

Teacher Development for Diversity: Citizenship Education, Religion Education and Learning through Participation in Communities of Practice

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Abstract

How should teachers learn for democracy and diversity in a society with a history of discrimination towards 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. The influence of the teacher's own frame of reference cannot be overlooked where learning religious and cultural diversity are concerned if there is to be effective mediation of these often controversial focus areas in the classroom. This article argues that 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 the 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.

Keywords: teacher development for diversity, democratic citizenship educa-

tion, religion education research, learning to teach religion in communities of practice.

Introduction

Teacher development for practice related to democratic citizenship education with a particular focus on religion education was the subject of an empirical study conducted with teachers in secondary schools in Gauteng from 2007 to 2008 (Ferguson 2011a). Given South Africa's turbulent history, characterised as it was by racial and religious segregation (before democracy in 1994), and the present day ongoing instances of social violence, many of which are linked to xenophobia, homophobia and other aspects of diversity, the challenge for teacher development lies with how well teachers are prepared for practice that manages the complexities and tensions associated with democracy and diversity (Ferguson 2011b). This article argues that as teachers are situated in their personal biographies (Amin & Ramathan 2009: 70), their particular beliefs and perspectives are likely to influence how they deal with diversity and its many intersections (Arnesen 2010; Ferguson 2011a: 66; Jarvis 2009; Ter Avest & Bakker 2009). For this reason the research focused on teacher development through communicative learning (Mezirow 1991: 64, 2000: 8), operationalized as communities of practice, to develop and transform the teacher's knowledge base for more effective practice for democratic citizenship education and religious diversity.

In this article, a sketch of the context and background to the research is provided. Thereafter a critical analysis of the theoretical framework that guided the research is presented. I argue that to develop practice that furthers the aims of *democratic* citizenship education inclusive of religious and cultural diversity, teachers need to learn the principles of democracy through participation with other teachers in learning communities, or communities of practice (Wenger 1998; online 2006/2013; Ferguson 2011a; Westheimer 2008). Thereafter, the research design and methodology are outlined, followed by some of the findings of the research as these pertain to the efficacy/ inefficacy of a community of practice approach to teacher-learning for democracy and diversity. Finally, conclusions pertaining to the findings are drawn and recommendations made for future teacher development and possible implementation.

Concepts Used in the Research

Given the contested nature of some of the concepts used in conceptualising the research, brief explanations of how these were interpreted are now provided.

‘Citizenship’ is one of these contested and complex concepts. As Enslin (2003: 73) has argued, “conceptions of citizenship are best understood in context, especially in divided societies”. Hence in the South African context, democratic citizenship *education* would entail acquiring knowledge and learning tolerance and acceptance of the ‘diversities’ in South Africa. The outgoing South Africa national curriculum (DoE 2003a) which gave impetus to this research, named ‘Citizenship Education’ as one of four focus areas in the subject Life Orientation. ‘Religion Education’ as the study of different religions and beliefs formed a component of Citizenship Education.

In recent curriculum developments (DoBE 2011a, b), the focus area ‘Citizenship Education’ has been subsumed under the ‘Topics’, ‘Democracy and Human Rights’ in the Life Orientation Grade 10-12 curriculum, and ‘Constitutional Rights and Responsibilities’ in the Grade 7-9 curriculum. Religion Education remains a focus of these Topics. From this development one could infer that the responsible citizen is one who understands the workings of a democracy and values the rights and freedoms of the diverse ethnic, cultural and religious groups who reside in South Africa. The term ‘citizenship/religion education’ is used in this article to draw attention to the integration of religion education with democratic citizenship and human rights education (Gearon 2010: 190; Jackson 2007: 28ff).

‘Democracy’ is also a complex concept. The preferred model in the context of this research, is a deliberative and communicative model that, after Young (1996: 120; Enslin, Pendlebury & Tjiattas 2001: 125), places greater emphasis on egalitarianism, inclusivity and communication than those conceptions that focus on reason and primarily critical argument. Furthermore, Young’s view that there is transformative potential in participation, in presenting one’s claims, in listening to others with the purpose of learning to understand their claims, has influenced how I have augmented Wenger’s mutual engagement dimension in his conceptualization of communities of practice, discussed further along in the article (Ferguson 2011a: 90). In addition, Young’s perspective on difference as a “deliberative resource”, as having the potential to contribute to rich democratic discussion

(Young 1997: 385; Enslin *et al.* 2001: 128), has also influenced the way in which deliberative democracy has been interpreted for this research (Young 2000, 1997; 1996; Enslin 2006). I do not dismiss critical argument as an element of deliberative democracy, since it is necessary for teachers and their pupils to develop critical argument as a democratic skill.

