Editorial: Religion and Education

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Our religions constitute one of the most important sources and resources for general human wellbeing, spirituality and human development, education, and social behavior. This is recognized and explored by researchers in a wide diversity of contexts and social spaces worldwide. Internationally, critical reflection and dialogue on our religions also occupy a central position in educational theories and practices. In post-apartheid South Africa, the situation is not different. With Prof Kader Asmal's official launching of the Government-sanctioned National Policy on Religion and Education (2003), our South African government recognized the important role our religions play in education, in our communities as well as the country at large. It is also seminally recognized that even though it is not indispensable, religion forms a seminal part of education in many environments (Sachs 1990).

Government also created the conditions of possibility for the contributions of the scholarly community and researchers in the developing of the requisite ideas, theories, paradigms, discourse and related practices (cf. Smit & Chetty 2009:331 - 353). The developing and fostering of integrated approaches in education, and teaching and learning about religion and the wide variety of denominations and orders we find in South Africa have taken a central position in our academic endeavours. It is in this wide arena that this volume of Alternation is making a further contribution and taking further our critical reflection and research[1]. It provides an opportunity to critically

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[1] Cf. the seminal volumes by Wanda Alberts on the *Challenge of Religious Education for History of Religions* (*Numen* 55 of 2008); Smit and Chetty's *Religion and Diversity* (*Alternation* Special Edition 3 of 2009) and Tayob, Niehaus and Weisse's *Muslim Schools and Education in Europe and South Africa* (2011).

reflect on some of the seminal topics and issues which have come to the fore during the ten years since the launching of the policy. As such, many of the issues and concerns also constitute central aspects of the future developing of the critical discourse with regard to religion in the public domain, especially in our schooling and higher education systems[2].

In the first essay, Federico Settler engages some of the seminal concerns about our National Policy on Religion and Education and some of the critical interactions around it. Crafted to provide a framework for the regulation for teaching and learning about religion in public education, the policy has been widely criticized and condemned by groups who fear the erosion of religion education in public schools. Despite the sustained contestation and challenges to the policy, many believe that the policy created a space for a non-sectarian and non-confessional treatment of religion in the public domain. The National Policy on Religion and Education is however also ambivalent about the value of religion, and the limits of enforcement has left it vulnerable. Settler argues that it is precisely through its vulnerability that we might find its most profound contribution to Religion Education in South Africa. He suggests that through a range of legal challenges to the policy framework and its proposed implementation of Religion Education in public schools, and at levels of School Governing Bodies, the policy has sparked vibrant and necessary public debates concerned with the effective teaching and learning about religion in public schools.

In his contribution, Cok Bakker develops an argument concerning the articulation of religion, education and citizenship education. He primarily focuses on three main points, *viz.*: the deductive mode of argument for religion; that this mode of argument is patently wrong in the light of empirical relevance; and the paradigm shift which this mistaken approach requires. So, firstly, he reflects on the link between religion and religious tradition(s) on the one hand and school and education on the other. In his reflection on the reasoning strategy to make sense of this link, he argues that people seem to tend strongly to think, argue and reflect in a deductive mode.

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[2] Cf. especially the curriculum summary for Religion Studies in Smit and Chetty (2009:337 - 339). The topics, especially those highlighted, directly link to the undergraduate and postgraduate curricula at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus.

Secondly, considering the religious claims people make concerning the impact of religion on the day-to-day educational practice, it is, empirically speaking, apparently wrong to take this deductive reasoning serious as a road to undisputable and unambiguous links between claims and practices. Given that it appears that deductive reasoning is wishful thinking or functions as a supposed but inadequate religious legitimatization of educational practices, which – which is demonstrated by the empirical educational praxis itself – Bakker raises the question as how educational practices could be understood in their connection to religious beliefs anew.

Focusing on the Values in Education Initiatives in the South Africa, Marilyn Naidoo provides a descriptive review of the literature, and considers and traces recent developments in terms of policy implementation. A central assumption in the policy initiatives is that religion and religious content play an important and supportive role in helping to nurture democratic values, political literacy and nation building among the youth. In considering the teaching of Religion Education and its role in facilitating values education, Naidoo focuses on the conflicting claims related to of religious identity. She shows that problematising these contested issues in the context of current debates makes for more relevant and effective learning about democracy within Religion Education than the abstract and idealised exposition of democratic values. Religion Education must be an integrated dimension of students' perceptions, experiences and reflections that need to form part of the discussions. As such, it will allow explorations of new content as well as dialogue where differences and contrasting ideas are deliberated. Such an approach, she argues, will enhance the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to equip the student to function in an open and democratic society.

In their contribution, Shan Simmonds and Cornelia Roux argue that the introduction of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and how it positions religion in the curriculum requires rethinking. They point out, firstly, that Religion and Education (RaE) has the propensity to engage a broader perspective than Religion in Education (RiE) in curriculum inquiry. The opportunity to engage in RaE in curriculum spaces has its origins in debates on religion as functioning in either the private or public domain. For their argument, they primarily draw on research focused on how adolescent girls from diverse religious and cultural contexts experience gender issues in their communities and society. They report on adolescent

girls' voices, their experiences and how they value gender in their own religion and culture, as well as in that of others. This viewpoint is significant for RaE for two reasons. Firstly, using gender as the research focus provides an alternative form of inquiry to create a discourse in and around RaE. Secondly, they consider how theoretical underpinnings of human rights, *viz.* universalism and particularism, can inform thinking about RaE epistemologically. For them we need to think differently about RaE, to consider human rights and gender theories in order to prevent voices being silenced, curriculum restricted and oppression continued.

