

Article

The Relevancy of Religious Literacy in Social Studies Curricula: Quebec's CCQ as a Case Study

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Abstract: This article explores Quebec's recent transition from the "Ethics and Religious Culture" (ERC) program to the "Culture and Citizenship in Quebec" (CCQ) program, emphasizing the role of religious literacy in secular societies. We investigate the rationale behind the shift, and examine the ERC's focus on fostering understanding of diverse religious and ethical perspectives as well as CCQ's broader mandate to integrate cultural and civic education and its aim at the development of a shared and common public Quebecois culture. The case study highlights the pedagogical and societal implications of this change, discussing how the CCQ program aims to enhance civic engagement, cultural awareness, and social cohesion. Furthermore, the article identifies opportunities for educators to address pressing global challenges, such as polarization, reconciliation, and the climate crisis, within the new curriculum framework. By promoting critical thinking, inclusivity, and active citizenship, fostering religious literacy in such programs presents a unique opportunity for educators and youth to contribute to a more resilient and harmonious society.

Keywords: religious literacy; social studies; religious; spiritual; non-religious; worldviews; secularism; laïcité; Quebec; Canada



Citation: Chan, W. Y. Alice, Sivane Hirsch, and Hicham Tiflati. 2024. The Relevancy of Religious Literacy in Social Studies Curricula: Quebec's CCQ as a Case Study. *Religions* 15: 1046. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091046>

Academic Editor: David Basinger

Received: 30 July 2024

Revised: 23 August 2024

Accepted: 27 August 2024

Published: 28 August 2024



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1. Introduction

In North American classrooms, teaching about religion is conducted separately from other topics in a formal religious education class, world religions class, or in specific units, themes, or segments of the social studies curriculum. It is common for educators to silo engagement with religion, spirituality, or non-religion as a separate discussion altogether, because discussions about religion are not encouraged and "don't ask; don't tell" is a cultural norm (Chan et al. 2023). However, social conversations in different parts of the world are changing and beginning to recognize that religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldviews inform other parts of society and vice versa.

As a team of Canadian educator researchers, we see this change clearly as Canadian provinces like Saskatchewan and Ontario introduce courses that are informed by Indigenous culture, knowledge, and worldviews, such as the Saskatchewan Kindergarten to Grade 12 science curriculum (Ministry of Education, Government of Saskatchewan 2022) and the 10 courses within the Ontario First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies stream, which includes courses in English, Art, History, World Views, and Politics/Law (Ministry of Education, Government of Ontario n.d.).

In this article, we introduce a conversation that is globally relevant, with a case study on the province of Quebec, where the Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program was introduced in 2008, then removed and revised in 2024 to become the Culture and Citizenship in Quebec (CCQ) program in which religion is discussed as one of numerous cultural realities instead of a main aspect of social diversity. Our analysis of the Quebec

context is of particular interest as many scholars have delved into the contemporary political and cultural climate of Quebec and its unique stance on social and political secularism. Indeed, in Quebec, social secularism, that describes the diminishing role of religion in social life, is accompanied by what is called *laïcité* (Maclure and Taylor 2010), which limits the place of religion in the political sphere through legislation. Thus, we frame, understand, and analyze the Quebec context using conceptions of secularism and *laïcité*. This is clearly apparent in the Québec education system that imposes *laïcité* on its secular public schools, but recognizes and partially funds private schools that are often religious. For instance, the question of whether civil servants, particularly public-school teachers, should be allowed to display ostensible signs of religious affiliation (such as wearing a hijab) at work is at the heart of discussions about *laïcité* in Quebec. Central to this debate is the balance between the right to display religious symbols in public spaces and the principle of separating religion and state. Strong sensitivities exist, especially regarding Muslim women's attire (Authier 2019). An underlying concern is whether individual civil servants' religious beliefs might compromise the appearance of their professional impartiality. In such a setting, Quebec's curriculum, and specifically the CCQ program, act as a relevant case study, where a cultural norm of "don't ask; don't tell" about religion is strong, parallel to many other global settings (Chan et al. 2023).