Context and Background to the Research

The backdrop to the wider research on which this article is based, is the curriculum reforms in South Africa since democracy in 1994. The introduction of democratic citizenship education inclusive of religion education to the national curriculum formed part of the curriculum reforms to counter discrimination and to promote responsible citizenship, diversity and inclusivity. With this historical background, these reforms were absolutely necessary, but the question remains whether, after almost twenty years, teachers are suitably prepared to mediate the complexities associated with such reforms effectively in the classroom (Ferguson 2011a). Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage (2005: 14) have argued that curriculum reform requires that at the very least teachers need to rethink the knowledge base relating to their disciplines and the pedagogical skills needed to provide productive and meaningful learning experiences for pupils from all kinds of backgrounds (Nieto 2000). But some educationalists argue that more than this is required for learning and teaching in a multicultural society. Cochran-Smith (2004: 145) stresses that “what teachers need to know *about* the knowledge base and *what else* they need to know, including attitudes, knowledge and beliefs to teach diverse groups” (e.i.o.) is necessary. This supports Nieto (2000) and Banks, Cochran-Smith and colleagues’ (2005) argument that teachers need to develop an understanding of the diverse groups to which their learners belong in order to affirm diversity in schools and in the classroom (Amin & Ramrathan 2009). Being able to open up to multiple perspectives is often problematic since many teachers may continue to harbour exclusivist worldviews, opposed to learning about the religions and worldviews of others. There is evidence from other research initiatives conducted in South Africa that show that the liberal and secular underpinnings of the national curriculum are at odds with the conservative religious or cultural perspectives of many teachers. Such conservative views

inhibit teachers including topics on religious and cultural diversity in the classroom (Mattson & Harley 2003; Ferguson & Roux 2004; Rooth 2005; Du Preez 2008; Jarvis 2008; Ferguson 2011a). This reality cannot be ignored if teachers are expected to be contributors to learners' understanding of such contested concepts as democracy, citizenship, diversity and human rights, as well as those values or virtues for citizenship education to be effective (Enslin 2003: 78; DoE 2001; Gould 1988). Furthermore the way in which religions and cultures continue to be misrepresented in the national curriculum (DoBE 2011a) and in textbooks is problematic and will persist if curriculum and textbook writers and teachers do not recognise that under- or mis-representation leads to negative reification and stereotyping. Misrepresentations of religions and cultures in the classroom are clearly related to a lack of knowledge and exposure and do little to infuse respect and dignity as core values of democratic citizenship education (Carrim & Keet 2005; DoE 2001; Jackson 1997: 125).

Yet, various Department of Education initiated In-Service Teacher Training (INSET) programmes conducted from 1995 to the present in Gauteng, supposedly designed to 'retrain' teachers for the political paradigm shift and radical curriculum reforms in South Africa, have hardly exposed teachers to substantive content knowledge, or to developing appropriate pedagogies for democracy and religious and cultural diversity (Ferguson 2011a: 140; Rooth 2005: 236). This oversight is odd in spite of the unequivocal references to diversity and inclusivity to promote human rights in various policies, the national curricula (DoE 2003a; DoBE 2011c) and the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (DoE 2003b), amongst them (*cf.* Chidester 2006; Carrim & Keet 2005).

On these grounds I contend that to develop teacher capacity for a just democratic culture, that is affirming of diversity, teachers need to be participant in ongoing discussions and dialogue with other teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills for education in the workings of democracy, human rights and religious and cultural diversity (Ferguson 2011a: 84; *cf.* Westheimer 2008). Since religions and cultures present different truth claims, it is necessary for teachers to acquire as Young (1996) put it, "appropriate deliberative dispositions, particularly of listening, and a capacity to value difference ...". It is for this reason that I propose teacher-learning in communities of practice for citizenship/religion education. The

theoretical framework that underpinned and guided the research is outlined in the next section.

Teacher Development for Citizenship Education/ Religion Education: A Theoretical Framework

In developing the theoretical framework that would contribute to conceptualizing this research I drew from the following: Wenger's theory of communities of practice (Wenger 1998; 2006/2013; Wenger *et al.* 2002); Mezirow's (1991; 2000) transformative adult learning theory which provided the means to understand how the personal histories or frames of reference of teachers influence their understanding of cultures, religions and religious diversity; various perspectives on deliberative democracy, for their emphasis on communication, participation and inclusivity, necessary prerequisites for communities of practice to develop teacher capacity for critical reflection on democratic culture (Young 1996; 2000: 23; Gutmann 1996; Enslin *et al.* 2001); and critical multicultural education, the work of Banks (1997; 2001) and Nieto (2000) in particular.

The term 'communities of practice' was originally coined to refer to groups of people who join together to engage in a process of collective learning about a subject to deepen their knowledge and expertise in relation to this subject, which becomes the shared domain of interest (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; 2006/2013). The literature abounds with conceptualisations of professional learning communities (Westheimer 2008; Cochran-Smith 2004; Zellermeier & Munthe 2007), but what distinguishes communities of practice from other kinds of professional learning communities are three dimensions of 'practice', viz. a shared domain of interest, or, the particular body of knowledge to which members of the community are committed; mutual engagement, which embodies the learning activity in a community of practice; and, a shared repertoire which includes the discourses, concepts, stories and concrete materials that a community produces in the course of its existence, relative to the domain of interest (Wenger 1998: 82ff; Ferguson 2011a: 86, 2012a: 138). These dimensions of practice are inextricably linked and together define the internal dynamics of communities of practice.

