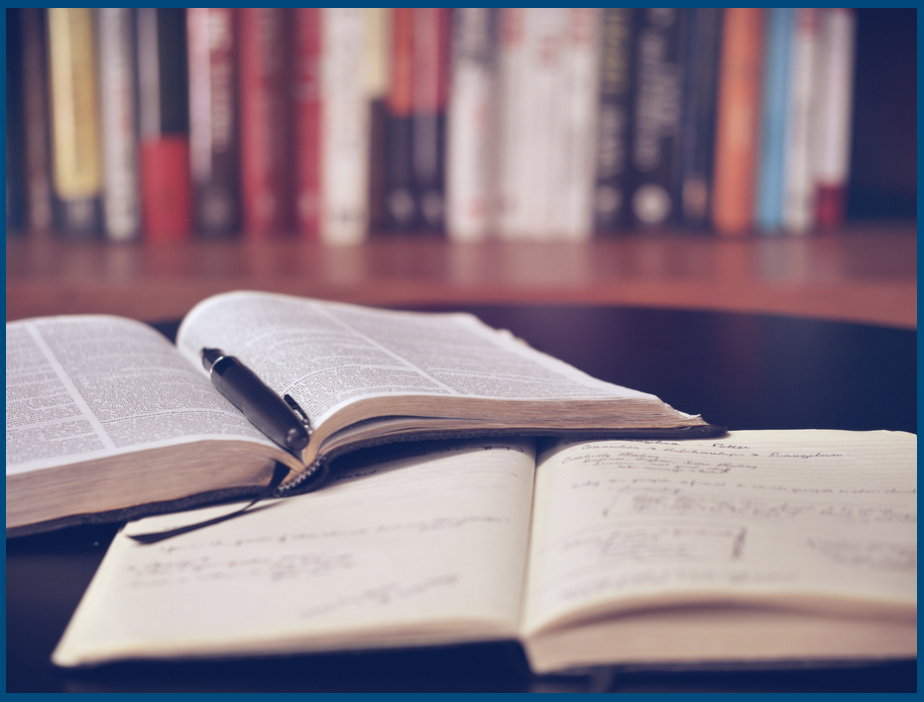
The Imperative for Religious Literacy Evaluation:

Context, Key Insights, and Recommendations



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Introduction

Religious literacy education is a nascent field. Its proponents make substantial claims about its ability to lead to social change, both in countering negative forces that threaten social cohesion, such as bigotry, polarization, and intolerance and by producing positive, pro-social changes in attitudes and behaviors. Yet, these claims are often difficult to assess.
At present, religious literacy educators have little empirical evidence to demonstrate the proposed relationships between religious literacy education and positive social changes in civil society.

This report seeks to ameliorate this issue in the emerging field of religious literacy education. It also urges religious literacy educators to understand the challenges and advantages of evaluation, as well as current barriers to the practice. The accompanying guidebook provides templates and an evaluation framework to aid practitioners in building evaluation into their program planning.

Greater attention to the assessment of religious literacy outcomes can benefit learners, practitioners, and the field as a whole.

Greater attention to the assessment of religious literacy outcomes can benefit learners, practitioners, and the field as a whole. One of the first challenges is defining the concept and scope of religious literacy, an expansive concept with both local and global implications. There is no one-size-fits all version or approach to religious literacy education—it is a context specific endeavor.

The field of religious literacy in the United States primarily originated with a focus on K-12 education (Seiple & Hoover, 2021). It has since expanded to encompass a wide range of professional and social contexts, including journalism, healthcare, and business (Dinham & Francis, 2015b; Walker et al., 2021). These varied sites for the application of religious literacy make it clear that this is something that is "best understood as a framework to be worked out in context" (Dinham & Francis, 2015a, p. 270), rather than a singularly defined set of knowledge and skills.

Accordingly, there is also no one way to approach the evaluation of religious literacy. This report provides an overview of current research and practices related to the evaluation of religious literacy. The recommendations, along with the companion guidebook, encourage scholars and practitioners across the field of religious literacy education to begin incorporating more research and evaluation across programs and initiatives.

Two Arguments for Religious Literacy

Arguments about the need for religious literacy education generally fall into two groups: (1) warnings about the consequences of not educating for religious literacy; and (2) claims about the ways religious literacy will benefit the individual or society. These arguments are often mutually reinforcing.

Religious Literacy as a Preventative Measure

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 are often viewed as a turning point for religious literacy. The attacks and their aftermath have become an example of the stakes of religious literacy, for policy-makers and the general public. Consequences include failing to understand how religious beliefs, practices, and worldviews are intricately connected with social and political forces (Albright & Woodward, 2006). Continuing social hostilities towards religious minorities provide additional evidence for this argument (Balaji et al., 2016; Kena & Thompson, 2021; The Trump Effect, 2016). Religious literacy is presented as a way to address deficits in the public understanding of religion.