How can there be discussion or teaching about religion, spirituality, or non-religion? We explore this question by reviewing more details about Quebec, the concept of religious literacy, and the published details about the CCQ curriculum so far. We analyze the CCQ curriculum through the concept of religious literacy and conclude by offering opportunities for religious literacy education where a CCQ equivalent does not exist, and pose considerations towards practical application at the end.

2. Religious Literacy in Secular Societies and Curricula

In the plural socio-political context of Quebec, secularism and *laïcité* are two distinct notions referring to two different aspects of the same reality. While secularism describes the ideology of a society where religion has less social importance, *laïcité* describes the manner constitutional frameworks use to handle religion (Maclure and Taylor 2010). And while it is often misinterpreted as being inherently opposed to religious expression in the public space, *laïcité* can also be interpreted as the political structure that allows, or even aims at providing a neutral and balanced ground where all religions and worldviews can coexist without direct interference from the state. In that sense, it allows all religions to live side by side in a space that favours none. For some, that entails that secularism should ensure a state that does not judge the relevance of the practices of others, but allows anybody to practice without being judged for their practice or belief. In other words, according to this vision, *laïcité* should ensure that all religious and worldview beliefs are treated with equal respect and recognition (Zala 2019). When *laïcité* is approached as an inclusive framework, it emphasizes collective identity and harmony over division, reinforcing the importance of understanding and valuing the religious, spiritual, and non-religious beliefs of all residents.

However, in Quebec, the idea that *laïcité* can protect various public practices among minority religious groups—such as the wearing of religious symbols and gender relations in minority communities—is subject to debate, raising and maintaining stereotypes from majority groups and maintaining challenges within minority communities surrounding these practices. The latter includes minority groups that might assert the right to control women or restrict marriage to members of their community, which many consider an affront not only to collective efforts that aim to limit the place of religion in Quebec society, but also to gender equality—considered a core value of Quebec society. In policy, this is expressed by the *Loi sur laïcité de l'État* (An Act respecting the laicity of the State, familiar locally as Bill 21). As in many contexts, there are diverging approaches and views to secularism in Quebec. These different views of secularism and *laïcité* cause tensions and misunderstandings that can deter societies from a goal towards equal respect and recognition.

Additionally, Quebec boasts a rich mosaic of cultures and religions in all its regions. In 2022, 99.7 percent of the population growth (149,500 people) was a result of international immigration ([Institut de la Statistique du Québec 2023](#)); the remainder of the growth was due to provincial birth rates. The top five countries of origin for immigrants that year to Quebec were France, China, Algeria, Haiti, and Tunisia—each holding different relationships with religion ([Ministère de l’Immigration, de la Francisation et de l’Intégration 2023](#)). While the greater Montreal area is more ethnoculturally and religiously diverse, other regions are becoming more diverse, due to increasing numbers of immigrants settling outside the metropolis. This diversity adds to the pre-existing presence of Indigenous peoples, and English settlers who have been in Quebec since the Conquest of New France in 1760 ([Hirsch and Borri-Anadon 2023](#)). Yet, such diversity can create ideological and political divides. One valuable tool in fostering a balance amidst differences, addressing potential misunderstandings, and creating opportunities for engagement and dialogue across the existing diversity is religious literacy.

Religious Literacy

Religious literacy is an academic framework that creates opportunities for a better understanding of religions, spiritualities, and non-religious worldviews. It helps individuals consider nuances about religious practices, beliefs, and worldviews in all their diversities. As it engages with the variety of perspectives that exist in each worldview, religious literacy goes beyond mere knowledge and fosters skills like critical thinking and questioning. It does not assume the absolute recognition of every aspect of religions and worldviews. Rather, religious literacy guides us to acknowledge the perspectives a person or group can hold, and offers room to critique harmful notions. This understanding paves the way for mutual respect, dismantles stereotypes, and challenges prejudices within society.

