

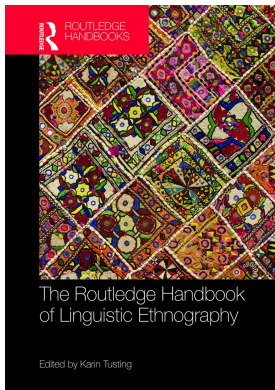
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Karin Tusting

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Vally Lytra

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Faith communities

Vally Lytra

Introduction

It's 8.05 on a bright and crisp Tuesday morning. When I enter the Temple I am immediately struck by how busy it is even though the Temple has just opened its doors. Families are coming into the Temple. Some children are dressed in their school uniforms and it looks like they are visiting the Temple on their way to school. I see a mother with her little girl - around 2 years old. The little one wants to run ahead but her mum is holding her tight by the hand. They walk up to the shrine of Ganesh. They circle the shrine a number of times. I also see a father with a school age boy in school uniform. They are standing slightly to the side of one of the smaller shrines on the left of the entrance to the Temple. The father touches his son's head and dabs red ash on his forehead. The boy quietly follows his father as he stops to pray at each shrine. The movements of the father and son are almost in unison as though they have performed these routines together time and again.

(Vally Lytra, field narrative 6/10/2009, reported in Lytra et al., 2016, p. 141)

The short excerpt of Temple worship from one of my early visits to the Sri Murugan Temple is illustrative of the centrality of faith in the lives of many British-born Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu/Saiva children and their families living in Newham, one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse boroughs in East London. Through Temple worship children acquire a wealth of linguistic and cultural resources, and aesthetic and historical knowledge, and cultivate age-appropriate emotional responses and embodied dispositions as they strive to become members of the faith community. In this journey, they observe, practise and perform devotional acts alongside parents, siblings, grandparents and other members of the faith community who act as mediators to the children's religious socialisation and learning. In the diaspora, Temple worship may be accompanied by religious education classes, which children attend on weekends, where they learn to listen to, recite, memorise and sing fluently and accurately *Thevarams*, devotional hymns in archaic forms of literate Tamil. As children progress in their religious learning, they start to develop an understanding of the history of the hymns and the stories about the lives of the saints who created them, and explore the

meanings of religious concepts and their significance to their daily worship in present-day London (Lytra et al., 2016). On auspicious holidays, children may partake in highly scripted religious music, dance and drama performances, usually performed in front of large audiences. At home, their faith learning may be sustained through family viewings of religious films and engagement with siblings in spontaneous and fluid, faith-inspired, story-telling and play activities using Lego blocks and other everyday objects (e.g. in playing “Temple”) (Gregory et al., 2013; Gregory et al., 2015).

Faith underpins the everyday experiences of many children and adults. It has been viewed as an important source of support, comfort and hope, as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of a globalised world and participate in multilingual, multicultural, multiethnic and multifaith societies. This is especially true for individuals and communities new to a country, or facing hardship and discrimination. For instance, the role of the Black Church in fostering resilience and inspiring educational effort and persistence for African American youth in the US has been well documented (McMillon & Edwards, 2000; Haight, 2002; Barrett, 2010; Peele-Eady, 2011, 2016). For some Latino children and their families in the US, religion has been an important source of spiritual and material support to resist the racism and marginalisation many face in their daily lives (Baquedano-López & Ochs, 2002; Ek, 2005; Volk, 2016). Some faith communities are majority, while others are minority religions that have been formed at different historical periods as a consequence of migration, trade, colonialism, slavery or religious persecution. However, empirical studies of faith communities and their role in children and adults’ learning, socialisation and personal and collective identification have hitherto received limited scholarly attention (see Rosowsky, 2015 for an overview and the collection of studies in Lytra et al., 2016a).