Such arguments can be dramatic and attention grabbing: "The consequences of this religious illiteracy are significant and include fueling the culture wars, curtailing historical and cultural understanding and promoting religious and racial bigotry" (Moore, 2007, p. 3). Religious literacy educators create a sense of urgency when pointing to the latest media coverage of a student being bullied because of their religious identity or to terrorists claiming religious motivation. Such urgency implies that religious literacy education could have prevented those incidents. Within this argument, it is important to learn about religion because a lack of knowledge and understanding can fuel social division and violence.

A wide range of religious literacy efforts have their roots in this approach. Governments and other organizations have turned to education about religion in their efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE) and prevent radicalization (Ghosh et al., 2017; Halafoff et al., 2019). Reports from the United States Institute of Peace (Mandaville & Nozell, 2017) and the United Nations (2017; 2021) point to religious literacy as a tool for preventing hate speech and violence.

The often-cited World Geography and World Religions course in the Modesto City School District has become a graduation requirement for all students in the district. It originated from religiously-fueled conflicts and grew out of the recognition that promoting rights, respect, and responsibility were essential for preventing bullying and conflicts among both students and parents (Chan, 2021; Lester & Roberts, 2006). While this course has become highly touted as a successful example of teaching about religion in public schools, the "just the facts" approach to the course discourages debate or deeper inquiry and reflects the course's origin as a part of plan to avert religious conflict (Lester, 2018).

Religious Literacy as a Proactive Approach to Pluralism

The second argument for religious literacy emphasizes the positive impacts of religious literacy and the benefits of increased knowledge, skills, and understanding. Religious literacy is portrayed as an asset rather than as a method to address a societal deficit. The anticipated positive outcomes range from broad societal impacts to more personal and localized changes. Prothero (2007) captures this range in a brief paragraph:

> **Those who master this dictionary [of religion related terms] will be prepared to engage with the controversial social and political issues of our time. Closer to home, they will also be able to understand what is being said (and implied) in town meetings and school committees. And they will have the confidence to participate in conversations about religion among coworkers and friends (p. 186).**

These arguments can be oriented towards greater interpersonal understanding in the present, or more substantial positive changes in the future. For example, Nash and Bishop (2009) write, "Our nation's adolescents need to learn the complexity of others' beliefs now in in order to live peacefully with others in the future...Is there any subject matter more essential today for students to understand if they are to grow up and prosper in a peaceful world?" (p. 9). These arguments advertise that religious literacy will lead to greater appreciation of religious diversity and social cohesion.

Two sets of guidelines emphasize the importance of religious literacy for engaged and informed participation in civic life in a pluralistic democracy: (1) The "Religious Studies Companion Document for the C3 Framework" (Blitzer et al., 2017), an appendix to the National Council for the Social Studies' College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (2017); and (2) the American Academy of Religion's "AAR Religious Literacy Guidelines: What U.S. College Graduates Need to Understand about Religion" (2019). Focusing on high school and college students, respectively, these documents take the position that religious literacy is an essential characteristic of an educated person and its knowledge and skills are applicable in students' future personal, civic, and professional lives.

Integrated Arguments for Religious Literacy

In practice, these two arguments are frequently intertwined, as in the American Academy of Religion's Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public School in the United States discussion of why it is important to teach about religion:

> **"One of the most troubling and urgent consequences of religious illiteracy is that it often fuels prejudice and antagonism, thereby hindering efforts aimed at promoting respect for diversity, peaceful co-existence, and cooperative endeavors in local, national, and global arenas."**
> (AAR Religion in the Schools Task Force, 2010, p. 5).

Similar aims are echoed in the 2014 Council of Europe report, Signposts: Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious World Views in Intercultural Education: "The aim of the recommendation is to provide knowledge [about religions] but also to cultivate sensitivity, reciprocity and empathy and to combat prejudice, intolerance, bigotry and racism" (Jackson, 2014, p. 16).

The trend in recent years has been to frame religious literacy as a civic project aimed at equipping individuals and communities in multi-religious societies to engage with big questions and challenges. (Francis & Dinham, 2015; Marcus & Ralph, 2021; Valk et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2021). In this approach, religious literacy education fills gaps in academic and cultural knowledge (Grelle, 2014; Prothero, 2007), promotes religious freedom and First Amendment frameworks (Haynes, 2018), and develops skills and attitudes to equip citizens in pluralist societies (Eck & Randall, 2018; Marcus, 2018). Religious literacy is one of many tools that individuals and communities can deploy to ease conflicts in contemporary public life.

All of these arguments make big claims, and the social realities are impacted by many other factors. To clearly demonstrate the link between religious literacy education programs and these desired outcomes, we must collect and share data, perform meta-analyses, and generally make evaluation practices commonplace across the field of religious literacy. At present, there is very little evidence that correlates current religious literacy efforts to any of these outcomes.