In Canada, the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy outlines five principles of religious literacy based on the work of various scholars (e.g., [Dinham and Francis 2015](#); [Jackson 2014](#); [Miedema 2014](#); [Moore 2014](#); [Prothero 2007](#)), and specific to Canada’s demography and history ([Patrick et al., forthcoming](#)):

1. Understanding the internal diversity within religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldview groups.
2. Understanding that similarities exist across worldview groups but that they are each distinct.
3. Recognizing the influence that socio-cultural, political, and economic aspects of society have on worldview groups, and vice versa, in the past and present, which change, inform, and shape these worldviews over time;
4. Recognizing the need to include religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldviews in the full conversation.
5. Recognizing that worldviews hold a significant personal meaning to the religious, spiritual, and non-religiously affiliated individuals. This leads us to discuss worldviews from an individual or community’s distinct lens and not from the worldview of another person/group, and know that individuals who share the same worldview may have diverse beliefs, expressions, interpretations, and terminology to describe it based on a number of factors, such as personal circumstance, place, political context, etc.

Studies have shown that developing civic religious literacy can empower individuals and organizations to identify, analyze, and engage better with members of their society of various cultures, religions, spiritualities, and non-religions, which play an indispensable role in shaping modern societies and individual as well as collective identities ([Lester 2011](#); [Chan 2021](#), etc.).

In the Quebec context, the profound Catholic heritage of the Quebec nation conjugated with a strong commitment to *laïcité* results in an important religious illiteracy, that can lead to bullying based on religious differences or assumptions ([Chan 2021](#)) or religiously-motivated hate crimes. This is highly relevant in a province with religious tensions, where nearly 25% of hate crimes reported to the Montreal Police (50 out of 212) targeted an

individual's religion in 2022; a slight decrease from 30% of reported crimes (69 of 191) in 2021 ([Division de l'Intelligence d'Affaires 2022](#)). Altogether of significant consideration for the largest city in the province and the second largest city in Canada.

The need to foster religious literacy might be more pronounced for social cohesion, mutual respect, and understanding amongst citizens. Furthermore, religious literacy holds an indispensable role not only in fostering intercultural comprehension that aims to go beyond mere tolerance, and harmonious “vivre-ensemble” (a social value embraced by many Quebec politicians and leaders) but also in cultivating global civic responsibilities (e.g., commitment to peace, climate change, etc.). In other words, religious literacy leads to many societal benefits such as the promotion of mutual respect and understanding, critical thinking and intellectual growth, understanding Quebec's cultural heritage, preparing youth for a globalized world, instilling moral and ethical foundations, and preparing a foundation for a functioning Quebecois laïcité.

In the multifaceted socio-political landscape of Quebec, laïcité has been a dominant theme, often pitting the values of state neutrality against freedom of religious expression. However, it is crucial to understand that secularism is not inherently antithetical to religion, especially as religious literacy principles help us understand that secular societies are informed by religions as they bore out of previously religious contexts. Instead, in contexts where secularism is properly functioning, it serves as a framework that can promote understanding and social cohesion when applied judiciously.

As a team of educator-researchers, we suggest that the instruction of religious literacy and the diverse religious perspectives in educational institutions within Quebec are of paramount significance. As the Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program was the previous local religious literacy curriculum and is now transitioning into the Culture and Citizenship in Quebec (CCQ), we review the potential of the CCQ curriculum as a form of religious literacy education in the following section.