Faith is often perceived as a very private, deeply personal matter. Consequently, research undertaken with faith communities may be considered to be “intrusive, insensitive, or even disrespectful” (Gregory et al., 2012, p. 197). Moreover, it is often anchored in the belief that only if one is a member of the faith community can one truly understand the religious rituals and sacred texts (Sarroub, 2005; Fader, 2009; see further discussion in *Main research methods* section, below). These widely held perceptions have been heightened by the secularisation of social life and the compartmentalisation of the secular and the religious, the public and private spheres, in many contemporary societies around the world. At the same time, there is a growing recognition of what Baquedano-López and Ochs (2002, p. 175) have referred to as the “entanglement” of the secular and the religious, pointing to the existence of more porous and fluid boundaries. Despite changes in the religious landscape, faith is an important driving force in contemporary societies (Report of the Commission of Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 2015). In the current climate of political, social and religious tensions, religious persecution is becoming an increasing “global problem” and religious discrimination “a ubiquitous fact of life irrespective of people’s creed” (Fox, 2015). In Europe, faith communities, especially minority ones, are often at the centre of debates over individual and collective rights, difference and social justice (Equinet, 2011). Examples such as the ban of ostensible religious symbols in state schools in France in 2004 or the Swiss referendum on the ban of construction of new minarets in mosques in 2009 have fuelled controversy about the place of religion in public life in general and in state schools in particular. This is reinforced by mainstream media portrayals that tend to stereotype or misrepresent the experiences of members of minority faith communities and privilege dominant narratives of majority faith communities. Rather than ignoring or dismissing faith in contemporary societies, I would argue that it is important to engage with research that seeks to understand the role of diverse faith contexts in the development of children and adults’ identities, belief

systems, languages and cultural traditions. This call for sustained dialogue can contribute to discussions on how multicultural, pluralistic societies are to be envisioned and created.

To this end, in this chapter, I present and discuss an emergent body of research that has viewed faith as an essential part of culture, a complex and multifaceted cultural practice that is embedded in specific local and global contexts and is passed down from one generation to the next, providing children and adults with membership and a sense of belonging. In this respect, becoming a member of the faith community does not only involve acquiring the necessary language and literacy-oriented skills to decode, recite, listen and respond to, chant or sing sacred texts in order to partake in religious ritual but also new ways of being, acting and seeing the world through religious frames of understanding, interpretation and belonging (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984; Gregory & Williams, 2000; also see studies in Gregory et al., 2004; Lytra et al., 2016a).

In the ensuing sections, first I trace the interdisciplinary antecedents of this emergent scholarship, drawing on work in social psychology, anthropology and literacy studies. Then, I review studies on faith communities, which highlight the importance of faith as a situated cultural practice embedded in rich ethnographic descriptions of diverse faith contexts, including religious education classes, religious and faith-inspired schools, homes and places of worship and other community settings. It is important to stress here that the purpose of these descriptions is not to reproduce or reinforce stereotypes, nor to represent faith communities and the practices described as homogeneous, static and unchanging over time and space and across generations. Rather, these accounts seek to demonstrate how an analytical focus on situated language and literacy practices can shed light on how distinct faith communities have developed, adapted and transformed as a result of institutional as well as broader social, political and historical forces. Even though many of these studies share theories and methods with scholarship in linguistic ethnography, to date, linguistic ethnography has not been used as a theoretical and methodological approach to the study of faith communities (with the notable exceptions of Sagoo, 2016 and Volk, 2016). Yet, if the aim of linguistic ethnography is to uncover how language and social life mutually shape one another in specific situated cultural practices (Rampton et al., 2004), then, I would argue, it is important to interrogate how the study of faith as a cultural practice can contribute to linguistic ethnography. I briefly discuss main research methods used and the implications of research with faith communities for teaching and learning in schools and classrooms and conclude this chapter with areas for future research.

Historical perspectives

Maybin and Tusting (2011) describe linguistic ethnography as “a broad area of shared interests rather than a distinctly bounded field”, drawing on a range of theories and methods (see also Creese, 2008; Shaw et al., 2015). In a similar vein, early investigations of faith as a situated cultural practice have been inspired by work in social psychology, anthropology and literacy studies, particularly the New Literacy Studies approach. The latter has also been closely associated with the development of linguistic ethnography (Maybin & Tusting, 2011; also Rampton et al., 2004, and see Gillen and Ho, this volume). Early studies challenged traditional conceptualisations of literacy as a set of technical skills and foregrounded the intertwining of the cognitive with the social, cultural, historical and ideological dimensions of language and literacy learning and socialisation through faith. They also urged language and literacy researchers to look beyond formal schooling models of literacy to literacies in everyday life, including religious education classes, places of worship and children’s homes. Three ethnographic studies

