

# Engaging Difference in Values Education in South African Schools

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## **Abstract**

This article, based on a descriptive review of the literature, considers the Values Education Initiative and traces recent developments in terms of policy implementation. 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, by using an example of difference, such as the conflicting claims of religious identity, this article 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, which allow explorations of new content as well as dialogue where differences and contrasting ideas are deliberated. This will enhance the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to equip the student to function in an open and democratic society.

**Keywords:** values education, religion education, religious identity, difference

## **Introduction**

Restoring the value system and moral fibre of society is a challenge of the highest priority for South Africans in general and the education sector in

particular. One wonders about the Department of Education's major cultural project, the Values in Education Initiative, and how its implementation has developed since its initial launch on 23 August 2001. This is important to establish as the still recent transition to democracy and the radical break with the past mean that South Africans do not yet have a settled conception of citizenship to draw on (Enslin 2003:73). In divided societies like South Africa people identify more readily with one of its ethnic, racial or religious components than with the society as a whole (Mattes 2002). Although the new South Africa provided something of a model for democratic values and peaceful transitions, the recent ministerial report by Craig Soudien on *Transformation and social cohesion and elimination of discrimination in public higher education institutions* (DoE 2009) is just one of the many examples indicating the persistence of racism and the lack of a transformation ethos. This has led to renewed calls for civic education or values education in a society entangled in civic strife.

'Values education' is commonly understood as placing a particular emphasis on civic and moral values (Halstead & Taylor 2000). Civic education is commonly understood to be concerned with the promotion of effective and active citizenship and the preparation of the youth of a country to carry out their role as citizens. Current debates on citizenship education are focused on the tensions between diversity (the needs of the individual, or group) and the education for democratic ideals (the needs of the nation-state). Some would argue that the enterprise is fundamentally flawed and that it rests on the myth of the homogeneous 'citizen' or 'nation' (Mason 2007). In the real world the nation state is 'an imagined community' constituted 'to make culture and polity congruent' and bring all participants 'under the same roof' by 'papering over the cracks' that divide the citizenry in terms of race, gender, class, religion and ideology (Mason 2007:177). Once those issues are engaged with through real political debate and contest it is very difficult to find substantial common ground for a curriculum programme on 'citizenship' which is intellectually coherent and sustainable (Kallaway 2010:17). Civic education is not simply a matter of teaching children 'good values' for the simple reason that it is always difficult to arrive at an adequate social consensus regarding what values to prioritise. What is often neglected in debates of this kind is the question of whose values are to be taught and whose interests those values will serve. At the same time is it possible to

have values education abstracted from the real political and ideological issues that divide the society? Is it possible for teachers in the context of ordinary classrooms to deal with the complex and divisive political topics without transgressing the line of teacher neutrality? Will it simply lead to indoctrination as it did under apartheid? What is undeniable is that values education is a real problem for the school curriculum.

In South Africa public pedagogy has been criticised for creating an artificial uniformity in which difference, disagreement and debate are buried under scripted narratives for creating consensus (Teeger & Vinitzky-Seroussi 2007). This in turn may force the curriculum for religion education to stress the underlying similarity of all religions in forming personal identity, transmitting moral values, and facilitating mutual recognition in a shared society (Smith 1988). In the process, creative and critical thinking about the multiplicity of religious identities and the negotiation of religious differences might be subsumed in the artificial manufacture of consensus or subordinate to the 'greater good' of the nation at large. This article will trace recent developments in values education focused on the teaching of religion education. This article will show that problematising contested issues of religious identity, in the context of current debates, causes more effective learning about democracy than the abstract and idealised exposition of democratic values.

Effective citizenship implies civic responsibilities, not the least of which is the recognition that the individual is part of a larger social fabric. Everyone is also a member of a smaller community which is defined by certain basic values that may exhibit real and potential value differences on some of the larger fundamental social issues. Core values will always be understood and interpreted according to the particular worldview and religious identity embraced by the individual. As British educator Robert Jackson states that with increasing inter-communal, inter-religious tension, religion is no longer a private matter but has become a public concern, and that society benefits 'if pupils in our society are conversant with its language' (Jackson 2004:139).