3. CCQ: A Case Study

To promote a secular curriculum, Quebec created a religious literacy program for all elementary and secondary students in 2008—the Ethics and Religious Culture (ERC) program—where learning was organized into the Ethics stream, the Religious Culture stream, and Dialogue. This program marked an important change when students were no longer separated by their religious belonging when learning about religions, but rather explored together different religions, and their beliefs and practices. Since its inception, the ERC was regularly criticized in the name of religious ([Boudreau 2011](#)), political ([Estivalèzes 2023](#)), philosophical ([Bouchard and Morris 2012](#)), secular ([Baril and Baillargeon 2016](#); [Braley 2011](#)) or feminist ([Charron and Steben-Chabot 2020](#)) arguments, notably for the place it accorded to religious culture in general and religious diversity in particular. Critics questioned both the need for teaching about religions and the way in which it was taught. Unlike other World Religions courses in North America that may teach a religion per unit, the ERC was organized thematically, allowing a comparative approach (although not promoted as such). Thus, while critics considered this teaching too relativistic, or accepting of all religions as legitimate ways of life, religious communities feared that this could lead young people to question their teachings and thus challenge parental rights to determine the religious education of their children ([Tremblay 2010](#)). Finally, those defending the strict vision of laïcité as opposed to religious display on the public sphere felt that the program should have adopted a critical view of religions, rather than showing respect for their worldview.

The new CCQ program, that will replace the ERC in fall 2024 focuses on three main areas:

1. The essence of Quebec culture, highlighting its history, foundations, and significant symbols.
2. Current societal topics, and emphasis on the role of students as well-informed citizens, touching on issues like freedom of speech, gender equality, and media literacy.

3. The importance of constructive dialogue—an emphasis akin to the ERC, but also adds a significant place to critical thinking.

While the program maintains the ERC's double objectives—to promote a “recognition of the other” (which has expanded to include “self-knowledge”) and the “pursuit of common good”—it adds as the first objective “exercising one's citizenship”.

The CCQ program maintains several themes that were treated in the Ethics stream of the ERC program, but brings distinct changes to teaching about religions. More importantly, it does not focus on religious expressions or specific religions (Boudreau 2011). First, it replaces the ERC competency that was devoted entirely to the study of religious culture with a disciplinary competency in sociology for the broader study of diverse cultural realities. The sociology competency—entitled “Studying cultural realities”—offers to develop students' skills to better analyze, observe, and explore the different aspects of life within Quebec society. Religion is therefore no longer the main object of study, but a cultural reality among others that must be circumscribed and analyzed through a range of appropriate knowledge in order to gain an enriched understanding of it. The ethical competence provides a space for discussion that recognizes the relevance of religion for some, but not for others. It also provides an opportunity to discuss the place given to religion in society, as well as attempts to restrict it in the public arena. This is where critical thinking and dialogue, which are cross-cutting components of this new program, come into play.

Secondly, the way religion is studied has also changed. It is analyzed through the social relations that are established within it. It proposes to treat religious diversity as just one of a number of different forms of diversity, including other markers of diversity such as gender, class, or ethnicity. It approaches religions as one worldview among others, while devoting a specific place to the study of what distinguishes them from others, notably narratives, rites, and rules. Thus, although religion has lost its priority in the revised program, it has not disappeared entirely.

Though these two distinct changes from the ERC to the CCQ discuss religions, religious identity, and religious culture more broadly than before, religion is specifically mentioned in three themes. In the curriculum of Secondary school—Year One, religion is discussed as one of the aspects that define one's identity and recognises the place religion can occupy in the public sphere. This is thus an opportunity to talk about religious diversity in society, but also within each religion, through reflection on how each person belongs to a community. This relates to religious literacy principles one and five listed above. For example, as the first principle highlights the internal diversity within all groups, this theme offers the opportunity to understand that there are many sects in Islam, and that diversity exists in each one, such that all Sunni Muslims are not the same. Each group or individuals within the global Sunni community express this aspect of their identity in different rituals, dress, celebrations, etc., and may hold varying perspectives on the same political issue.

In Secondary school—Year Four, religion is integrated in the theme “Culture and symbolic productions”, which suggests a better understanding of its components. It is a good opportunity to situate religions in their socio-economic and political context, and understand their contribution to the society in which they live. This relates to religious literacy principles three and four above. Principle three emphasizes the ways that religions, spiritualities, and non-religions inform all parts of society, and are informed by them, which can be seen when the values of non-religious individuals lead them to volunteer at food banks to serve other members of society, and when Jewish philanthropists have established hospitals that employ and care for people from all religious backgrounds, for example. Principle three also points out the changes of each worldview group overtime, and that none are static—most recently evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when all religious groups had to change the way they worshiped or celebrated sacred days. From a critical perspective, principle three also highlights the impact of governments that impose restrictions on religious and/or spiritual practices or expressions. In Canada, this speaks to the federal government's colonial practices that institutionally removed the cultural and

human rights of Indigenous groups for generations. Principle four opens this conversation by ensuring that spiritual and non-religious identities, communities, and perspectives are included in a Canadian approach to religious literacy.