To clearly demonstrate the link between religious literacy education programs and these desired outcomes, we must collect and share data, perform meta-analyses, and generally make evaluation practices commonplace across the field of religious literacy.

Recent critiques of the field of religious literacy have pointed to the contrast between these claims and the lack of evidence (McCutcheon, 2020; Wolfart, 2022). Criticisms about the "paucity of empirical evidence for the material, social or societal benefits widely ascribed to enhanced religious literacy" (Wolfart, 2022, p. 23) should be taken seriously, but the lack of evidence for impact should not be grounds to dismiss the entire project.

This report calls on religious literacy educators, scholars, and funders to pay greater attention to the verifiable impacts of their programs. By increasing efforts in research and evaluation through systematic inquiry and the collection of empirical data, we can provide a deeper understanding of the effects of religious literacy education.

Benefits of Increased Research and Evaluation

Engaging in ongoing and systematic assessment and evaluation of religious literacy education is worth the investment of time and financial resources:

> **"When done right, assessment can achieve three goals. It can strengthen grantor and grantee decision-making, enable continuous learning and improvement, and contribute to field-wide learning."**
> (Wales, 2012, p. 2)

These three elements—grantor-grantee decision making, continuous learning and improvement, and field-wide learning—are needed in the field of religious literacy education. They each contribute to the growth and maturation of the field across multiple dimensions.

Support growth and share knowledge across the field

The field of religious literacy education is still emerging. As the field is developing, all stakeholders benefit from sharing knowledge and learnings. Empirical findings are particularly valuable when they are publicly accessible so that others can build or strengthen their own programs accordingly, reducing barriers for others developing or revising programs.

Data about the impacts or successes of particular programs enables others to point to those contributions and demonstrate the potential of their own program. Having available models of successful program is often crucial for gaining support from administrators, communities, and funders.

Currently, without concrete evidence of impact or effectiveness, most programs must rely on the persuasiveness of the unproven arguments. Because so much of religious literacy education is concentrated at local levels, this type of knowledge sharing does not typically create competition between organizations. Instead, programs can discuss how they might be able to replicate others' successes, ultimately resulting in mutually reinforcing evidence as more programs are able to demonstrate impacts across multiple contexts.

Decision Making and Accountability to All Stakeholders

High quality research and evaluation efforts that gather data from all stakeholders and provide multiple perspectives on a program and its impacts can help organizations direct their (often limited) resources to the most effective components. As an interdisciplinary field, the stakeholders may include religious studies scholars, K-12 educators, students, administrators, foundations and other funders, education researchers, and scholars in other social science and humanities fields. Engaging all of the stakeholders as a part of research

and evaluation efforts can help to increase collaboration across otherwise siloed groups and avoid making assumptions about needs, prior knowledge, or contexts. All of this leads to better decision making and enables organizations to be more accountable—to their own mission, to their stakeholders, and to the wider field.

Ongoing Improvement and Innovation

While most programs naturally improve over time based on experience and anecdotal data, more intentional evaluation efforts can provide clear and specific feedback to drive systematic and efficient improvement. Some best practices include:

- Short, iterative cycles of evaluation and improvement can target specific programmatic elements to focus on desired outcome.
- Integrate evaluation processes across the program design and implementation process. Integration provides learning opportunities throughout: from program goals and outcomes, to pedagogical approaches and assessing outcomes.
- Well-designed evaluations require a clear understanding of what the program claims to do and how it intends to reach goals.
- Implementing an evaluation can improve programs simply by requiring greater reflection on the programs' intended goals and impacts.

Critiques of Increased Evaluation

There is ongoing debate about increased evaluation efforts, especially of humanities subjects in the K-12 space (Fitchett et al., 2014; Wills, 2007). In the school setting, if a subject is not assessed or evaluated, it often loses a share of limited teaching time to subjects that are tested. The implementation of an assessment or evaluation can lead to increased instructional time for the subject, but the scope of the subject may also be narrowed to fit the test. As the push toward "data-driven" instruction and decision-making in K-12 education has demonstrated, having data does not necessarily improve practices. It can also result in tensions between the purposes of education and the goals of evaluation (Gordon, 2018; Hargreaves et al., 2013). For instance, pressure to show evidence of impact can have the unintended consequence of program designs that are more conducive to evaluation than to meaningful learning about complex topics (Gordon, 2018).

When thoughtfully designed, assessment and evaluation add value to the program. Evaluation can provide benefits for participants, such as opportunities to reflect on their learning at multiple points in the program. Lester and Roberts (2006) make an important point about what evaluation adds to public debate in their research in Modesto, CA: "Statistical and field research alone cannot resolve all the disagreements about how to handle religion in schools, but they can reduce the extent of disagreement by providing hard evidence that cannot be ignored by any side in the religion and schools debate" (p. 14). Having more data will ultimately provide a clearer picture of what is happening in different contexts and help us to refine the conversation about religious literacy.