While some may criticise the interaction of religion and state, in South Africa the majority of the population belong to a religion and religious resources have been central to nation-building. Part of the long road to citizenship in South Africa has been redefining the relationship between

church and state, faith and democracy (Swartz 2006:564). In liberal-democratic societies, according to Habermas, mutual learning processes and dialogue between religious and secular citizens should flourish (in Calhoun 1997:34). The state needs to take a positive stance towards the contributions of religious communities and persons in the public domain because they can provide secular society with important and necessary sources for attributing and creating meaning. South Africa is both a religious country and a democratic one. So while the Constitution guarantees religious freedom, the state has been at pains to emphasise that freedom *of* religion does not constitute freedom *from* religion, especially where religion can be a national asset in shaping public moral values. The real test of religious pluralism and the affirmation of diversity in South Africa lie in the effective balancing of national unity on one hand and religious and personal laws on the other. Thus it is important to note the relationship between religion and citizenship – for this article the importance of the focus on religion education as it moulds citizens and in this process ways of negotiating and overcoming difficulties of difference (Crick 1998).

To begin, it was clear that after the democratic elections of 1994 that the traditional role and function of teaching religion education within the prevailing doctrine of National Christian Education (CNE) would inevitably change. The idea the CNE was the sole bearer of beliefs and values of an open and democratic society could no longer meet the needs and challenges of the multi-religious South African society. Knowledge of different beliefs and values became a prerequisite for facilitating learners within the open school system.

In South Africa values education was advocated in two important policy documents from high-powered committees under the chairmanship of Wilmot James, established by the *Ministry of Education: report on the values and democracy in education* (DoE 2000) and *Manifesto on values, education and democracy* (DoE 2001). The first report highlighted six qualities the education system should actively promote: equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour. The *Manifesto*, recognising that these values are not fully operational in South Africa, identified ten values that should be promoted in schools: democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism, non-sexism, ubuntu (communalism), an open society, accountability, rule of law, respect and reconciliation. The

challenge was recognised of how to ensure that teachers were an embodiment of these values in order to ‘infuse the classroom with a culture of human rights’ (DoE 2001:33). The *Manifesto* is based on the assumption that instilling in learners a broader sense of values would enrich the individual and by extension enrich the society as well. The difficulty is that it accomplishes this by marginalising the personal. This is perhaps understandable in a context as culturally diverse as ours, but it is precisely on matters of personal that the traditionalist interpretation is so dangerous (Pendlebury & Enslin 2007). The *Manifesto* also outlines educational strategies, predicated on the notion that values cannot be legislated but merely promoted through the educational system (Department of Education 2001).

Pursuant to the ten principles above, the Ministry of Education offered religion in public schools where multi-religious education is promoted, using a phenomenological approach, with the emphasis on teaching students *about* religion rather than promoting specific religions or religious beliefs. South Africa’s *Policy for Religion and Education* (DoE 2003) was linked to a broad range of initiatives, celebrating linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. Despite the concern that studying religion from a neutral perspective negated the notion of remaining impartial, the National Policy was seen as important for furthering nation-building, a process that called for religion education to reach specific outcomes and relay values that the state had identified as desirable. Religion education became the bearer for understanding different belief systems, gaining religious content and adhering to moral obligations in public and private schools. Religion education was introduced into the curriculum as an integral part of the subject field Life Orientation and Religion Studies. Life Orientation is a compulsory subject for all learners and is made up of learning areas that promote the teaching of life skills including democracy and human rights (DBE 2011:8). A main aim of Religion Studies is religious literacy and citizenship education; it should ‘enhance the constitutional values of citizenship’ (DBE 2011:8). An outcome in these learning areas is that learners will be helped to exercise their rights and responsibility. Another is active participation in the promotion of a democratic, equitable and just society.