Finally, at Secondary school—Year Five, in the theme “Quest for meaning and visions of the world”, religions are tackled among the forms of knowledge to be examined. It is an opportunity to reflect on the meaning that each believing, practicing, or self-affiliating person gives to belonging to a community. This relates to religious literacy principle two, about understanding how similarities exist across worldview groups but that they are each distinct, so that each community is recognized to be unique from another. For example, many Hindus and Sikhs celebrate Diwali together or in their own communities, but Hindus and Sikhs are also different in many ways. This theme relates to principle five as well, which emphasizes the need to see that worldviews hold a significant personal meaning to religious, spiritual, and non-religiously affiliated individuals. For example, a Metis person in Quebec may approach Catholicism in ways that reflect their unique Metis cultural heritage in Canada, the history of Quebec, the colonial history in Canada, and their own life experiences—something that other Catholics (and other Metis Catholics) may not understand or fully relate to.

While the focus on religion is more limited in the CCQ than it was in the ERC, the five elements of religious literacy can find their place in the CCQ curriculum. Indeed, the program no longer attaches any particular importance to religion. Rather, it recognises its place in the plural society in which we live in every sense of the word, and that this diversity must be recognized and understood in the broader context of a society that wants to encourage its citizens to live together. Additionally, through its aims, the new program enables students to get to know themselves better before setting out to meet others. Furthermore, its new curricula aim to promote the “exercise of one’s citizenship” legitimizes religion as an identity, especially as this aim is the overarching objective that guides the other two. Thus, the CCQ connects the conversation to local and global matters of oneself and citizenship, while engaging directly with religions, spiritualities, and non-religions. This is particularly noteworthy because Quebec society, like many others, holds a common social norm of “don’t ask; don’t tell” (Chan et al. 2023).

4. Opportunities for Educators

While teaching about religion in school is important to encourage religious literacy, it can also be nourished by discussing other topics in the classroom that are not necessarily related to religion but are influenced and informed by it. This can also become an opportunity for educators who are not in Quebec, or do not have a formal religious literacy curriculum like the CCQ, to still impart the religious literacy knowledge, skills, and attitude that create opportunities for important social studies conversations. These include three areas of growing concern locally, nationally, and globally: A lack of civil discourse and polarizing views; climate crisis; and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

These topics will no doubt be relevant for the CCQ, other religious literacy programs, or class discussions. Engaging students in these topics through religious literacy can prepare and offer students opportunities to understand, dialogue about, and engage with these local and global affairs connected to their current and future selves.

4.1. Addressing Polarization

Polarization of societies increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the global and regional conflicts soon after. It is a process that is changing societies and education has a role to play in preventing its further growth or addressing it.

While polarization of societies is observed in many nations worldwide and concerns different aspects of living together in society, when individuals and groups are unable or unwilling to engage across groups, often divided by their political, ethnic, national, and religious worldviews, religious differences are being targeted often as the cause of these disagreements. This seems however oversimplified, since religious literacy is grounded on the

concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016), which raises the need to recognize the other identities of gender, sexuality, mental and physical (dis)ability, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, and language, among others, that are deeply entwined with one's religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldviews or identities.