In conceptualising this research, the homogenising tendency of the

‘community’ concept was deemed to be problematic for how religious and cultural differences, with the increased likelihood of conflicting worldviews, would be managed (Wenger 1998; Jewson 2007: 69). Given the sterile corporate context in which Wenger (1998: 45ff) developed communities of practice theory and consequently how the mutual engagement dimension was envisaged as a tool for knowledge management in the corporate world, I found that the communities of practice concept did not provide adequately for how disagreement and conflict arising from differences in religious or cultural worldviews would be resolved (Ferguson 2011a: 98; Wenger *et al.* 2002; Roberts 2006: 629; Hughes, Jewson & Unwin 2007: 172). Wenger did not work specifically with teachers and curriculum developers on *learning about* religion and belief, culture and ethnicity in a multicultural society, or to transform how people perceive human difference. For this reason I have drawn on Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, especially his formulation of “discursive communities” (Mezirow 1991: 207) to enrich Wenger’s conceptualisation of mutual engagement. Mezirow’s theory provides insights into what transformative thinking means in adulthood, how a person’s frame of reference is constituted and transformed (Ferguson 2011a: 70; Taylor 2009: 4). Mezirow contended that discursive communities should foster transformative learning with regard to democracy and diversity which entails promoting values such as freedom, equal opportunity to participate, openness to alternative perspectives or worldviews and mutual respect, since these values are requisite for transformative learning in adults to occur (Mezirow 1991: 77, 78; Ferguson 2011a: 77). Further along in the article it becomes evident, with reference to the qualitative data, why a citizenship/religion education community of practice needs to function from a platform of democratic values. While Wenger advocated for mutual recognition of the ability of participants to ‘negotiate meaning’ in a community of practice, I argue that mutual recognition must extend beyond mutual *ability* to negotiate meaning in relation to the domain of interest (Wenger 1998: 99), to include an affective or moral dimension (Waghid 2009; Enslin *et al.* 2001). What this implies is that in order for a citizenship/religion education community of practice to be effective, members need to accept one another’s (human) differences unconditionally, to enable equal opportunity to participate and hence to contribute to the domain of interest (Ferguson 2011a: 99).

Transformative learning theory as defined by Mezirow (1991) is a theory of learning that analyses and explains how adults learn to make meaning of their life-world. The appeal of transformative learning theory for continuous teacher development lies with its potential to explain how teachers as adult learners transform the beliefs, attitudes, opinions and emotions that constitute their meaning schemes (points of view or habits of mind) and meaning perspectives (frames of reference) (Mezirow 1991: 223). These concepts, central to Mezirow's theory, were significant in this research for explaining how teachers as adult learners may think about and approach learning for democratic citizenship and diversity given South Africa's history of segregation. Mezirow (1991: 1) maintained that adult learners are "caught in their own histories" and in order to make sense of their backgrounds and beliefs need to start with what has been acquired through prior learning and socialization. On these grounds one could argue that the teacher's frame of reference should not be overlooked where learning and teaching about diversity is concerned (Mezirow 1991: 46). It is likely that a teacher's frame of reference or worldview (Mezirow 2000: 16; Merriam 2004: 61) will influence her/his perceptions of diversity and disposition toward the liberal values espoused in the Constitution (of South Africa), other human rights declarations and the national curriculum. Transformative learning depends on social interaction in discursive spaces so as to maximize opportunities for teachers to learn inclusivity, toleration, respect and acceptance of differences for developing a *practice* that mediates learning for democratic citizenship in the classroom (Mezirow 1991: 167; Ferguson 2011a: 90; Ferguson & Roux 2004). I agree with Jansen (2009) that transformative thinking in teachers is integral to the development of young people who are able to think critically and behave responsibly as engaged members of society.

The extent to which teachers have been exposed to diversity and education for democracy and the efficacy of learning through participation in communities of practice is the focus of the research discussed in the following section.

Research Design: Mixed Methods Using a Sequential Transformative Strategy of Inquiry

The research as a whole was conducted using a mixed methods sequential

transformative strategy of inquiry (Ferguson 2011a: 106; Creswell 2003: 212). This means there were two distinct phases of data collection: a cross-sectional survey (quantitative/qualitative) followed by a phase of participatory action research (PAR) with ethnographic elements (qualitative) (Ferguson 2011a: 103ff.). The reason for sequencing the quantitative and qualitative data collection in this way was to gain an understanding of the extent of teacher knowledge of Life Orientation in general and the participant teachers' relationship with citizenship/religion education more specifically. The intention was that the findings in the survey should inform the design of the PAR phase. This second phase allowed for time in the field to investigate the efficacy of communities of practice for teachers to learn content, pedagogy and democratic skills and values for citizenship/religion education (Ferguson 2011a: 115ff.).

The bulk of the survey was designed to elicit YES, NO or UNSURE responses from the respondents with qualifying statements (hence quantitative/qualitative).

The Context of the Study: Cross Sectional Survey

The study was positioned within the secondary school sector. Sixty secondary schools in the Gauteng Province were selected to participate in the survey. A purposive sampling strategy was implemented since the respondents needed to be Life Orientation teachers, or at least teaching Life Orientation at the time that the study was conducted (Ferguson 2011a: 109). The schools were also purposively selected to include inner-city, suburban and township schools as it was thought that differently situated schools would view religious and cultural diversity differently.