Key Insights from the Literature

Recognizing the importance of contextualization, this report focuses on evaluations of religious literacy in the education sector, both K-12 and higher education. The research included a literature review and practitioner interviews with a focus on work that is primarily connected to religious literacy in education, although some organizations work across sectors. The Appendix includes a complete listing of the literature review and the selection and review methodology. Because there is no common definition of religious literacy across the field, this review takes a broad view of what counts as research that attempts to measure or assess religious literacy.

The literature review examined empirical studies published between 2007 and 2021. Very few of the studies reviewed attempted to assess how much or what participants learned as the result of participating in a religious literacy education program (e.g. Ferman et al., 2020; Green et al., 2018). The vast majority examined religious literacy in terms of current levels of knowledge (Marks et al., 2014, p. e.g.; Saylor et al., 2021), attitudes or perspectives (e.g. J. Grant et al., 2020; Tannebaum, 2018), or practices (e.g. L. Grant & Matemba, 2013; Markowitz & Puchner, 2018).

The findings from the literature review fall into four themes:

- Focus on Baseline Knowledge
- Very Little Long-Term Follow Up
- Limited Assessment of the Impacts of Curriculum Materials
- Existing Evaluation Tools

The literature did not reveal an extensive body of empirical data on the impacts of religious literacy education, but it does provide valuable insights into directions for future work.

Research vs. Evaluation

There are considerable overlaps between research and evaluation, with the two sharing many characteristics including methodologies, instruments, and approaches to analysis. The American Evaluation Association defines evaluation as "a systematic process to determine merit, worth, value or significance" (AEA Board, n.d.). While both research and evaluation involved the generation of knowledge, "both judgment-oriented (summative) and improvement-oriented (formative) evaluations involve the instrumental use of results" (Patton, 1996, p. 132). Evaluation is typically associated with decision-making and value judgments based on the findings.

In contrast, research aims to describe processes, conditions, impacts, or results of interventions, but the findings and results do not make claims about the merit or worth of the object or program being researched and are not primarily intended for decision-making (although research does frequently get factored into decision-making). There are advantages and disadvantages to both research and evaluation, and the lines between the two can sometimes be blurred. Although the Guidebook primarily discusses evaluation, much of the content can also be applied to research about religious literacy education programs. In short, the field will benefit from greater knowledge and insights about experiences and impacts of religious literacy education, and increasing both research and evaluation will help achieve this.

Focus on Baseline Knowledge

The most basic type of assessment measures knowledge of facts. The 2010 U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey (Pew Research Center, 2010) is perhaps the best-known research of this type. While this study does not claim to measure religious literacy, its survey instrument has been used as a proxy measure for religious literacy in many other studies (e.g. Anderson et al., 2015; Marks et al., 2014; Smith, 2011). Pew's first-of-its-kind survey (2010) found that participants could only answer 16 of the 32 fact-based questions on average. These initial results provided a sort of benchmark of a specific type of knowledge about religion. A 2019 revised version of this study found an average score of 14.2 out of 32 questions (Pew Research Center, 2019). When this survey was used in other studies, the results were typically similar or participants performed better than the national average. While these types of studies are informative and valuable, they do not provide insight on whether those surveyed are able to use that knowledge in a meaningful way and do not demonstrate the impact of religious literacy education.

Relatedly, there is a lack of research describing the current landscape of education about religion, particularly in the US. For example, there is little data about how religion is included in curriculum standards or how many secondary schools offer courses in religious studies. More studies in this area can help demonstrate the need for more education about religion and the need for more research.

Putting Research into Practice

Baseline studies are essential for establishing a starting point against which impacts can be measured. Research about the current levels of knowledge or existing programs and learning opportunities can help make the case for the need for more religious literacy education. Baseline and landscape studies are essential starting points and enable more in-depth future research.

Very Little Long-Term Follow Up

The few studies that did attempt to measure the impact of religious literacy education generally did so immediately or shortly after the educational experience (e.g. Brooks, 2019; Ferman et al., 2020; Green et al., 2018). Capturing participants' perspectives immediately following a program provides valuable insights. However, until participants return to their professional or personal contexts and encounter situations relevant to the program content, it is difficult to determine if the learning will have an impact on real-world situations. Many of the claims about religious literacy producing more prosocial behaviors and attitudes require longer-term evaluation to fully understand the impacts.

Putting Research into Practice

Conducting long-term, follow-up evaluations for any program involves overcoming multiple barriers, including logistics, resources, and retaining participants willing to continue engaging with the evaluation. Program design plays a significant role in this challenge; longer programs are typically more able to develop the types of relationships with participants that can lead to longer-term engagement. Building a follow-up evaluation into programs requires additional planning, support, and funding; it can also provide more meaningful insights into impacts. Even when an initial evaluation was not conducted, reaching out to program alumni can be an opportunity to gain insights into the long-term impacts of a program.

