



Religious Literacy for Youth Workers

Just as media literacy is indispensable due to omnipresent media messages and new technologies, religious literacy is a skill essential for youth work because young people come from diverse cultural backgrounds with various beliefs and non-beliefs. European society is multicultural and multireligious. Youth from minority communities is even harder to reach, so youth workers need to improve intercultural communication, and this is facilitated by solid religious knowledge and open attitudes towards different worldviews.

Due to its contribution to intercultural communication and raising awareness of diversity and cultural identities, religious literacy and ability to have an interreligious/intercultural dialogue are important elements of citizenship competence. As religion affects numerous aspects of the human experience both on individual and social level, understanding of key religious tenets is a crucial skill for youth workers.

Here are some of the key points regarding religious literacy:

- It is not about memorising facts or doctrines, rather about developing a critical awareness of how religion shapes people's identities, experiences, and interactions. It involves recognizing the diversity and complexity of religious traditions, as well as the commonalities and differences among them.
- It also requires acknowledging the role of power and privilege in shaping religious narratives and representations, and challenging stereotypes and prejudices that can lead to discrimination and violence.

- It can be enhanced through various strategies, such as learning from authentic sources and voices, engaging in dialogue and action with people of different faiths and worldviews, and reflecting on one's own assumptions and biases. Using simple language helps in explaining and understanding religious concepts.
- It can help in understanding youth perspectives, values, and needs, as well as to foster respectful dialogue and inclusion in the community.
- Interreligious dialogue always happens between people, not between religions. Therefore be aware that personal views, including your own, may not represent a particular religion or belief completely accurately.

Freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Articles 18 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In line with these provisions, the European Union has recalled that "freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, applies equally to all persons. It is a fundamental freedom that includes all religions or beliefs, including those that have not been traditionally practised in a particular country, the beliefs of persons belonging to religious minorities, as well as non-theistic and atheistic beliefs. The freedom also covers the right to adopt, change or abandon one's religion or belief, of one's own free will." (Council Conclusions on Freedom of religion or belief; 16 November 2009)

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