Participatory Action Research Phase

Participatory action research (PAR) opened up the opportunity to work collaboratively *with* teacher participants to investigate the responses to the survey questionnaire in more depth (Heron & Reason 2006: 144). A community of practice was constituted with the teacher participants as the unit of analysis in the PAR phase of the research. In my dual role as

researcher and “empathetic provocateur” or mentor, a term borrowed from Mezirow (1991: 206), I was able to simultaneously investigate the problems associated with learning and teaching religion and religious diversity and observe the teachers’ engagement in the community of practice, as well as with their learners in their classrooms (Ferguson 2011a: 105ff.). The PAR phase was conducted in six cyclical stages allowing time for dialogical engagement in the community of practice, time to put learning into practice in the classroom, and time to reflect on classroom activity when we regrouped every few weeks (Ferguson 2011a: 118). The extent of the teachers’ knowledge base concerning school policy on religion, content and pedagogical knowledge of religion and religious diversity, as well as their disposition towards including topics on diverse religions and beliefs were explored. In addition, informed by principles of transformative learning theory, this phase of the study enabled me to discover *how* the ‘situatedness’ of the participants with their personal histories and experiences of religion, culture and worldview gave meaning and scope to classroom practice (Ferguson 2011a: 178, 185). Data elicitation methods included focus group interviews and discussions, classroom observation and semi-structured interviews.

Three teachers constituted the community of practice in the PAR phase of the research, two women and one man. All three were resident at schools in the same district in Gauteng and had participated in the cross-sectional survey. These schools are located in different social-economic and cultural contexts. One of the schools is situated in a township and attended by black children only (School B, Phumzile). Christianity and African Traditional religions are the majority religions. Another of the schools is situated in an area that was designated ‘Coloured’ during the apartheid era and is still attended mainly by ‘Coloured’ children (School A, Rochelle). Christianity is the majority religion with a small number of Muslim pupils. The third school, located in a farming community, was formerly a white school before 1994, but is now multicultural (School C, Tlaletso) (Ferguson 2012b: 204ff). Christianity is the majority religion in this school. Some of the pupils come from neighbouring African states, including Botswana, Zimbabwe and Malawi. To maintain the anonymity of the participant teachers, the names used to identify them are pseudonyms (Ferguson 2011a: 176).

Cross Sectional Survey: Findings Pertinent to the PAR Phase

Some findings from the survey will be presented as these were important for constructing the domain of interest in the community of practice in the PAR phase. The survey was designed to elicit biographical details of the respondents, including age, sex and home language; information regarding their original teacher qualifications; knowledge of policy on religion in education; the focus of INSET programmes regarding learning about citizenship and religion education; disposition towards including topics on diverse religions and cultures in their Life Orientation programmes; teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and skills to include diverse religions and cultures in their classes (Ferguson 2011a: 149).

Of the 60 questionnaires distributed to Life Orientation teachers, 62% (n=37) completed and returned the survey questionnaires. The 62% return provided adequate information to construct a "snapshot" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000: 175) of the trends or patterns in teachers' approaches to citizenship/religion education in the Gauteng Province at a point in time (Ferguson 2011a: 129ff).

Biographical Details

For the purposes of this article, only the age group categories are reported. The survey indicated that 57% of the respondents were older than 39 years at the time of the completion of the survey and fewer than 20% younger than 31 years. The age group categories included in the survey, viz. 21 to 30 years, 31 to 39 years, 40 to 49 years and 50 years and older, were calculated to determine the age of respondents at the time of South Africa's democratization in 1994 from the time that the survey was conducted in 2007. The reason for creating the age group categories in this way was to determine if the age and socialization of teachers would influence how they related to the contents of the Life Orientation curriculum concerning democracy, citizenship and religious diversity (DoE 2003a: 11; cf. DoBE 2011a, 2011b). An assumption at the outset of the study was that the older the respondents, viz. over 35 years of age at least, the more likely it would be that they would *not* feel prepared to teach citizenship/religion education, because teachers would have been subjected to the influences of Christian

National Education in their initial qualifications. Their professional qualifications would in all likelihood also have included Christian Religious Education and/or Biblical Studies. The younger the teachers (age group category 21 to 30 years), the more likely it is that they would have experienced religious and cultural diversity from childhood and that their courses in their teacher education qualifications would have included democracy, human rights and diversity topics (Ferguson 2011a: 136ff).

Teachers' Undergraduate Courses in Religion

The survey data indicate that more than half of the respondents qualified as teachers before 1994 when Religious Education was defined by Christian Nationalism (Rose & Tunmer 1975). Eighty nine percent of the teachers who participated in the survey are Christian, representing at least eleven different denominations of Christianity, including Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholicism, as well as various African Independent Churches (AICs), viz. the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) (Ferguson 2011a: 131). Hence in this sample there was greater evidence of diversity in the Christian backgrounds of the teachers than diversity as adherence to different religions. Approximately 57% of the respondents indicated that their undergraduate qualifications had included religion in some way. These courses included Biblical Studies, Religious Education (Christian), Philosophy, Sociology and Comparative Religions. However, when asked if these courses had prepared them to teach diverse religions and beliefs, 46% said NO (32% said YES). Teachers who felt they were neither informed nor skilled to manage teaching and learning about diverse religions and worldviews as a result of their pre-service qualifications were in the majority in this sample (Ferguson 2011a: 148).

Teachers' Knowledge of Policy, Curriculum and Teacher Development Programmes

In answer to a question on DoE INSET programmes, 81% of the respondents indicated that they had attended such programmes, but that technical or structural aspects of the curriculum mainly had been covered with minimal

reference to the inclusion of diverse religions and cultures (Ferguson 2011a: 139, 142). Thirty five percent responded that facilitators had included a section on diverse religions, covering Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, African Religions; issues pertaining to diversity; issues around multiculturalism, meanings of inclusivity and “anti-bias” (*sic*). The 37% who indicated that diverse religions, cultures and beliefs had been included in the INSET programmes that they had attended indicated that content had been “brief”, “in no detail”, “only mentioned”, and in one case, “we were given a lot of posters to explain different religions” (Ferguson 2011a: 140).