Given the biased history against democracy and diversity in South Africa, René Ferguson focuses her research on the issue of how teachers should learn in ways that would inculcate democracy and appreciation of diversity. While teachers in South Africa have attended in-service development programmes, little seems to have been achieved regarding the development of the complex knowledge base that enables classroom practice specifically for democratic citizenship education and religion education in Life Orientation. One main stumbling block is the influence of the teacher's own frame of reference. If there is to be effective mediation of learning of religious and cultural diversity, these often controversial focus areas in the classroom, cannot be ignored, she argues. More specifically, to develop a practice for democratic citizenship education and religion education, teacher development should occur through participation with other teachers in communities of practice. Communities of practice theory, transformative adult learning theory and perspectives on deliberative democracy are synthesised to create a theoretical frame for teacher development in communities. The article outlines this approach by drawing on a mixed method research project in which this theoretical framework was implemented amongst a sample of secondary school Life Orientation teachers in the Gauteng Province. It reports some of the findings from the data elicited from a survey and an action research phase. It concludes with an evaluation of the communities of practice concept for teacher-learning for democracy and diversity.

Departing from the assumption that Religion Education in South Africa refers specifically to a diversity of religions and beliefs Janet Jarvis points out that the Religion and Education Policy (2003) requires teachers to adopt a multi-religious approach to Religion Education. This presents a challenge to Life Orientation student teachers given the religious diversity in

South African classrooms. Given this challenge, her article draws on research focused on final year Life Orientation student teachers, in the School of Education at a South African university. Once qualified, these student teachers will be expected to facilitate Religion Education as part of the Life Orientation curriculum. She explores their understanding of religious freedom as a constitutional right and how their religious identity influences their approach to Religion Education. This qualitative case study, also draws on the theory of identity negotiation, and shows that, to varying degrees, the students struggle to adopt a multi-religious approach to Religion Education. She contends that Initial Teacher Education Life Orientation modules need to create space for student teachers to explore and negotiate their religious identity. This is necessary for the effective implementation of the Religion and Education Policy (2003) which expects teachers to encourage learners to grow in their own religious beliefs while also empathetically respecting the religious beliefs of others in society.

In her article, Hui-Xuan Xu reports on a qualitative study on pedagogies that foster intercultural sensitivity development in a general education course in a tertiary institution in Hong Kong. Interventions drew on Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions of cultural differences, i.e., power distance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long term and short term orientation. In order to stimulate undergraduates' intercultural sensitivity development, the study also employed multiple teaching strategies, such as narrative writing, group learning, and movie watching. Undergraduate's self-reported learning out-comes and their perceptions of the impact of the teaching strategies were collected through individual interviews. Findings are that 1) these interventions have resulted in a higher level of intercultural sensitivity among undergraduates; 2) narrative writing is an effective teaching strategy to encourage under-graduates to reflect on their own cultural values and essay writing is very useful in stimulating students to think deeply and actively on cultural difference issues; 3) the intentional combination of strategies in the stage of minimization and acceptance is imperative to motivate students' development.

In his study, Denzil Chetty provides convincing and insightful arguments for moving beyond some the seminal paradigms in vogue in Educational circles currently. Over the past decade, we have seen the advent of technologies (more especially Information and Communication

Technologies) transforming the higher education landscape. One of the critical challenges emerging within this new landscape has been how to position the integration of technology within an appropriate learning theory. The three 'traditional' learning theories most often utilized in the creation of instructional environments, namely behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism, have come under much criticism in the design of learning spaces for the twenty-first century learner. One such theorist coming to the fore challenging the presuppositions and relevance of the above three learning theories and offering an alternative approach has been George Siemens with his notion of 'connectivism'. Siemens' connectivism posits that knowledge is distributed across networks and the act of learning is largely one of forming a diverse network of connections and identifying the connected patterns. Hence, my aim in this paper is to ascertain the core principles of Siemens' connectivism, and probe the prospects for a technology-centered pedagogical transition in religious studies. In so doing, Chetty proposes the redesigning of learning spaces, where learning is no longer an internal, individualistic activity but an actionable process of gaining knowledge through connecting with specialized information sets that reside within networks of other people, organizations and databases.

Given the vast array of religious phenomena, as well as constantly emerging novel forms and expressions of religious life they also actualize a whole range of issues as part of the social sciences, education, and teaching and learning. In her contribution, Maheshvari Naidu approaches teaching and learning through the hermeneutic of 'engaged pedagogy' as put forward by the noted feminist writer bell hooks, and uses Kainon New Church School as a case study for what engaged pedagogy means in the context of teaching within a religious school. The research suggests that such engaged teaching aims at accruing a particular kind of 'social' or 'religious capital' for the learner. Social capital itself is a reference to the resource embedded in the connections within and between a network and nodal actors in the network, and religious capital is defined as consisting of an acquirement of 'power and level of embeddedness into this or that religious culture' (Finke 2003:3).