by Scribner and Cole (1981), Street (1984) and Heath (1983) have been especially influential in paving the way for subsequent research. Combining anthropological fieldwork with experimental psychological methods, social psychologists Scribner and Cole (1981) examined the interconnection between cognition and literacy development in the Vai, a traditional society living in North-western Liberia. They observed how the Vai became literate in one or more writing systems which had broadly speaking distinct functions although their boundaries in everyday use were often blurred: the indigenous Vai phonetic script used locally in daily communication, Qu'ranic Arabic for religious purposes and English, the official script used nationally in political, educational and economic institutions (Scribner & Cole, 1981, pp. 62–63). In particular, they investigated how children and young adults acquired Qu'ranic literacy in multi-age Qu'ranic schools through the recitation and memorisation of Qu'ranic verses. The majority learned to recite and write out verses without understanding the language. Few who completed the Qu'ran were able to proceed to advanced studies, which included learning Arabic as a language and studying Islamic theology and jurisprudence (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 63). The authors demonstrated the social, cultural, religious and economic consequences of developing Qu'ranic literacy, arguing that “becoming literate in the Arabic language means becoming integrated into a close-knit but territorially extended social network, which fuses religious beliefs, fraternal self-help, trade and economic relationships with opportunities for continuing education” (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 63).

This account links closely to the study of anthropologist Brian Street (1984) on “maktab” literacy (Islamic school literacy) in a rural village in North-East Iran during the 1970s. Street's ethnographic fieldwork led him to propose an “ideological” model of literacy which understood literacy as a social practice that is infused by particular conceptions of knowledge that privilege certain meanings and interpretations of literacy over others. This model of literacy he contrasted with an “autonomous” model, which saw literacy as a set of neutral skills and competences. Street observed a wide range of complex literacy practices involved in the development of “maktab” literacy:

while some learned to simply recognise the words on the page as a sort of mnemonic for stimulating recitation of passages, many learnt to read in Arabic and Farsi and used their skills to read other texts than the Koran. Some developed skills in interpretation and argument, and some learnt to elaborate on basic themes and to express their ‘meaning in various forms’. A few learnt the rudiments of writing.

(Street, 1984, p. 152)

An important finding of Street's study was the transferability of specific literacy skills connected to “maktab” literacy in the acquisition of new literacy practices, such as the adaptation of “maktab” literacy for the development of “commercial” literacy that was associated with the economic growth of early 1970s Iran.

The importance of faith in shaping children's apprenticeship into the different linguistic and cultural practices of their respective communities is illustrated in Heath's (1983) comparative ethnography of children's early language socialisation. In “Ways with Words”, she documented how children growing up in two communities, Roadville (white working class) and Trackton (black working class), in the South-Eastern United States learned to use language in different ways at home and in the community, including the fundamentalist Protestant Church and the Black Church, respectively. Heath demonstrated how features of vocabulary, narratives, songs and interaction patterns children learned in Church or through listening to Biblical parables and Church-related stories became intertwined with children's

everyday talk and verbal activities at home. In one example, two and a half year old Lem from the Trackton community constructed a story-poem in response to the distant ringing of a church bell (Heath, 1983, p. 170). Lem's story resembled a poem in terms of imagery and prosody, which he performed while swaying back and forth. Echoing his participation in weekly church services with his family, the structure and delivery of his story-poem combined features from religious language (rhyming, repetition) and modes of discourse ("call-and-response") with an outline of a sequence of events. In the Roadville community, story-telling was understood as "true to the facts of an event" and adults saw story-telling as didactic in nature (Heath, 1983, p. 186). For instance, the use of a Scriptural quotation in a story had the purpose of reproducing and reinforcing expected norms of behaviour of all community members.

Both examples of story-telling highlighted the impact of Church-related literacies on early language socialisation but also foregrounded the mismatch between the language and literacy practices, experiences and expectations of the two non-mainstream communities and those of the mainstream school. Heath's study sought to counter deficit perspectives that tend to associate children from working-class and ethnically diverse backgrounds with academic failure and represent the young children and their families as active, creative and agentive meaning-makers in their own right. More broadly, the aforementioned studies emphasised the intertwining of language and literacy practices associated with faith with broader repertoires of everyday social and cultural practices, and the breadth and scope of faith as a force for learning, socialisation and belonging for individuals and communities.