## **Policy Implementation and Challenges**

The nature of Curriculum 2000 and the *Revised National Curriculum Statement* (DoE 2002) was framed by notions of redress, inclusiveness, progressive pedagogy and local governance. The RNCS describes how schools are expected to develop critical, active, responsible and active citizens. The most recent curriculum review of the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* (DBE 2011) articulates a framework for values in education which continues to focus on citizenship and the constitution. According to the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (DoE 1996) each secondary school is also required to have a representative council of learners (RCL), a student-only council to aid democracy and student voice; and two students are also to be full and equal members of the school governing body (SGB). Despite the array of policy around citizenship, schools have been given little guidance on implementation (Hunt 2010).

In implementing these values across the religion education curriculum, legislators have made the assumption that teachers will unproblematically adopt a multi-religious approach but teachers have to be sensitised to the different values embedded in each belief system and cultural orientation and have to be equipped to facilitate these values (Green 2004). This requires highly skilled teachers who are provided with a great deal of curricular guidance and institutional support. But scholars argue that teachers have received little guidance or special training (Chrisolm & Leyendecker 2008; Bantwini 2010; Mattes 2013). Prejudice towards diversity in school and society still prevails (Pratap 2006) and can be counterproductive to the implicit value system of the education process. Teachers teach from a mono-religious perspective, although in a multi-religious school environment (Roux & Du Preez 2006; Hunt 2010:54). Teachers in training, especially those who come from homogeneous environments, are not necessarily literate in religious diversity and often display signs of fear or discomfort when placed in a religiously diverse environment (Roux, Du Preez & Ferguson 2009). The organisation and understanding of religion education is a construction of the teachers' own frame of reference with an interpretation of the religious content, its morality and spirituality. There are tensions between teacher's personal religious identity and their professional identity. This position might bring teachers in conflict with the insider/outsider position of facilitating religion education. This 'identity conflict' needs to be

explored and negotiated in order for the *Policy for Religion and Education* (DoE 2003) to be successfully implemented (Zinn & Keet 2010).

The outcomes based curriculum which was supposed to promote a series of values conducive to democratic citizenship, has as of yet failed to effect attitudinal change. Some argue that the intended values outcomes, including democracy are simply too implicit in the curriculum for most students to appreciate (Chikoko, Gilmour, Harber & Serf 2011). There is no specific place for the explicit teaching and discussion of democratic government, let alone the value and superiority of democracy as a form of government (Allais 2009). Currently values education is understood as procedural knowledge and is thus incongruent with the Constitution's expectation of generating an active, critical citizenry (Solomons & Fataar 2011:230). Solomons and Fataar argue that the school curriculum should be conceptually aligned to a broader conception of values that combines propositional, procedural and dispositional knowledge orientations (Solomons & Fataar 2011:230). In addition although teachers supported the principle of the recent curriculum reviews, the nature of the changes sorely taxed teachers' sense of what could and should be done in the classroom. Not only were the language and expectations of the curriculum obscure and jargon-filled; they also found the assessment expectations burdensome and the pedagogical prescriptions difficult to implement which resulted in an increased workload (Bantwini 2010).

It seems the practical principles of the *Manifesto* may be elusive for the many teachers trained in an authoritarian and non-expansive tradition, and under severe pressure from constant demands of ever-changing policy. The guide on *Values and Human Rights in the Curriculum* (DoE 2005) recognised this difficulty and provided a detailed interpretation and useful examples of how to use the principles to guide practice, but this also added to the intensification of teachers' work leaving little time for reflective engagement that the *Manifesto* and its strategies requires.

Chrisholm and Leyendecker (2008) examined the gaps between policy and practice in curriculum change and state that while there is agreement on the aims of reform, there is evidence of divergence in practice. They argue that in practice ideas are re-contextualised and displaced, and are often unable to meet the social development goals demanded of them (Chrisholm & Leyendecker 2008). In a society undergoing transition,

teachers themselves have different views on the meaning of democracy and democratic practices. Evidence from research conducted by Harland and Kinder (1997) indicates that lasting professional change comes only when there is value congruence between the policy message about ‘good practice’ and the teachers’ own codes of practice or values; when policy intentions and teachers’ beliefs about good practice or values coincide. In Hammett and Staeheli’s (2011) research, respect and responsibility emerged as core concepts and are bound up with the assumptions regarding power relations and the authors argue that respect is often unequal instead of reciprocal between educators and learners. They point out that the conditions of work and learning have a ‘serious impact on the quality of and achievement in education in South Africa’ (Hammett & Staeheli 2011:275). Similarly Pillay and Ragpot (2011) show through research in Gauteng schools that the proper management of the processes for implementing the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* as applied in the classroom are lacking. Because rights have remained at the rhetorical level and not part of praxis, neither the public engagement nor continued values or civic education has had the intended impact of wide-scale social transformation or addressing racial tensions (Spren & Valley 2012).