Forty three percent indicated that INSET programmes had not included content on diverse religions and cultures and 19% did not respond to this question at all. Respondents pointed out that there had been time only for some background on religions, but none had been studied in any depth (Ferguson 2011a: 143). These numbers indicate that 62% of the teachers in this sample were required to teach a section of the Life Orientation curriculum without meaningful training. A range of random topics, which some teachers indicated were not particularly useful for enhancing their understanding, had been included. Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that they had minimal or no knowledge at all of the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (Ferguson 2011a: 138) and it appears that the INSET programmes that this cohort had attended did little to change this situation.

Teachers’ Partiality towards Including Topics on Diverse Religions and Cultures

It is significant to note that in spite of the limited exposure to religious, cultural and other diversity related issues in their professional qualifications and in INSET programmes respondents were generally accommodating of religious diversity. In an open question on how respondents felt about including topics or themes on diverse religions and cultures in their Life Orientation programmes, 83% of the respondents were affirming of the pluralist reality of South African society (Ferguson 2011a: 144ff). The language used by teachers in their responses indicated that they do understand the relationship between democratic citizenship and religion education. In their responses to this particular question the respondents

referred to the “right to freedom of religion”, “respect” for the “values, cultures and rights of other citizens”, “sensitivity towards others”, “knowledge and understanding of others”. These respondents pointed out that a teacher’s knowledge is important as it influences what happens in the classroom (Ferguson 2011a: 146ff).

In a few of the cases respondents were positive and affirming towards including different beliefs in their lessons, while others seemed wary about including material on certain religions. Responses included:

- I feel good because you learn to deal with people of different cultural backgrounds and religions.
- General information is good, but it is not fair to teach from a faith perspective.
- I don’t really mind, but as a committed Christian I don’t have much passion for teaching about Hinduism and Buddhism.
- I prefer [teaching about] culture because the youth are not practicing their cultures, specifically their beliefs, norms, ethics. They tend to imitate western style. African cultures should be taught in multiracial schools not only township schools.

Another of the questions asked if teachers thought they had the knowledge and skills to include topics on diverse religions and cultures in their classes (Ferguson 2011a: 150). Sixty eight percent responded affirmatively, while 32% were either NO or UNSURE. Explanations of the positive responses included:

- I have knowledge, even if limited as a result of self study, reading and research.
- Knowledge is gained from speaking to religious leaders and colleagues.
- My knowledge was gained from teaching in a school with different religions and cultures.
- With internet access and all the materials I have it is possible.

Although this question yielded a 68% YES response, only 49% (n=18)

actually answered the question. In some cases teachers responded from the learners' point of view, what learners should know, rather than if the teacher him/herself felt equipped to teach diverse religions and cultures. So while 83% of the respondents were positive towards the inclusion of religious and cultural diversity in Life Orientation, it appears that not as many were convinced that they had the knowledge base to facilitate this inclusion effectively (Ferguson 2011a: 150).

One of the NO responses is worth noting in that the respondent said that "he could not explain in detail other religious cultures, and made explicit reference to "Shembe¹, IPHC², the ZCC".³ For some teachers and their learners the AICs are a far greater reality than the 'major religions' which take precedence in the national curriculum and in textbooks. Resources on the AICs are also not as easily available for teachers as are the resources on 'major religions'. Either they are not mentioned in textbooks and learning and teaching resources, or they are touched on only briefly, often inaccurately (Ferguson 2011a: 154). Membership of the AICs is particularly evident in the larger cities in South Africa and surrounding smaller towns. To be truly inclusive I maintain that the AICs should receive specialist attention in teacher development programmes (*cf.* Ferguson 2012b). The question begs why teachers do not simply search for the relevant information on the internet. While this may be a valid question for researching 'major religions', in my own research of online resources on the AICs, I maintain that these are not necessarily written for the novice to religion education and moreover require an expert tutor or mentor to assist teachers to make sense of the AICs in the history of Christianity in South Africa. This point will be returned to in the discussion of the PAR phase further along in the article.

In a question in which respondents were asked if they had included, or planned to include topics on diverse religions and cultures in classes, 81%

¹ Shembe, or the Church of the Nazarites, whose founder was Isaiah Shembe.

² IPHC is the acronym for the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. The present leader is Glayton Modise and the church's headquarters are at Zurbekom, south-west of Johannesburg (*cf.* Anderson online).

³ The acronym for the Zionist Christian Church whose leader is Barnabas Legkanyane. The headquarters are at Moriah, outside Polokwane, Limpopo Province (Chidester 1992).

responded that they had or would be doing so later in the school term (Ferguson 2011a: 159). This set of responses was significant considering that in a previous question only 49% indicated that they felt academically prepared to include topics on diverse religions and cultures. Sixteen percent of the respondents clearly said they avoid topics on diverse religions and cultures. In addition, none of the respondents mentioned any other religions or movements than those referred to as ‘major religions’ in the national curriculum (Ferguson 2011a: 160). This implies that minority religions, which are protected by the Constitution, could be avoided in the classroom by teachers who have no knowledge of them or are negatively influenced by the media hype that often surrounds them.