Critical issues and debates

Despite the seminal studies presented in the previous section, the study of faith as a cultural practice is still a peripheral topic in the academic literature. Ethnographically informed studies of faith as a cultural practice have mainly been concerned with children and adolescents living and learning in bilingual/multilingual settings across diverse faith contexts, including religious education classes, religious and faith-inspired schools, homes, places of worship and other community settings. It is noteworthy to mention here that the boundaries of these settings are by no means sealed. Rather, faith contexts are understood as linked, permeable and dynamic, bridging home, school and community, where language and literacy resources, spiritual and moral beliefs, values and dispositions alongside strong expectations of high standards and achievement travel across spaces and shape faith learning and learning more generally (Lytra et al., 2016b). In one such study, Kenner et al. (2016) illustrate how Ghanaian Pentecostal and Bangladeshi Muslim faith communities take a holistic approach to children's learning by guiding them in developing language and literacy skills that can transfer in their mainstream education. At the same time, they foster resilience to overcome adversity, racism and low expectations about their educational achievement in the wider society. As the authors describe children's participation and uptake of leadership roles in communal worship during Children's Day, a special celebration in the Pentecostal Church, they show how children of different ages recited verses of varying length and complexity they had memorised from the Bible and performed action songs. All children were constructed as successful learners by being applauded and encouraged through cheers and spoken responses by the congregation. The collective blessing that followed served to celebrate their achievement and unite the children and their families with the faith community. A similar holistic vision of children's educational development and achievement was evidenced in Sago's (2016) study of the Nishkam Nursery project in Birmingham, in central England. Inspired by Sikh

religious heritage, the nursery sought to fuse values, practices and identities from the children's different worlds of home, school and faith communities.

Faith learning has an additional moral and spiritual dimension that distinguishes its purpose from learning in other contexts: the knowledge, competences and performances learned and perfected over time are the means to partake in religious ritual in the context of the faith community with the purpose of ultimately building a relationship with a higher and eternal being (Gregory et al., 2012; Lytra et al., 2016b). In the remainder of the section, key threads running through studies of faith as cultural practice are discussed. These themes may be relevant to linguistic ethnographers interested in the wealth of linguistic, cultural, social, scriptal and embodied resources, competences and practices, situated in specific times and locales, that children and adolescents weave into their faith learning as well as the complexities, contradictions and tensions involved in achieving membership in their respective faith communities. The studies discussed are underpinned by a strengths' perspective on children's and adolescents' multilingual, multiscriptal and multisemiotic resources, highlighting the heterogeneity of their trajectories, repertoires and identities while simultaneously attending to the broader social, cultural and institutional processes involved in meaning-making and identity formation. In this sense, they allow for the bridging between the micro level of the individual and the macro level of the social order.

A common theme has been the way in which faith learning is inextricably linked with children's moral and spiritual development and influences the construction of a shared identity and a shared past invoked through language. Baquedano-López (2008) explored the linguistic, interactional and textual resources a Sunday school teacher and her students made use of as the latter learned to recite a prayer in a "doctrina" class which is part of a Spanish-medium Catholic religious instruction programme for Mexican immigrant children in the US. Her study illustrated how through the reading activity, the faith teacher and the students engaged in "a ritualization process that focusses and constructs the text as sacred" (Baquedano-López, 2008, p. 581). At the same time, she corrected her students' utterances during the reading activity reinforcing the ideological orientation of the Mexican Catholic Church and faith classes regarding the importance of sustaining and developing Spanish proficiency in a diasporic context. In her analysis of the religious narrative of "Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe" (Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico), Baquedano-López (2000) demonstrated how the Sunday school teacher instructed students to construct and interpret the narrative in culturally appropriate ways: by combining the use of Spanish with factual (historical, geographical and moral) knowledge of the narrative. She argued (2000, p. 450) that the narrative tellings served "to narrate being Mexican, locating themselves across a distal colonial past in Mexico and their immediate postcolonial present as immigrants in Los Angeles". Uniting faith members' past, present and future and fostering a transnational identity also emerged amongst central American and Mexican youth in a Spanish-medium Pentecostal Church where young people were urged to construct their individual and collective identities following 'el camino' (God's path) (Ek, 2005, p. 77).