Limited Assessment of the Impacts of Curricular Materials

Although several organizations have developed written curricula with the goal of promoting religious literacy, there is not currently research on the usage or impact of these resources. Some curricula may have been examined through internal evaluations within organizations, but the findings are not publicly available. Additionally, there is not yet research on the usage or impacts of either of The American Academy of Religion's two sets of guidelines aimed at religious literacy, or The National Council for the Social Studies' Religious Studies Companion Document (Blitzer et al., 2017) as part of its College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards.

Putting Research into Practice

Assessing the impacts of a curricular tool is even more challenging than evaluating a workshop because there is rarely direct communication between the producers of the tool and the end users. Evaluation and research in this area needs to examine the adoption (how many schools/classrooms are using the materials?), implementation (how are the materials being used?), and impacts (do the materials produce the intended learning outcomes?) of curricular materials. Projects that intend to develop curriculum materials can also benefit from conducting needs evaluations at the beginning of the project. A needs evaluation provides the opportunity to gather input from the intended users of the materials, and also establishes relationships that support future implementation and impact evaluations.

Existing Evaluation Tools

Interfaith America (Assessing Interfaith Development Using the Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric: A Case Study, n.d.; Baxter, 2013) and Global Spiritual Life at New York University (Ennis, 2017) have developed rubrics to assess learning connected to their programming on religious literacy and interfaith engagement. There do not appear to be publicly available data gathered from the Interfaith America tool. The NYU rubric was designed to accompany the Faith Zone program and is the most well-documented, including discussion of the development of the curriculum and rubric, a sample workshop, and the workshop outcomes. The findings, which include data collected between 2012 and 2016, show positive impacts from the workshop described in the book, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data (Ennis, 2017).

Unfortunately, more recent data are not available, and it does not appear that this rubric has been implemented or discussed elsewhere in the literature. Both of these tools are promising starting points, particularly for those working in higher education. However, they do not appear to be implemented widely.

Putting Research Into Practice

The two evaluation tools discussed have great potential, particularly because they are connected to programs that reach substantial numbers of participants annually. Additional research based on the usage of these tools would provide valuable insights for the field. It should be noted that these were designed to be used in specific contexts and with specific programs. Simply deploying them in another environment will not necessarily produce valid results. However, these tools can be used as models to guide the development of tools for other contexts.

Key Insights from the Field

This project originated from a series of conversations with the Religious Literacy Cohort of the Powering Pluralism Network, a group of 40 of the top religious literacy academics and practitioners in the United States. This group was a good starting point to examine religious literacy evaluation practices. In a survey sent out prior to the cohort meetings, the participants were asked: (1) How do you or your organization define religious literacy or competency? and (2) Briefly, how does your organization measure the impact of your religious literacy work? Twenty-five cohort members responded to this survey. To generate more specific insights into current practices and thinking around evaluation and assessment among religious literacy professionals, I conducted interviews with individuals working in organizations that primarily or partially focus on religious literacy in the education sector, including K-12 and higher education.

While these two data collection methods are far from a systematic study of evaluation practices across the field, the responses point to two key findings: (1) there is no common definition of "religious literacy" shared by those who utilize the term, but most of the definitions recognize multiple dimensions, and (2) very few people or organizations are engaged in sustained or rigorous assessment or evaluation of their religious literacy work.

Definitions of Religious Literacy

The responses to the first question about defining religious literacy varied substantially, but largely fell within the general framework of knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes about religions in relation to public or civic life. Nearly every definition included multiple facets, such as "knowledge of religious traditions…[and] the skills necessary to effectively work in religious contexts," or offered qualifiers about contexts, audiences, or purposes. Although this group of religious literacy professionals produced a list of varied and thoughtful definitions of religious literacy, a full 20 percent of respondents indicated that their organizations did not have a specific definition of religious literacy (although about half of these responses still included some discussion about a definition). The wording of the survey question allowed a variety of responses. It is not clear whether all the definitions offered would be considered the "official" or formal definition used by the represented organizations. Based on the wording of some of the responses ("I associate religious literacy primarily with…" or "We draw on…"), it is likely that a number of organizations have not adopted a specific definition of religious literacy to inform their work. Only three of the responses made any claims about the outcomes of religious literacy, all related to positive outcomes of understanding across differences. Again, the question did not require respondents to name the impacts of religious literacy.

When organizations had a concrete definition of religious literacy and their programmatic aims, respondents also noted that the whole concept is too broad to be adequately covered in a single initiative. They stated that an individual course or program might target only one or two elements of religious literacy.

Little Evaluation and Limited Capacity

Responses to the question about measuring the impact of religious literacy work were considerably more mixed. Twenty percent of the survey respondents directly stated that their organizations did not, at that time, formally assess the impact of their work on religious literacy. Another 20 percent pointed to specific measures or tools that they were using. Two of these respondents specifically recognized a need for improvement in this area. The majority of the responses in this group referenced informal or anecdotal measures of broad impacts. Respondents commonly noted the number and characteristics of individuals or groups reached as some of their data points. Demographic information about participants is very valuable, but does not provide insight into the impacts of the programming. None of the responses mentioned how insights gained from measurement or evaluation were used (although this was not included in the original survey question).