Critics have wondered whether the utopian discourse of the education policy is not shooting policy and its implementation in the foot (Mattes 2013:135). Policy documents should establish achievable, defined concepts rather than further turning controversial terms, such as ‘democratic’ and ‘literate, creative and critical citizen’ into rhetorical buzzwords or ‘magic-bullets’ that lose their distinctive meaning through their close proximity with the rhetorical use of ‘social hope poetry’(Unterhalter 2000:70; Chrisholm & Leyendecker 2008). It is a conceptualisation that avoids engaging with social complexity and any notions of difference. Critics suspect that an uncritical consensus is demanded that demonises and discredits dissent (Kraak & Young 2000; Sayed & Jansen 2001:275; Fleisch 2002). This reduces the space for debate and contestation about possible outcomes of the transition and the nature of South Africa democracy. The creation of such ‘national unity’ perpetuates and masks continuing inequality and thus constitutes a very real threat to the consolidation of democracy (Moodley 2010). Under these conditions, the space for different voices within groups to express who they are becomes constrained.



## **Contested Issue: Religious Identity**

Within schools learners may possess a range of interlocking identities, which vary through time. These identities are shaped by the schooling contexts, the social relations of the schools and the agency of individual and groups. With identities of South Africanness and common citizenship emerging, there are indications of greater assertions of self-chosen new group identities, which may potentially challenge a common citizenship. For example, the reconstitution of identities of whiteness in schools are making for increasing exclusive enclaves of Jewish, Greek or Afrikaans children who attend circumscribed schools (Carrim 1995). It is important to understand how different identities attend to social cohesion. Alexander explains that ‘difference, instead of constituting a bridge toward understanding the intrinsic value of diversity – biological, cultural and political – becomes a springboard for xenophobic stereotyping and latent social conflict’ (Alexander 2002:6). Viewing difference, identities and values in the light of growing discontent and alienation one can easily see ‘the other’ as the enemy. Stronger individual religious identification may result in enhanced group solidarity, cohesion and collective identification. At the same time, visible demonstration of a minority religious identity may provoke hostility and discrimination from the dominant group. The formation of group identities is a factor that warrants more careful observation, study and research.

Religion is the source of values that speak to a wide range of societal issues impacting on schools. Public schools are microcosms of the societies in which they function and thus, the school must face the same problems of drugs, violence, intolerance and lack of respect for diversity that are part of society at large. In declaring and enforcing appropriate standards for learner conduct, schools struggle to create a culture in which all learners have a shared sense of values. Creating that shared culture can be difficult where rules are simply propagated without considering underlying religious beliefs. Members of a particular culture may view all value-related issues (especially social, economic, political and moral) exclusively in terms of their personal (and group) ideals and aspirations, perspectives and interests. Even as values may be moral, non-moral or immoral, there still arise situations in which people differ about whether social issues are moral, traditional, customary or social conventions (Birch & Rasmussen 1989).

In the public school environment, we not only encounter different value systems in each religion but each learner also bears within himself or herself a religious identity. Religious identity reflects a dynamic process in which religious 'data' in the form of texts, rituals, symbols, values, and the like are evaluated and related to the concerns of everyday life (Ziebertz 2008:34). Individuals or communities deem certain beliefs and practices significant to the extent that they label themselves a religious individual or community. Religious identity is made up of ideological, ritual and institutional identity (Van der Ven 2003:480). It is expressed in the never ending tension between stability and change, tradition and innovation (Ziebertz 2008:34). There are societies in which religion either serves as the source of collective identification, or rises in that meaning as 'the flip side of secularization' (Jones & Smith 2001:47), and globalization. Without denying the signs of a greater fluidity of religious collective identity in the global context, the basic assumption is that even in modernity religion may be important for people's collective self-understanding, and not only for individualized forms of religiosity, and/or religious extremism and fundamentalism.