Other studies have probed into the language interrelationship between liturgical, minority and majority languages, written and vernacular forms. Moore (2008) examined the apprenticeship to Qur'anic literacy amongst the Fulbe in Northern Cameroon. Similar to Scribner and Cole's (1981) findings amongst the Vai, the study highlighted how students developed varying competences in memorising, reciting, reading and writing verses in Qur'anic Arabic without explanation of the meaning of the sacred text. For the Fulfulbe children as well as for many other children learning Qur'anic literacy around the world, Qur'anic Arabic is not their native language nor is it a language spoken in the local community. As a result, the faith

teacher relied on the interweaving of Qur'anic Arabic and Fulfulbe alongside the use of other semiotic resources (posture, pointing, gaze) to impart the religious knowledge as well as teach children proper spiritual and moral conduct (see also Moore, 2013). Rosowsky (2013, p. 67) discusses different interweaving of languages in his comparative study of children learning to read a "religious classical" that is the liturgical language of their faith community across three faith settings, a Jewish Cheder, a Sikh Gurdwara and a Muslim Mosque in the UK. His study highlighted the enduring importance and resilience of liturgical languages (Biblical Hebrew, Classical Punjabi and Qu'ranic Arabic) across the three settings and the symbolic and aesthetic values attributed to learning to read a liturgical language closely tied to the children's developing religious identities. In fact, the pre-eminence given to liturgical languages by faith communities may in fact deter the transmission of other ancestral languages across generations in a diasporic setting (Rosowsky, 2008).

As these studies have illustrated, in each faith setting, the language interrelationship is different. Moreover, language practices are shaped by hierarchies of knowledge and rankings of languages circulating locally, in the faith setting, as well as by long-standing, societal discourses and language policies (Baquedano-López and Ochs, 2002; Fader, 2009; Auleear Odowally & Unjore, 2013). Beliefs about languages link the linguistic with the social, the moral with the political and as such, they can never be taken as "natural", "transparent" or "neutral". A case in point is the study by Auleear Odowally and Unjore (2013). The authors conducted a series of interviews with participants in two Mauritian Sunni Muslim Madrassahs, including several faith teachers, in a period of transition when written Kreol (the dominant home language and local lingua franca) was being introduced as an optional mainstream primary school subject. The authors argued that while faith teachers in particular employed both oral and written forms of Kreol, amongst other languages, as a medium of religious instruction to teach children the main principles of Islam, they simultaneously undermined its importance. Influenced by official and popular beliefs about the low status of Kreol as a non-standard variety, faith teachers ultimately aspired to shift the written medium of instruction in Madrassahs to French. The latter was perceived as a more prestigious language, affording educational and professional mobility in a fast-developing postcolonial state.

A common feature of many studies is that they go beyond an exclusive focus on language to examine the broader relationships between language and other communicative modalities, including gesture, body posture and image as well as the materiality and technological dimensions of these practices. As Fader (2009, p. 6) eloquently puts it in her study of girls' multilingual literacy socialisation practices in a Hasidic (a nonliberal) Jewish religious community in Brooklyn, New York, "beliefs about language interact with beliefs about the body and material culture in specific historical and cultural ways." For instance, in the Hasidic elementary school where she conducted her fieldwork, young girls learned to recite *loshn koydesh* prayers (in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic) accurately and fluently alongside the appropriate external displays of affect and sincere intentions through sanctioned bodily movements and positions seen as preparing the young girls to become pious Jewish women.

Studies in home settings have also investigated how children make sense of their faith, drawing on a wide range of linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, embodied and social resources and practices. In Gregory et al. (2013), the authors explored how children from four faith communities (Polish Catholic, Ghanaian Pentecostal, Bangladeshi Muslim and Tamil Hindu/Saiva) in London syncretise faith with other activities in their everyday worlds. They showed how children combined, created and recreated different narratives, using different languages alongside music, dance and play to make sense of faith in their everyday lives. In one