A follow-up survey asking about how assessment results were used to revise programming was sent to the same group in October 2021. Although there were only four respondents, none of them noted changing their programming as a result of evaluation efforts or findings.

While almost every person interviewed indicated an interest in improving their assessment and evaluation practices, they did not currently have consistent, rigorous evaluations as part of their religious literacy programs.

Interviews found similar results. While almost every person interviewed indicated an interest in improving their assessment and evaluation practices, they did not currently have consistent, rigorous evaluations as part of their religious literacy programs. Some interviewees mentioned conducting brief post-program surveys related to satisfaction, collection of attendance data, or recording general take-aways after a training. These process-type surveys were the norm across most organizations that did any type of evaluation. While some organizations had a more specific definition of religious literacy or more concrete programmatic aims, that did not necessarily translate to the implementation of evaluation in their programs.

Several interviewees cited organizational capacity as a barrier to engaging in more in-depth evaluation. Simply managing program design, delivery, and organization administration can tax the capacity of a small staff, making integrating high-quality evaluation into programming seem out of reach. Additionally, many people noted a lack of confidence in their evaluation skills. A constant theme from the interviews was that more evaluation would benefit individual programs and the field, but limited resources were a significant barrier.

Recommendations

There is a great deal of work to be done to develop a body of evidence about the impacts of religious literacy education. Increased attention to evaluation of religious literacy programs will support growth and development across the field for all stakeholders.

1. Establish Organization- and Program-Level Definitions of Religious Literacy

Definitions of religious literacy are fluid and context specific, but they are essential for program planning, evaluation, and research. They are most useful when they can be broken down into operationalizable constructs that can guide both program design and assessment. Organizations should be clear about their working definition of religious literacy, both for internal programming and to facilitate conversations between practitioners and scholars.

2. Identify Research and Evaluation Priorities

Because there is so little research and evaluation data in this field, potential research questions are endless. One urgent need is baseline research and evaluation, including needs assessments. Evaluations here can help organizations target areas of greatest need or interest for their stakeholders. Solid baseline research will also be critical to meaningful impact research as a benchmark to measure growth or progress. Once a baseline has been established, organizations should outline specific learning goals and then design evaluations, including long-term follow-up, to assess those goals. Goals focused on greatest impact or interest should be prioritized.

1. Establish Organization- and Program-Level Definitions of Religious Literacy
2. Identify Research and Evaluation Priorities
3. Conduct and Replicate Baseline Research
4. Integrate Evaluation Procedures into Program Planning and Implementation
5. Share Findings from Internal Evaluations
6. Establish Partnerships for Research Initiatives

3. Conduct and Replicate Baseline Research

It is crucial to continue to conduct the types of baseline research that make up much of the current body of literature (e.g., Marks et al., 2014; Saylor et al., 2021; Tannebaum, 2018). Baseline studies do not measure the impacts of religious literacy education programs, but they provide insight into current practices, attitudes, and knowledge that is crucial for designing and promoting programs. It would be highly beneficial to see several of these studies replicated in multiple contexts. For example, Saylor et al. (2021) surveyed pre-service teachers at three universities in the southern United States about their understanding of the application of the First Amendment religion clauses. This study could be replicated with pre-service educators in different regions and institutions. Similarly, Halafoff et al.'s (2020) study of religious literacy and attitudes towards religious pluralism among Australian teenagers could be replicated in other countries, or regions within countries. Because religious literacy consists of contextual knowledge and skills, replicating these types of studies can develop a more nuanced understanding of existing knowledge and educational practices around religious literacy.

4. Integrate Evaluation Procedures into Program Planning and Implementation

Evaluation is most effective when integrated across the entire planning and implementation process of a program rather than as an afterthought or a rushed post-program survey. Integrating evaluation in the program design can improve alignment between program goals and activities. This might require creating greater capacity within the organization to conduct evaluations or contracting with external evaluators, either to complete the full evaluation or help create an evaluation plan that can be implemented internally.

5. Share Findings from Internal Evaluations

Sharing findings of internal evaluations, particularly evidence of impact, supports growth and improvement across the field. There is so little research; any shared evaluation findings in this field contribute meaningfully to other practitioners, researchers, and funders who are interested in supporting this work. Conversely, when information is not shared, the full scope of the field of religious literacy education is not visible. Individuals and organizations new to the field lack templates and models, which slows down progress in the field as a whole.

6. Establish Partnerships for Research Initiatives

One way to increase capacity for evaluation in small programs is to develop partnerships with academic researchers. This can benefit the whole field. Peer-reviewed academic research often requires additional resources (financial, time, etc.), but it is sometimes seen as more reliable because in-house evaluations can be perceived as biased towards the program. Academic research can investigate questions applicable beyond the program being studied and can reach different audiences through conferences and journals. Research partnerships with universities or other research agencies can also scale up evaluations with bigger sample sizes and deeper and longer-term impact assessments.