Religious identity necessarily involves a rejection of the view, which some citizens may hold, that religious attachments are more important than political ones as a source of identity. What is more, its longevity over time gives religious identity a perennial credibility, surpassing the contingencies that appertain to biographical, political or other immanent notions of identity (Van der Ven 2003:480). This strongly felt credibility may lend itself to emotional or ideological support for better or worse. Religious identity is not a form which can be tacked on as an extra component to their citizenship, but is something which they believe permeates the whole of life. Hence the desire for separate schools, which has been described as a form of 'voluntary apartheid' (Halstead 1995), and which religious believers see as the only way to provide their children with a sound education in a secure and stable environment where the beliefs and values of the school are broadly in line with those of the home. Thus one of the problems of religious identities in a multi-religious world is the exclusiveness of religious claims, the view that 'my religion' is in some way more unique, superior, normative and absolute (Knitter 1985). Although religious identity is more than this, its holder cannot escape the question of the 'other,' of other religions in a religiously

plural world (Hermans 2001). For example, Christian opponents to the education policy opposed religion education by alleging that it established a uniform multi-religious religion or, alternatively, that it established a uniform anti-religious philosophy of secular humanism (Chidester 2006:73) and thereby undermined the decentralised role of local schools in determining their own particular and distinctive religious ethos. So while religious communities offer identity to people, in many cases this identity is exclusive. In schools, nurturing learners to become responsible, effective citizens grounded in their worldview and identity may conflict with their developing religious identity which could pose a problem in realising the democratic vision. It is important to note that there is an inescapable link between a person's religious identity and his or her attitude towards adherents of other religions or religious diversity, since core values will always be understood and interpreted within the particular religious identity embraced (Dreyer, Pieterse & Van der Ven 2002). As a consequence, the reconciliation potential of religions is not self-evident and they can become part of the problem. Religio-centrism derived from a religious identity is not perceived in a fully conscious way, but nevertheless provides a filter of reality that can detract from what is being taught or studied.

However much a model of citizenship seeks to avoid narrow forms of nationalism or ethnocentrism, it cannot avoid other more subtle forms of inequality or cultural domination. If values are not dealt with directly, they will still be embedded in the teacher's worldview and will be part of the hidden curriculum (Halstead 1996:4). Consequently, one has to consider the criticism of implied neutrality with regard to the religious convictions or religious identities of both the teacher and the learner (Hermans 2001; Sterkens 2001). This concept of 'enlightened neutrality' holds up an ideology of mutual interdependence as it expels religion from the public to the private domain (Ziebertz 2008). All too often liberalism is misguidedly thought of as a neutral alternative to religious perspectives rather than a specific ideological vision (Pike 2008:115). Religious parents and groups might well argue that the state is failing to pay due respect to their rights by imposing the current values on the education curriculum, when being a good citizen can be 'perfectly compatible with unswerving belief in the correctness of one's own way of life' (Glaston 1989:99). Pluralism is considered by liberals, to be the most rational response to diversity, but this can

discriminate against those who sincerely believe that some ways of living are morally acceptable and others are not (Pike 2008). The tension between the liberal assumptions of citizenship education and such religious perspectives should not be underestimated because privileging autonomous rationality may exclude any theonomous alternative (Pike 2005:115). Seeing reason and revelation as incompatible has been challenged by authors such as Pike (2008), but we are, perhaps, more aware now than ever before that reason alone can be inadequate, given the nature of our lives and the way in which we actually live.

### **Taking Difference Seriously**

If religion education is to be worthwhile for all learners, it cannot be based on the assumptions which undermine the beliefs, values and commitments and identity of some. Schools need to create space in religion education for ways that recognise, affirm, and explore, creatively and critically, possible invented, emergent and contested identities. Understanding why these identities and worldviews differ so radically in some of society's most controversial issues might be more fruitful than glossing over or dismissing those differences. Essential to the pedagogy informing critical citizenship is the praxis, agency and voice of those who confront marginalisation, injustice and inequality.