Respondents were asked if they thought they had the knowledge and skills to handle discussions or debates on controversial religious or cultural issues in their Life Orientation classes (Ferguson 2011a: 155ff). This question was included in the survey since democratic citizenship education in the Life Orientation curriculum requires teachers to demonstrate religious tolerance and respect for difference and the pedagogical skills to mediate critical discussion or dialogue in the classroom should controversy arise. Fifty seven percent of the respondents said they could, while 14% said NO and 24% said they were UNSURE. With regard to the positive and UNSURE responses only three of the respondents mentioned that teachers are able to handle controversial issues on religions and cultures because they have been trained to do so; only one mentioned that she is able to handle the debates because of the diversity evident in her working environment; and only one mentioned that it all depends on what religion one is talking about. Interesting that Satanism was singled out as something this teacher would not be able to talk to in any depth (Ferguson 2011a: 157).

Teachers who said NO did so on the grounds that their knowledge of other religions and cultures is “scanty” or as one teacher said: “I avoid being controversial on issues concerning religion” (Ferguson 2011a: 157). These responses raise questions about the preparedness of Life Orientation teachers in general to do justice to citizenship education themes. Diversity topics in the classroom are likely to engender conflict. Various researchers have commented that in order for young people to learn tolerance they need to learn about conflict (Barnes 2009; Gearon 2004: 14). If teachers are averse to including topics on conflicting religious views or beliefs, either because they

do not believe they are sufficiently knowledgeable to do so, or because their own personal convictions inhibit them from doing so, then one has to ask how else learners will acquire the political and religious literacy skills integral to democratic citizenship education (Roux 2010: 998; Gearon 2010: 185ff; Robertson 2008: 32; DoE 2003b).

Discussion of the Findings in the Survey Data

The survey indicated that the teachers in the sample were generally affirming of religious diversity and were willing to include topics on religious and cultural diversity in their Life Orientation programmes in spite of limited exposure to Religious Studies in their qualifications. However, the data betray a lack of teacher content knowledge about religion and religious diversity in South Africa as well as limited pedagogical skills, suggesting that enthusiasm alone is inadequate. This lack of content knowledge leaves teachers unable to deal informatively and critically with the ‘one-size-fits-all’ and possibly ‘bounded’ approach to religion in the national curriculum. Over emphasis of the major religions results in minority religions including the previously mentioned AICs as well as the Nazarite Church (Shembe), and by extension the Bahai Faith, Rastafari and Wicca/Paganism going unnoticed and even misrepresented by teachers in the classroom.

The affirmations of diversity displayed by the majority of respondents in this sample served as a starting point to encourage further learning in this field in the PAR phase. The responses were analysed using narrative analysis (Elliot 2005; Gubrium & Holstein 2009) with thematic content analysis, and discourse analysis (Taylor 2001). The key themes identified formed the basis of the interview guides for the focus group interviews and discussions that defined the PAR phase (Ferguson 2011a: 122).

Teacher Development for Religious Diversity in Communities of Practice

In this section the three dimensions of the community of practice are discussed in terms of how these were defined and refined for citizenship/religion education. Many of the views expressed in the survey

questionnaires on religious and cultural diversity were examined more specifically in the PAR phase in the contexts and experiences of the three participants. The participants provided useful and relevant narrative accounts of religious and cultural diversity in their neighbourhoods and/or from their interactions with learners in the classroom. Such accounts will be included in the ensuing discussion as evidence of the value of face-to-face dialogical communication to confront difficult issues as these were produced by the teachers' contexts. What also emerges is how context produces or generates knowledge relevant for developing the domain of interest for a particular community, rather than being imposed in a reified 'once-size-fits-all' format in textbooks or as vertically transmitted in INSET programmes (Ferguson 2011a: 172ff). Details of some of the narratives have been published elsewhere (Ferguson 2012b), hence are referred to only briefly here.

The shared domain of interest for this community of practice is citizenship/religion education. As previously mentioned, the domain of interest is the particular body of knowledge that motivates the community of practice. Ideally the domain is shared since the teachers should all participate in constructing it. It is also potentially generative as participants raise issues from their own experiences in the classroom, analyse, discuss and 'negotiate' meaning through critical reflection (Wenger 1998: 77). 'Negotiation of meaning', a concept from Wenger's theory was deemed essential for dealing with tensions or dilemmas associated with religious diversity and questions about truth (Griffiths 2001: 19) in this community of practice. 'Negotiation of meaning' could be explained as the process that participants in a given context go through in order to understand each other. For this research 'negotiation of meaning' as it is in Wenger's theory was augmented by drawing on Mezirow's 'communicative learning' which requires critical reflection and dialogue by participants in a discursive community (Mezirow 1991: 76, 199). Both Mezirow (1991) and Taylor (2009: 4) have argued that these two elements of communicative learning are necessary for critical inquiry and problem-solving for transformative thinking in a learning context. Whilst 'negotiation of meaning' could suggest that interlocutors should reach a settlement or agreement, in this research, 'negotiation of meaning' was taken to mean that interlocutors would need to keep an open mind and mutually accept critical evaluation of their own and others' frames of reference (Ferguson 2011a: 74; Mezirow 2000: 31). It is possible that

given the dilemmas associated with religious and cultural diversity that participants might not reach agreement. However, one could equally argue that disagreement should not deter teachers from full participation in the community of practice activities, as difference could be a resource (Young 2000: 24, 81).