narrative, seven-year-old Tanja created an imaginative story bringing together characters, plots and descriptions from different cultural traditions, namely popular fairy tales and films in English and tales of Hindu Gods and religious films in Tamil passed down from previous generations. Volk (2016) examined how six-year-old Benny engaged in a syncretic event, a home worship/Bible reading/reading lesson with the expert mediation of his Puerto Rican grandmother, both members of a Pentecostal Spanish-speaking Church in the US. Through the collaborative and fluid co-construction of reading the text, retelling the events and the meaning of the Bible story, Benny was able to develop his emergent bilingual and biliterate skills and represented himself as a successful reader, while attending to the moral message of the Bible story, the importance of obedience. Building on the aforementioned work by Heath (1983), these studies use a syncretic literacies lens to show “ways in which cultural threads from diverse sources are interwoven into a single interactional fabric and enacted in daily routines” by children and their families (Gregory et al., 2013, p. 345). They also show how the negotiation and construction of religious belonging intersect with the development of other identity categories linked to gender, ethnicity, race, youth/popular culture or that of a successful learner/reader.

Investigating the meaning-making resources and practices involved in becoming a competent member of the faith community has drawn attention to how children and young people may align themselves with or disaffiliate themselves from the social and cultural expectations, norms, values and behaviours of the faith community. Tusting (2015) explores the role of writing in a First Communion Preparation class in a Roman Catholic parish in the north of England. She shows how through processes of recontextualisation the children were invited to write themselves in the texts they produced by encouraging each child to draw on their personal experiences and circumstances in unique ways. As Tusting (2015, p. 248) remarks,

the role of writing in these sessions was not to construct Catholic identity as allegiance to the Church as an institution, or as assenting to a particular set of beliefs. Instead, children were writing new ways of seeing themselves, as a special individual, with a particular role to play in their communities, and the responsibility to make active choices.

Studies also emphasise moments of tension involved in the formation and negotiation of religious belonging and the construction of children’s identities in relation to their families, friends and faith community members, locally and translocally. Rumsey’s (2016) study focusses on the interrelated cultural practices of a sanctioned coming-of-age ritual called *Rumspringa* in Pennsylvania Dutch: adult baptism and entering the Amish community, and shunning as a consequence of leaving the faith community. Through these faith practices, adolescents can decide whether or not to participate in the Amish community. She observes that such practices are not exclusive to the Amish community but “are mirrored in faith communities all over the world” as their purpose is “to maintain group cohesion and to pass on the literacy knowledge between generations of community members” (Rumsey, 2016, p. 57). In another study, Auleear Owodally (2016, p. 162) describes how her nine-year-old daughter Halimah navigated what she referred to as a “mixed faith situation” of attending a private Roman Catholic school while being exposed to Islamic religious practices and discourses at home and in the madrassah, in Mauritius. Her participation in a school musical play of Joseph produced such moments of tension which she sought to address by strategically compartmentalising her different social identities and keeping the social worlds of the school and the madrassah separate as she strove to become a Mauritian Muslim.

These studies reflect a broad constructionist approach to identities, emphasising multiplicity, fluidity and fragmentation. Identities are viewed as relational, negotiable and performed in practices, performances and social behaviours in complex and nuanced ways (Gee, 2000). They provide a window into the interplay between individuals' agency to negotiate, resist and transform self and other ascriptions and the broader societal discourses that may constrain or energise them (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). At the same time they signal an apparent contradiction between the researchers' theoretical orientations towards identities as negotiated and discursively constructed and how parents, religious education teachers and religious leaders may often reify, essentialise or romanticise children's identities (Baquedano-López & Ochs, 2002; Souza, 2016; Lytra et al., 2016a). Taken together, these studies illustrate that faith communities create supportive spaces for children's learning and identity construction but that learning to participate in faith communities may be fraught with conflict, tension and contradiction as children learn to navigate different social worlds.

Main research methods

Studies of faith as a cultural practice have mainly drawn on ethnographic methodologies that seek to interpret the children's faith practices and performances from an emic or participants' perspective while attending to the researchers' theoretical orientations and positionings (the etic perspective) (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). A common feature of many of these studies is the researchers' sustained engagement with the faith community, often over several years and across multiple sites (e.g. homes, religious education classes, places of worship). In this sense, they provide both a longitudinal and a contemporary account of faith practices, as they are co-constructed with the participants and are situated in local and global contexts.