A more modest goal of values education requires cognisance of the role of different identities, as well as the significance of conflicting moral claims (Adam 2000). Citizenship education should be expanded to include rights from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic and language groups to help students to acquire the values needed to work for equality and social justice (Banks 2008:129). Since both personal and civic values have owed their origins to personal principles derived from religious worldviews which have influenced decision-making and shaped actions and attitudes. An example of this in classroom practice is the strong Christian ethos among South African teachers and schools especially in the area of evolution and creationism (Chikoko *et al.* 2011:11). In another example in South Africa, the KwaZulu-Natal Equality High Court handled the case of a mother who contested a school Code of Conduct which prohibited learners from wearing any jewellery except earrings and a watch. This court came to the conclusion that

the school's Code of Conduct had failed to rid itself of existing discrimination by insisting on uniformity and disallowing the respondent's daughter from using a nose ring. The learner's religious values supported by constitutional rights to human dignity and expression, overruled the school's values reflected in its authority to make and enforce a consistent dress code throughout the school (quoted from De Waal, Mawdsley & Cumming 2010).

An effective way to engage values education will be to handle the underlying motivations of contending groups. Teachers need to recognize and acknowledge differences between their learners and then to go further and interrogate issues that arise from that difference. It involves more than a sense of awareness of cultures and promoting a sense of acceptance and tolerance, as with this kind of acknowledgement comes a sense of stereotyping and patronizing attitudes. The kind of diversity embedded in the classroom points to the need for teachers to have in their awareness not specific knowledge about cultural and religious difference of their students and how to educate others about the, but cognizance that one cannot predict how these influences have shaped learners' consciousness and praxis. Structural, cultural, personal and religious aspects are important to analyse and be aware of as these are part of the fabric of society with interlocking patterns of power and influence and of course are at play in the classroom. Hence values education can contribute to citizenship by 'providing opportunities for pupils to see how individuals, group and political choices, policies and actions, e.g. human rights, are inextricably linked with and influenced by religious and moral beliefs, practices and values' (Pike 2008:116). Religion education can contribute to countering misinformation on religious issues in private and public space. The meaning and core ideas of many religious issues, moral, values and perceptions visible to society in other subjects and disciplines should be explored. The aim of this deliberative attitude towards learners' learning is to empower them with thinking tools to make sound moral decisions and engage in moral behaviour. Issues of citizenship, morality, ethics and social justice in which religion can have an input can help to strengthen and support a religiously just society with a respect for diversity.

At the same time creating safe spaces for student's citizenship are important in shaping how students engage. A recent study (Hunt 2010) found that how schools engaged with citizenship in the past, continued to influence

citizenship practices; students from non-traditional religious groups were expected to assimilate into the existing culture of the school. Without safe spaces for citizenship to be practised, cultural and religion difference appeared to exclude further an already largely disengaged student populace. Having access to a 'rights agenda' gave many students a language to express a citizen identity, but without the agency or safe spaces to take it further, for many it remained a rhetoric of citizenship, as opposed to a practice. Socio-historic contexts of the schools, racial/cultural hierarchies and staff-student relations all influence how (and whether) citizenship identities were produced (Hunt 2010). Only through a critical exploration of how democracy functions in the everyday reality of the political community in which learners live, can learners be motivated to narrow the gap and become active, engaged citizens.

The aim of values education should be to develop a culture of human rights in schools based on respect and dialogue between teachers and students, but with frank admission that teaching values in schools is both risky and important. Democratic values and skills are not genetic, they are learned and in a democracy young people need to develop the ability to analyse and discuss controversial issues in a peaceful manner based on mutual respect. Part of the challenge for authoritarian and reproductive preparation in teaching is the reluctance on the part of teachers to 'pay attention to their own pedagogical reasoning and reflective practice' (Chikoko *et al.* 2011). A study (Buthelezi, Mitchell, Moletsane, De Lange, Taylor & Stuart 2007) has found that many teachers in South Africa see school knowledge as safe and uncontested and shy away from values and controversies even though these are key aspects of life in a democratic society. This problem is particularly significant where HIV/AIDS (a highly controversial issued based on personal values) is a threat to social well-being and where teachers are reluctant to tackle sexual issues in the classroom. Teachers need to be made aware of their inherent power, responsibility and autonomy to make a difference in their own classroom practice and communities by exemplifying sound values. The correct facilitation and active engagement with the content and specific learning outcomes has the potential to promote strategic outcomes (communication, investigation, and problem-solving) with the implementation of the acquired skills in the larger social discourse (Smit & Chetty 2009:349).