Appendix: Literature Reviewed

These articles were identified through keyword searches in academic databases and searches of the literature citing and cited by the articles. Studies selected for the review included some type of evaluation or assessment of religious literacy in educational settings with educators or students. Studies on student learning in formal and often compulsory Religious Education (RE) courses in primary or secondary schools were not included in this review. While research on RE in these contexts can contribute to this conversation, these courses generally have multiple pedagogical aims, including moral or faith formation, citizenship formation, and socialization. Religious literacy is increasingly discussed as an aim of RE (Biesta et al., 2019; Dinham & Shaw, 2017) but does not currently appear to be the focus of student assessment. Studies that looked at religious literacy within a specific religious tradition were not included.

The literature in this table met the following criteria for the review.

- Published after 2007.
- Based on empirical data, either qualitative or quantitative.
- Participants were current teachers or administrators, pre-service educators, or students (middle school, high school, and college students).
- Defined (explicitly or implicitly) religious literacy broadly, including knowledge, skills, dispositions related to multiple religious traditions, and plural society.
    - Did not include studies that looked at religious literacy only within a specific religious community (e.g. Rackley, 2014).
- Attempted to measure the quantity, quality, or application of participants' religious literacy.
    - Studies that looked at connections between religious literacy and other factors were not included (e.g. Chan, 2021).
    - Studies that looked at programs or courses that were intended to teach religious literacy, but did not attempt to assess the participants' religious literacy, were not included (e.g. Lester & Chan, 2022; Soules, 2019).

Literature that discusses the evaluation of religious literacy, but does not report on findings of research or evaluation, is included in the Appendix C of the accompanying Guidebook.

Appendix

Citation	Context	What is being evaluated?	How is it being evaluated?
Anderson, D., Mathys, H., & Cook, T. (2015). Religious beliefs, knowledge, and teaching actions: Elementary teacher candidates and world religions. Religion & Education, 42(3), 268–288. https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2014.944063	Preservice elementary teachers	Relationship between PSTs personal beliefs and knowledge of world religion during 4-day teaching experience of world religions.	Pew Religious Knowledge Survey (pre and post-tests), interviews, lesson plans, observations.
Awudi, J. (2019). Teacher Preparedness in Teaching Religious and Moral Education in the Junior High Schools in the Twifo–Hemang Lower Denkyira District [Unpublished Thesis, University of Cape Coast].	48 teachers in in two junior high schools in Kenya	Teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge preparedness.	Survey, observations.
Blumenfeld, W. J., & Jaekel, K. (2012). Exploring Levels of Christian Privilege Awareness among Preservice Teachers. Journal of Social Issues, 68(1), 128–144. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2011.01740.x	Preservice teachers in a Midwestern US university	How aware are these students of the concept and impact of Christian privilege in American society?	Qualitative survey.
Bowman, N. A., Rockenbach, A. N., Mayhew, M. J., Riggers-Piehl, T. A., & Hudson, T. D. (2017). College Students' Appreciative Attitudes Toward Atheists. Research in Higher Education, 58(1), 98–118. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-016-9417-z	US college students (large scale survey)	Appreciative attitudes towards different religious and non-religious groups.	Quantitative survey data.

Appendix

Citation	Context	What is being evaluated?	How is it being evaluated?
Mayhew, M. J., Bowman, N. A., Rockenbach, A. N., Selznick, B., & Riggers-Piehl, T. (2018). Appreciative Attitudes Toward Jews Among Non-Jewish US College Students. Journal of College Student Development, 59(1), 71–89. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2018.0005	US college students (large scale survey)	Appreciative attitudes towards different religious and non-religious groups.	Quantitative survey data.
Rockenbach, A. N., Mayhew, M. J., Bowman, N. A., Morin, S. M., & Riggers-Piehl, T. (2017). An Examination of Non-Muslim College Students' Attitudes Toward Muslims. The Journal of Higher Education, 88(4), 479–504. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2016.1272329	US college students (large scale survey)	Appreciative attitudes towards different religious and non-religious groups.	Quantitative survey data.
Dávila, D. (2015). #Who Needs Diverse Books?: Preservice Teachers and Religious Neutrality with Children's Literature. Research in the Teaching of English, 50(1), 60–83.	Preservice teachers (US)	How likely are preservice teachers to include books with diverse religious content in classroom lessons?	Analysis of written responses.
Ferman, D. M., Reeve, K. F., Vladescu, J. C., Albright, L. K., Jennings, A. M., & Domanski, C. (2020). Comparing Stimulus Equivalence-Based Instruction to a Video Lecture to Increase Religious Literacy in Middle-School Children. Behavior Analysis in Practice, 13(2), 360–374. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-019-00355-4	US middle school students	How do two different learning approaches influence students' ability to match symbols, terms, and religious traditions?	Pre-post-follow up surveys or quizzes testing knowledge and ability before and after intervention.