Researchers working in diverse faith settings have critically reflected on how they built relationships in the field as well as how they negotiated their identities. In particular, scholars have considered the difficulties in conducting research when one is not a member of the faith community. In her ethnography of Yemeni-American female high school students, Sarroub (2005, p. 17) comments on how her mixed ethnicity and non-religious stance were sometimes seen as a problem by her participants: "the underlying assumption among my informants was that I would not understand them if I was not really Muslim as they were. As an outsider I could never capture their reality." Other scholars have indicated that being a member of the faith community is an important criterion for acceptance as a researcher (Rosowsky, 2008; Rumsey, 2010). These reflections highlight how the researchers' biographies, histories and identities inform the research process and how participants' voices are represented and knowledge is constructed and legitimised. They also demonstrate some of the constraints involved in doing research specifically with faith communities where faith is considered a very private part of life (Fader, 2009).

Researching with children raises additional challenges to researcher positionality, knowledge building and representation due to the imbalance between the adult researcher and the child participant. In this respect, researchers need to move beyond adult-centric perspectives of children's practices, beliefs and identities to ensure that they hear the children's voices and include them in their research narratives. In addition, they need to develop child-friendly methodologies that provide children with tools that allow them to represent their knowledge, experiences and interpretations in ways that are meaningful to them (Lytra et al., 2017).

Scholars working with children and young people in diverse faith settings have used a number of strategies to address these challenges. Eve Gregory and colleagues worked with

a multilingual, multicultural and multifaith research team, developing reflexive practices in team ethnography and encouraging members of the faith community to participate in data collection and analysis (Gregory et al., 2012). Some researchers have relied on cultural insiders and engaged in member checking (Volk, 2016), while others have used autoethnography (Auleear Odowally, 2016; Rumsey, 2016) to develop more polyphonic representations.

As far as methods of data collection and analysis are concerned, there is a broadening of range associated with a conceptual shift to visual and multimodal research methods (Martin-Jones and Martin, 2017, and see Bezemer, this volume). To engage the active participation of children in the research process, participant observations, interviews, photography, audio and video recordings may be enhanced by children's text-making, such as mind maps (Kenner et al., 2016) and scrapbooks (Lytra et al., 2016, 2017). Methods of data analysis attend to the interplay of multilingual, multimodal and embodied resources (Baquedano-López, 2008; Fader, 2009; Auleear Odowally, 2016; Rumsey, 2016).

Implications for practice

For researchers doing linguistic ethnography in educational settings, the studies of faith communities presented in the chapter highlight the rich and complex multilingual, multiscriptal and multimodal practices that exist beyond schools and the children and young people's ability to draw upon and syncretise this wealth of meaning-making resources from diverse faith settings to support their faith learning and develop their faith identities. Thus, the study of children's and adolescents' languages, literacies and identities in faith settings is crucial not only for understanding the selves they bring into the classroom but also how their faith identities may affect their learning and achievement in school. Consequently, they raise two important questions: How might the knowledge gained from diverse faith settings transform classroom pedagogies? How might it help teachers create more equitable practices? These questions become all the more pertinent as dominant social and educational discourses in many contemporary societies frequently trivialise, marginalise or render problematic learning in and through faith, particularly in relation to school literacies (Gregory et al., 2004; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Dávila, 2015; Lytra et al., 2016b).

Inspired by her own unique religious and cultural upbringing rendered invisible at school, Dávila (2015) investigated a group of pre-service elementary teachers' responses towards integrating a children's book like "In My Family/En Mi Familia" (1996) by Mexican-American author Carmen Lomas Garza in their future English language arts classrooms and discussing its religious content and significance with their future students. Her analysis indicated that most teachers expressed a willingness to use the children's book to raise awareness of Hispanic/Latino heritage in the US in general amongst their future students. However, few would engage with the culturally relevant religious content of the book. Dávila's findings offered insights into ongoing concerns in the US about how cultural and religious illiteracy particularly towards the traditions of non-mainstream communities may in fact reinforce othering narratives and further marginalise these communities. Instead, she advocated for the need of religious neutrality in schools viewed as preparing pre-service teachers "to be inclusive of different religious perspectives whenever relevant" and "cultivate children's cultural/religious literacies in becoming citizens of a pluralistic society" (Dávila, 2015, p. 78). To date, studies that have explored how children might leverage their religious knowledge and experience to support school learning and the understanding, interpretation and production of secular texts remain very few (Reyes, 2009; Skerrett, 2013; Damico & Hall, 2014; Machado et al., 2017).