In Quebec, gender–race–ethnicity–religion are intertwined, displayed in the exceptionally high cases of reported hate crimes and incidents towards Arab-Muslim Montrealers (30 cases) and Jews (104 cases) in the five weeks after the attack on Israel by Hamas on 7 October 2023 (CTV News 2023). In Canada, sexuality–religion is intertwined, as some Christian and Muslim groups across the country protested against the teaching about two-spirited, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other non-heterosexual identities in schools (CBC News 2023). In much of the world, class–race–ethnicity–nationality–religion are intertwined, as seen in parts of the Middle East where South Asian labourers of different ethnic, racial, national, and religious backgrounds are employed in low wage jobs and precarious living conditions (Vora and Le Renard 2021). The power differences in each circumstance are related to the many aspects of identities, but also to politics, including intentional exclusion of others, such as the systematic removal of Myanmar citizenship among Rohingya Muslims, promoted by local fundamentalist Buddhist leaders in the majority-Buddhist nation (Albert and Maizland 2020).

The principles of religious literacy guide us to perceive these complex and interconnected lived realities in Quebec, Canada, and globally to see that polarizing “religious” concerns are steeped in multi-faceted layers of politics related to many intersecting identities. Intersectionality, as part of a discussion of religious literacy, helps us challenge simplified narratives that promote polarization in society by perceiving that religion is only one part of the full conversation.

4.2. Discussing the Climate Crisis

Climate change and climate action is a global issue that affects everyone and everything. Thus, a desire to address climate change, or climate crisis as some refer to it now, requires engagement with others. In parts of the world where there is an increasing number of non-religiously affiliated individuals, such as North America and Western Europe, religious literacy reminds us to engage with everyone—including those who may be religious and addressing the climate crisis from their worldview. Examples include the following:

- ARocha Canada, a Christian organization (<https://arocha.ca/who-we-are-a-rocha-canada/> accessed on 25 July 2024)
- EcoSikh (<https://ecosikh.org/> accessed on 25 July 2024)
- EnviroMuslims (<https://enviromuslims.ca/> accessed on 25 July 2024)
- The International Environment Forum inspired by the Bahá'í faith (<https://www.iefworld.org/> accessed on 25 July 2024)
- Green Faith (<https://greenfaith.org/> accessed on 25 July 2024)
- Jewcology.org is (<https://jewcology.org/about/> accessed on 25 July 2024)
- Keepers of the Water (<https://www.keepersofthewater.ca/> accessed on 25 July 2024)
- One Earth Sangha (<https://oneearthsangha.org/> accessed on 25 July 2024)

All of these organizations address the climate crisis based on the values, principles, and teachings from their specific worldviews.

In order to engage more individuals towards climate action and collaborate together, one must be open to understanding and dialogue with people of different (or similar) religious and spiritual foundations, and find points of connection based on an understanding and recognition of these commitments that lead towards action. In many cases, there is a lot that can be learned from certain groups through their generations of environmental efforts, such as the leaders of Ethiopia's church forests (see Dodds 2021) and Indigenous efforts that may have not been previously documented in writing.

4.3. Engaging Reconciliation

A third and equally challenging topic to broach in some contexts is that of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Since the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, different countries have adopted it, including Canada in 2021. This followed reports by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission who detailed the cultural genocide and intergenerational trauma that Indigenous Peoples in Canada had experienced, which remains today ([Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015](#)).

In Canada, colonization was premised on a mixture of political ambitions, economic gains, and religious zeal, similar to other forms of colonization towards Indigenous groups around the world. To build and repair relationships with local Indigenous individuals and communities, one must first acknowledge and be truthful about the harm that has been done. This truthful acknowledgement requires an engagement with the religious goals and maltreatment that have led to intergenerational trauma, cultural genocide, and racism. The prohibition of sacred Indigenous ceremonies and practices, such as the powwow, the potlatch, jingle dances, and smudging in Canada, to name a few, were forms of systemic discrimination that were strategically created to eliminate one spiritual practice for another. As spirituality is a deep and explicit component of most Indigenous cultures, reconciliation requires engagement with this openly. The religious literacy principles offer a lens and tool to perceive the place of religion and spirituality in the many ways it is understood within different Indigenous cultures, and how each person engages with it uniquely.