The research seeks to illustrate that Kainon School is part of a small networked community comprising the School, the Church, and the Congregational community (who are in many instances also parents at the school) and argues that teaching and learning occurs within these

communally overlapping fields, similarly embedded within a particular religious culture. Methodologically, the paper is positioned within a qualitative framework where the experiences and reflections of teachers and learners are captured through personal interviews and sustained observation.

Ephraim Taurai Gwaravanda, Erasmus Masitera and Prosper Muzambi focused their research on philosophy of education and argue that the Zimbabwean Ordinary Level Religious Studies syllabus is inadequate and insensitive to the virtue of religious respect in the globalised world. Firstly, ordinary level Religious Studies is based on either the synoptic gospels or a combination of Luke and Acts which are only part of the scriptures of one religion namely Christianity. Secondly, the syllabus is designed for a multi-faith society as reflected in schools yet other religions like ATR, Islam, Buddhism, Baha'i and atheists among others, are excluded from the syllabus. Thirdly, the virtue of respect for other religions remains elusive to the syllabus because there is no comparative analysis from other religions to give an appreciation of interfaith dialogue. Fourthly, the syllabus does not foster flexibility and open-mindedness that is needed in the globalised world because the method used requires the pupils to be descriptive rather than analytical. As such the research provide some critical reflection on the syllabus and concludes with some recommendations on how to improve the syllabus.

Patricia K. Chetty and Irvin G. Chetty investigated the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies in Grade 10 by the learners, educators and principals. The subject has been phased in from Grade 10 in 2006, Grade 11 in 2007 and Grade 12 in 2008. Minimal research has been conducted on the factors influencing the choice of this subject in Grade 10 by the learners, educators and principals. Is their choice of the subject by the learners motivated by their vocational and career goals? The issue of the learner's choice deserves some detailed explanation. In the National Curriculum Statement when the learner reaches Grade 10, four compulsory subjects must be offered: two official languages, Mathematics or Mathematics Literacy, and Life Orientation – out of seven subjects. The learner has to then choose three optional subjects offered by the institution. Not every approved subject is offered by every school. Schools chose to offer subjects from an approved list which can include commercial, technical, humanities or specialist arts subjects. Religion Studies is one of these optional subjects. Some of the seminal questions that the research sought to answer are: What

do learners expect from this subject? Why are they offering this subject? Is the principal's choice of offering this subject in support of the learner's career goals? Are the learner's choice correlated with the intention of the policy makers? Are the educators also in support of the learner's vocational goals? What are the factors that have influenced the choice of Religion Studies as a subject in the FET Band by all the key stakeholders?

Johannes A. Smit and Beverly Vencatsamy report on an analysis of a sample of the modules offered in the discipline of Religion at the University of KwaZulu-Natal – introduced in 2005 at Howard College campus. Founded in 2000, the programme was conceptualised in a consciously positioned postapartheid paradigm. The article provides a brief background for the programme, and then proceeds to analyse a selection of the first and second level modules, focusing on the steady growth experienced, 2005 – 2010. This is followed by an analysis of the home disciplines of students and the reasons why they enrolled for RELG101 and RELG106. Finally, the article deals with the interdisciplinary potential this focus on the programme in Religion reveals. The assumption is that such analyses reveal observable trends that need to be taken into consideration in the further offering and developing of the modules – as well as the programme more broadly speaking.

Stephen F. Bigger's article discusses the nature of criticality for religious education curriculum and pedagogy, with a particular focus on marriage in Hebrew Bible (Old testament or OT) texts. First, 'criticality' is defined in historical and literary terms, asking questions of what the Bible writers meant and intended. Secondly, the use of Bible texts is explored through the prism of 'critical theory', in which social critique particularly emphasises notions of justice, equity and democratic 'voice'. The presence of secular Jewish thought within the Frankfurt school of social-critical thought suggests some influence from the ancient Jewish prophetic call for everyday justice. Thirdly, he explores synergies between critical theory and the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, 'practical wisdom' on effective living, as developed by Bent Flyvbjerg and colleagues. Through these lenses, the he then assess the way marriage is discussed and taught in religious education in Africa and elsewhere. He concludes his study by providing some pointers as to the broader potential for this mix of Critical Theory and *phronesis* for education more broadly speaking.

Finally Suren Naicker studies the metaphors employed by Swami

Vivekananda to explain otherwise abstruse philosophical principles within the Hindu school of thought. He mainly focuses on the *Advaita Vedanta*, which maintains that there is no duality of existence despite the appearance of such. Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a framework, and Corpus Linguistics as a tool, the article explores Vivekananda's complete works. It con-cludes that, unlike mainstream Western religions, which employ primarily the FAMILY frame to conceptualise God, this is not so within Vivekananda's Hinduism. Even though he does use this frame, he more often than not draws on the WATER frame to explain concepts, thereby providing an alternative conceptualization.

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