Future directions

The intensification of transnational population flows across the globe (see Grey and Piller, this volume) has brought about significant social, cultural and demographic changes, including tremendous changes in the religious landscape (Report of the Commission of Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 2015). These changes have propelled researchers working with faith communities to focus on complex diversities and mobilities questioning dominant, bounded and fixed representations of faith communities. As the studies discussed in this chapter attest to, the relationship between ethnicity, language and faith remains strong for many faith communities worldwide (Souza, 2016); how this relationship might have developed and changed across generations and geographical spaces and within faith settings raises new questions about the constitution of social groups and the negotiation and construction of cultural practices and membership (Moore, 2011; Rosowsky, 2008, 2013). My own observations and discussions with others about the changing membership of faith communities in Lausanne, Switzerland, point to the constitution of increasingly multilingual and multiethnic congregations where integration into the majority society seems to emerge as a compelling factor for participation in the local (French-medium) Roman Catholic Church (Anita Auer, personal communication).

Moreover, the research focus has been primarily on those who remain within the folds of the faith community; a lot less attention has been paid on those who struggle or who fail to stay. A case in point is Rumsey's (2016) discussion of those who choose to alienate themselves from the Amish Church, and the practice of shunning which regulates relationships between a person who has left the Church after joining it or has been excommunicated for not abiding to the Amish way of life. In another study, Fader (2014) examines the use of the Internet and in particular the blogging practices of a group of nonliberal Jews who used their posts to challenge their own faith communities, drawing on varieties of English and Yiddish and their orthographies in gendered ways. Through the on-line spaces they created, "these bloggers anonymously posted critiques of nonliberal Jewish life, explored secular knowledge, met each other online and offline to socialize, and experimented with self-expression in multiple languages".

Fader's study and those of others attest to the growing prominence of new communication technologies in faith settings (see studies in Rosowsky, 2017a). Faith community members can virtually attend a religious service and partake in prayer and other religious rituals and ceremonies (Jacobs, 2007; Rosowsky, 2017b). They can also share their faith experiences through social networking sites, like Facebook (Souza, 2017), blogs (Lieber, 2010) and Internet discussion forums, and on-line video sharing platforms (Peuronen, 2017). In so doing, they create virtual spaces for self-expression and the cultivation of social relations that transcend face-to-face encounters and physical encounters, consolidate existing membership and attract new members. Peuronen's (2017) study, in particular, focusses on a community of Christian lifestyle sports enthusiasts in Finland and looks at how, through linguistic, semiotic and discursive practices, they negotiate membership and position themselves and others in relation to their Christian/evangelistic mission and the snowboarding culture both on-line and in face-to-face conversations in snowboarding camps. These studies at the intersection of religion and digital media have pointed to new ways of thinking about how faith communities are constituted and imagined, and how the boundaries between secular and sacred spaces are negotiated and redefined both on-line and off-line. They have also raised important questions about the mediation of religious experience and its authenticity and appropriateness, emphasising the deployment of a wide range of linguistic, scriptal and other semiotic resources across contexts and media.

Further reading

- Lytra, V., Volk, D., & E. Gregory. (Eds.) (2016). *Navigating languages, literacies and identities: Religion in young lives*. New York: Routledge. (This edited collection investigates how children and adolescents leverage rich and complex multilingual, multiscriptal and multimodal practices associated with religion to perform their religious subjectivities, in homes, religious education classes, faith-inspired schools and places of worship across a range of religious communities.)
- Rosowsky, A. (2008). *Heavenly readings: Liturgical literacy in a multilingual context*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. (This ethnographic study examines the literacy practices associated with Islam of a multilingual Muslim community in the UK and how these practices have come to shape community members' individual and collective identities in a diasporic context.)
- Skerrett, A. (2013). Religious literacies in a secular literacy classroom. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 49(2), 233–250. (In this article, the author explores how a language arts teacher recruited the students' religious literacies for understanding and analysing secular texts and producing academic writing in a US classroom.)

Related topics

Multimodality; Sociolinguistic ethnographies of globalisation; Ethics; Collaborative ethnography; Language diversity in classroom settings; Youth language.

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