Appendix

Citation	Context	What is being evaluated?	How is it being evaluated?
Grant, J., Byford, J. M., Casey, L., Owens-Mosby, D., & Casey, C. (2020). Teachers' Perceptions of Religious Literacy in the Development of Civic Participation. World Studies in Education, 21(1), 45-60.	5 teachers in religious and secular schools in the US	How do these particular teachers define religious literacy? How do they see the connection with civic preparation?	Qualitative interviews.
Grant, L., & Matemba, Y. H. (2013). Problems of assessment in religious and moral education: the Scottish case. Journal of Beliefs & Values, 34(1), 1-13.	Scottish primary and secondary schools	How well do RE teachers evaluate student learning?	Review of teacher and student materials.
Green, A. R., Tulissi, A., Erais, S., Cairns, S. L., & Bruckner, D. (2018). Building an Inclusive Campus: Developing Students' Intercultural Competencies Through an Interreligious and Intercultural Diversity Program. Canadian Journal of Higher Education / Revue Canadienne d'enseignement Supérieur, 48(3), 43–64. https://doi.org/10.7202/1057128ar	Canadian college students	Perspectives towards intercultural diversity, engagement skills, and how they are influenced by an immersion experience.	Mixed methods – standardized inventory (Intercultural Development Index) and qualitative questionnaires.
Halafoff, A., Singleton, A., Bouma, G., & Rasmussen, M. L. (2020). Religious literacy of Australia's Gen Z teens: Diversity and social inclusion. Journal of Beliefs & Values, 41(2), 195–213. https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2019.1698862	Australian Gen Z teenagers	Religious and spiritual identification of teens, levels of religious literacy and attitudes toward diverse worldviews and religions.	Large scale survey, focus groups. Religious literacy exercise identifying images associated with different traditions.
Ingle, E. W. (2015). Religious Literacy in a Northwest Georgia School District [Unpublished Dissertation]. The University of Tennessee.	189 teachers in northern Georgia	Attitudes, perceptions, and educational practices of HS teachers about religious literacy	Survey – 7 Likert-scale items and 7 completion items.12 interviews.

Appendix

Citation	Context	What is being evaluated?	How is it being evaluated?
Lester, E., & Roberts, P. S. (2006). Learning about world religions in public schools: The impact on student attitudes and community acceptance in Modesto, California. First Amendment Center. (Although this study is outside of the parameters for the review, it was included because of its significance in the field.)	Students, teachers, & community members in Modesto, CA	The impacts of the Modesto World Religions course, particularly attitudes towards rights and religious diversity, as well the implementation of the course.	Surveys, interviews.
Markowitz, L., & Puchner, L. (2018). Structural ignorance of Christian privilege. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 31(10), 877–894. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2018.1506180	US elementary teachers and admins	Perceptions & practices of elementary teachers & administrators about the practice of Christianity in schools and classrooms	Interviews.
Marks, M. J., Binkley, R., & Daly, J. K. (2014). Preservice teachers and religion: Serious gaps in religious knowledge and the First Amendment. The Social Studies, 105(5), 245–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2014.927344	Preservice teachers at 3 midwestern US universities	What do preservice teachers know about religion and the first Amendment?	Pew Religious Knowledge Survey.
Saylor, E., An, S., & Buchanan, L. B. (2021). The First Amendment, Religious Freedom, and Public Schools in the South. The Social Studies, 0(0), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2021.1992745	Preservice teachers in the southern US	What do preservice teachers understand about religious freedom and their role as public school teachers?	Survey – quantitative responses.

Appendix

Citation	Context	What is being evaluated?	How is it being evaluated?
Smith, D. E. (2011). Religious knowledge among pre-service secondary teachers of English and History [Unpublished Dissertation]. Appalachian State University.	Preservice English and History teachers in North Carolina	Participants' "basic level of religious knowledge," "higher-level thinking skills as relates to religion and public life," and knowledge related to curriculum standards and textbooks.	Religious Knowledge Survey, additional survey questions on religion, public life, and curriculum.
Tannebaum, R. P. (2018). Teaching About Religion Within Early Childhood and Elementary Social Studies: Exploring how Preservice Teachers Perceive their Rights and Responsibilities as Educators. Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 9(4), 30–48.	Preservice elementary teachers	Preservice teachers' confidence discussing religion with elementary students; understanding of constitutional rights; association of teaching religion with broad multicultural education principles.	Interview and qualitative survey, coursework.

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AAR religious literacy guidelines: What U.S. college graduates need to understand about religion. (2019). American Academy of Religion. https://www.aarweb.org/AARMBR/Publications-and-News-/Guides-and-Best-Practices-/Teaching-and-Learning-/AAR-Religious-Literacy-Guidelines.aspx

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