An instance from the qualitative data to demonstrate how these dynamics played out in reality came from the participants sharing their particular areas of interest, or issues that they found difficult to mediate in the classroom. Tlaletso (School C) shared that some of the learners in one of her classes knew about Wicca. She narrated how two boys claimed that they were witches (Ferguson 2011a: 207). They had shown her some disturbing pictures of animal sacrifices stored on their mobile phones, claiming that these sacrifices had been performed by witches. Rochelle (School A) told how she had objected to her daughter having to learn about “worshipping the moon”, which we (the participants in the community of practice) concluded had been about Wicca or Paganism (Ferguson 2011a: 234). The problem highlighted in this case is that many teachers who are either deeply steeped in their faith traditions or hold particular views on witchcraft may not be inclined towards teaching about Paganism/Wicca because of long held misconceptions and prejudices (Leff, Fontleve & Martin; Mezirow 1991:44; Cranton & Roy 2003:88). The responses to the age group categories in the survey questionnaire, as well as to the question that asked teachers if they had completed any courses on religions in their teacher education qualifications are relevant here. Since 43% had indicated that they had not studied religion in any way, and more than 35% said they had completed courses in Biblical Studies, it is not difficult to see why minority religions, especially those that already have a prejudiced track record, are not likely to be well received by teachers who have not had opportunities to reconsider their own beliefs and prejudices in development programmes (Ferguson 2011a).

The teachers’ responses in the focus group discussions in the community of practice indicated how necessary it is for teachers to engage in person with colleagues on controversial or difficult issues of belief that arise in the classroom. Tlaletso’s narrative, in which she related the boys’ claims to being witches, indicated that teachers may not always have the knowledge to turn provocative claims or questions from learners into learning opportunities. Meeting as a learning community provided opportunities to

confront controversial topics such as witchcraft and to put some of what the boys were claiming into perspective (Ferguson 2011a: 207). It was clear that Tlaletso did not have prior knowledge of Wicca to allow her to respond to the boys, especially the disturbing photographs of animal sacrifice that they had shown her. Investigation of the literature will show that animal sacrifice does not feature in Paganism/Wicca (Gallagher 2005), information that Tlaletso will not have acquired without studying the key tenets of Paganism/Wicca.

This incident also shows that the construction of the domain of interest is dependent on mutual engagement through which participants not only share knowledge and experience, but also deconstruct inaccurate views, in this case of Wicca, held by the boys (Wenger 1998: 55; Ferguson 2011a: 84). Teacher development for citizenship education should allow teachers to foster understanding of religious and cultural difference by interrogating the reasons for them, particularly from the perspective of teachers' and learners' frames of reference, rather than pushing them aside (Ferguson 2011a: 231; Mezirow 2000). If one takes into account the sensitive nature of the particular issues raised by the teachers in the focus group discussions in this research, it would not have been possible to examine or resolve them in INSET programmes where vertical transmissions of information occur, often in fragmented ways (Ferguson 2011a: 188; *cf.* Wenger 2006/2013; Cochran-Smith 2004: 15). The exchanges that took place amongst the teachers in the focus groups are indications of the kind of horizontal dialogical/reflective interaction required to shift teachers in their thinking, as theorised by Taylor (2009: 9) and Mezirow (2000: 10). However, vertical input from some more knowledgeable person is sometimes necessary to inject new learning and new ideas into the community of practice and to encourage teachers to critically examine their own frames of reference, to assess the assumptions underlying their own beliefs (Ferguson 2011a: 74, 207; *cf.* Mezirow 2000: 10; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002: 139). Witchcraft is differently understood in different religious and cultural groups in South Africa. In traditional African beliefs and in Christianity, witchcraft is negatively understood and aligned with evil. In Paganism/Wicca however, witchcraft is a positive and life affirming practice (Gallagher 2005; Leff, Fontleve & Martin online), a 'truth' that may well escape teachers without some kind of face-to-face discussion with more knowledgeable others.

A further instance of such an interaction occurred after I had observed one of Phumzile's Grade 12 classes in the Observation cycle of the PAR. The teacher asked the learners to list the religions that they knew of. One learner responded with 'Indian', another 'Ghandi' (Ferguson 2011a: 223). The teacher did not try to correct the learners that neither 'Indian' nor 'Ghandi' are names of religions. The teacher then asked the learners if African tradition is religion. The class did not answer – everyone remained silent. When the teacher and I discussed this incident afterwards, he pointed out that he did not know enough about religions to ask probing questions to guide the learners' thinking (Ferguson 2011a: 224). This response was quite disconcerting since the observations took place well into the PAR cycles. The participants had been issued with material on religions practiced in South Africa to start them off, but evidently this teacher had not read the material. This instance drew attention to the possibility that not all of the participants in a community of practice will necessarily take responsibility for mastering knowledge and therefore for contributing to the domain of interest, leaving them floundering on the periphery of the community of practice (Wenger 1998). Ironically, this particular school could contribute significantly to the domain of interest where African Traditional Religions and the AICs are concerned, but the teacher needed to be shown the possibilities and to gain the confidence⁴ to take on more sophisticated aspects of religious and cultural diversity in the classroom (Ferguson 2011a: 210). Graven's (2004: 179) finding from her research with Mathematics teachers, that *confidence* is an "additional component of learning" and necessary for teachers to move from the periphery of a community to full participation, is relevant here.