Further, religious literacy in social studies curricula (of all kinds) can help students broach these pressing macro issues in relation to themselves. The disciplinary tools enable students to learn about religions, spirituality, and non-religion in a different way, by developing both a more analytical understanding of their place in society, and by allowing them to elaborate their own point of view on the issue, especially through principle five. This principle also allows students to consider how religious, spiritual, or non-religious identity may be an irreconcilable part of their identity, while it is not so for others from the same community group. In exploring this discussion further, the dialogue, listening, and inquiry skills important in religious literacy also create opportunities to open up other locally controversial conversations, such as that related to differences in gender, sexuality, race, or ethnicity (see [Hirsch 2022](#); [Lester and Chan 2022](#)).

Quebec's CCQ is promising in these regards as it creates opportunities to engage with each of these pressing topics, especially as it connects discussion about religious individuals to exercising one's citizenship and that of others—a view towards local and global citizenship.

5. Application

While the announcement of the ERC revision and the plan for a new programme declaring its main interest to be Quebec's culture has been criticized by some who were worried about the disappearance of religious education in schools, an analysis of the place given to religion in the new curriculum shows that it offers new opportunities to develop religious literacy differently. The avenues in the CCQ to promote religious literacy and mutual understanding of diverse religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldviews are valuable as both forms of engagement are indispensable to fostering social cohesion in any society.

However, educators reading this article who do not teach in Quebec may ask, Where do I begin?

Most educators are not trained to teach about religion, spirituality, or non-religion. In societies where “don't ask; don't tell” is prevalent, educators may not have the curriculum or resources to begin this conversation. For educators who want to engage in this beneficial development among students, we encourage them as follows:

- (1) To remember that religion, spirituality, and non-religion are part of a larger social conversation. Including the conversation in an interdisciplinary manner is one way

to begin the conversation and guide students to see its existence in society and that it is possible (and necessary) to engage with religious, spiritual, and non-religious worldviews in an informed manner.

- (2) To use the religious literacy principles to guide classroom discussion. Often, principles #1 and #2 are the easiest to begin introducing first, as they can dismantle stereotypes. Start small, with one principle at a time.

Like other contexts, this is a local conversation that is informed by local histories, cultures, and voices. Let the context speak through, so that this is a locally relevant conversation, and let the five principles of religious literacy be a guide.

6. Conclusions

In a region and world that seems to be increasingly siloed, where discussion of religion and politics is not socially welcomed for fear of conflict or disagreement, we have discussed how religious literacy offers concrete guidance to enable constructive and respectful dialogue. Religious literacy's embedded skills, knowledge, lenses, and attitudes are practical and academic. They open dialogue and engagement with notions, ideas, and new changes that are challenging for adult educators, let alone students of all ages. Where there is fear of disagreement, religious literacy helps us understand that constructive and respectful disagreement and inquiry about differences are natural, valuable, and possible. Where there is conflict, religious literacy offers key principles to understand challenging and complex realities from the micro to macro levels of society so we can systematically unpack the details. This recognition is exceptionally important for social studies educators and curricula that engage with an ever-changing world and requires educators to speak to and analyze potentially new, dramatic, and multi-faceted global events where more questions than answers exist.

In a religiously diverse context like Quebec, we have explained that the CCQ presents room for a religiously literate engagement with religious, spiritual, and non-religious aspects of social and personal life. Moreover, the CCQ curriculum shows that such conversations and insights are important, even in a context with high levels of tension and discrimination towards religion and the religious.

For global and complex matters, such as polarizing societies, the climate crisis, and reconciliation, we also discussed how religious literacy can build bridges towards understanding, potential partnerships, and change. None of these matters are simple and straightforward for educators or anyone in society, but religious literacy offers the guidance to unpack it a little bit at a time with a clear, nuanced, and respectful approach—an important way to break the silence of “don’t ask; don’t tell”.

Author Contributions: All authors contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing of the article; detailed analysis of the CCQ curricula, S.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This article did not require ethical approval to complete.

Informed Consent Statement: This article did not involve human participants.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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