Identity, social life and morality are seen as inescapably social and cultural processes, which are constructed and reconstructed in everyday social interactions (Thornberg 2008:53). The hidden curriculum is critical as it relays the implicit assumptions of teachers and other school agents that silently structure social discourse and educational praxis. Values in the classroom can be sabotaged by other school practices and has far-reaching effects without being noticed (Giroux & Penna 1983). Inconsistencies and perceived injustices in teachers' interventions, implicit moral constructions of the school rules and school life result in negative attitudes among students (Thomson & Holland 2002:93) who are not passive recipients but active agents in the socialisation process. As Waghid suggests our current understanding of values education might be impoverished and too narrow, and could potentially be extended beyond the simplistic expression of rights and responsibilities to dealing with how we treat and behave towards others (2004:44). Such a goal has a greater chance of success than the expression of moral indignation and normative educational endeavours shared only at a very abstract and superficial level.

Given that in South Africa the formation of religious identity is primarily the responsibility of families and religious communities and not the public school, it is important to understand how religious identity, shaped by religious socialisation influences learners' attitudes in supporting citizenship education in schools. Religious communities need to foster the identity formation of their children and young people with an eye on their participation in social and public spaces. Values education may fail to engage with the ways in which religious communities, families and civil society are sidelined in the project of building national democracy and in this way may indeed undermine some of the values of tolerance, equality and justice, which values education itself seeks to inculcate. In this process educators will need to bring together home and school more effectively in a concerted effort to enhance the quality of education.

More research is needed on the politicising of religious environments and traditions within education. The links between religious identity, ethnic identity and national identity are often only examined when the ethnic minority demands or maintains a separate state based on religious identity. In such a scenario, religious nationalism has been interpreted as an instrumental tool for nation-building (for example, the nation of Israel). Much of the

research in South Africa with regard to questions of race and desegregation is pessimistic about the nature and types of changes that are being effected in schools (Vally & Dalamba 1999) but work on with teachers and learners regarding the complex questions of identity, citizenship and difference has not yet been done. Teachers need opportunities to explore how their religious values may influence their responses to multi-cultural difference and religious diversity. Little attention has been paid to how religious identity intersects with other forms of social difference, such as race and gender in the schooling experience of minoritized youth. Individual rights and practices of religions as well as traditional cultural practices are increasingly being discussed (Gearson 2002) in order to promote dialogue and discourse between world opinions, religions and cultures. Research of this nature will provide nuanced insights into the complex role religion plays in promoting particular value systems and could show how religion in education can be levered to change discriminatory and harmful value systems.

## **Conclusion**

Values, attitudes and skills associated with democracy are influenced by many factors, including the media, interaction with one's family and friends and everyday lived experience.

Religion and religious content play an important and supportive role in helping to nurture democratic values, political literacy and nation building among the youth. Educators need to seek in the whole school curriculum ways to foster humane values within the different ethnic and religious communities. Since religion education is to be an integrated dimension of students' perceptions, experiences and reflections it will be helpful to allow explorations of new content as well as dialogue where differences and contrasting ideas are deliberated. Democratic ways of conflict resolution rather than the idealistic clamouring for unifying national values become more salient.

The growing challenges between policy orientations of government and the lived reality in schools must be dealt with if learners are to be helped to actively contribute to the common good. Whether schools will succeed in the ambitious task of creating transformed citizens will depend on how the powerful resource of religion in South Africa is accessed. The challenge for



religion education will be to include religious plurality in educational practice and public discourse rather than contributing to religion being pushed back to the private by treating it as a purely informational subject.

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