A *shared repertoire* develops through mutual engagement in relation to the domain of interest (Wenger 1998: 82). In the case of citizenship/religion education the shared repertoire could comprise a positive rights discourse germane to the diversity of religion and beliefs (Ferguson 2011a: 88; 2012a: 132). In order to become an insider to the practice of the community and to be able to participate fully (*cf.* Graven 2004), a teacher needs to learn the discourse of citizenship/religion education, including the

⁴ On confidence as a fourth dimension of a community of practice, see Graven (2004).

reifications (terms, concepts, theories) of the domain (Wenger 1998: 58; Ferguson 2011a: 91). The repertoire may also comprise personal histories and experiences of religion or belief of teachers, learners and their parents, examples of situated experiences of religion and culture, rituals and customs. The shared repertoire is potentially a rich 'basket' of resources generated from practice and participation in a teacher-learning community (Ferguson 2011a: 194ff; Wenger 1998: 55). With regard to citizenship/religion education, the repertoire is likely to be different for each community depending on the social context/s. For example, Phumzile narrated that he had attended the wedding reception of friends who had married in the IPHC. He had witnessed that many couples from the church had married *en masse* on the same day. A personal story such as this one is of great relevance and interest to this school community, since the IPHC headquarters are located not very far from the school, but is open only to members or invited guests (Ferguson 2011a: 202; *cf.* Anderson online). Recognition of these firsthand accounts of rituals and ceremonies as experienced by teachers is invaluable for developing the repertoire and the citizenship/religion education domain of interest.

'Negotiation of meaning' is also integral to developing the shared repertoire as the means to actualizing mutuality and respect, democratic values integral to the discourse of the community of practice (Ferguson 2011a; Gould 1988). The reason for this becomes obvious when conflict arises in communities born out of theological differences between denominations or sects of a particular religion, in this case Christianity. To substantiate this claim, I share a narrative that emerged in the data related to a particular experience of one of the participants. Tlaletso often spoke about Zionist Apostolic Christianity in her home environment and theological conflict between different 'mainstream' denominations of Christianity in her school environment (Ferguson 2011a: 236). The sources of these theological conflicts were related to differences in interpretation of the Biblical text between denominations and were consequently sources of tension amongst her colleagues in one instance, and between learners in her classes, in another. She was concerned that the theological tensions between herself and her colleagues might jeopardise the life of the community of practice at her school. For all three participants, the community of practice afforded opportunities to engage meaningfully with colleagues on the difficult issues

about and between religions in their immediate environments. However, the responses from these participants indicated that unless teachers are willing to exercise critical thinking skills to explore the tensions associated with diversity, as well as the democratic values to manage diversity, they are unlikely to introduce such debates in their classrooms, hence denying their pupils opportunities to engage meaningfully with diversity, an objective of democratic citizenship/religion education (Gearon 2010: 196; DoBE 2011b: 5).

Final Reflections on the Research Experience

From an analysis of the data elicited for this research, both survey and from the PAR phase, it is evident that learning through participation could mean different things in different contexts. Whilst INSET programmes could be interpreted as learning through participation, the survey data indicate that teachers of Life Orientation did not acquire deep knowledge and understanding (*cf.* Biggs 2003) of democracy, citizenship and religious diversity from such programmes in order to contribute effectively to the development of the political, religious and human rights literacy of their learners. INSET programmes attended by the respondents to the survey tended to convey limited information about these key concepts which led to some teachers feeling frustrated. The research was consequently taken to the field in a PAR phase in which a small sample of teachers were given opportunities to engage directly with others who are interested in teaching and learning citizenship/religion education. Through this field work, teachers were observed as they participated in the activities of a community of practice. It became evident over time that mutual engagement, as dialogue and critical reflection on dilemmas of diversity of belief, practice and lifestyle, is integral to teacher development for the finer nuances of diversity, necessary to contribute meaningfully to learners acquiring the political and religious literacy alluded to in the national curriculum and policies.

Moreover, since many teachers do not have formal Religion Studies backgrounds (survey findings, Ferguson 2011a: 134ff) to enable them to address diversity of religion and belief in an informed and inclusive way, learning through participation in decentralized communities of practice I maintain, is a solution to acquiring and generating knowledge of multiple

perspectives on religion and belief not only globally, but also to raise awareness of ‘situated’ experiences of religion and belief, particularly groups who are marginalized due to misunderstanding and stereotyping (Young 2000: 73ff). This research indicated however, that teachers need to be prompted to tell their stories of their own ‘situated’ experiences of belief and practice, to speak openly about their experiences of conflicting dogma in the classroom as a way of reflecting on their own frames of reference, and to find ways to resolve them in the classroom context. Working in a community of practice with these three teachers over many months provided a glimpse into the worlds of the teachers, their learners and their communities. The personal beliefs and values of the teachers and how these influence their relationships with their learners could only be expressed in a decentred learning space, in person, with trusted colleagues (Ferguson 2011a: 229).

Communities of practice however, by Wenger’s own admission (Wenger *et al.* 2002), are at risk of becoming hegemonic if participants reject religious, cultural or lifestyle differences, because they cannot transform their thinking about others and therewith become self-serving. Constant stimulation of the practice therefore is required by a more knowledgeable mentor (Mezirow 1991: 207) to ensure ongoing negotiation amongst participants, including critical reflection on their own socially constructed assumptions and some form of inter-ideological dialogue or discourse (Ferguson 2011a: 256; *cf.* Roux 2007).

Learning to teach for diversity is an ongoing responsibility for teachers of citizenship/religion education as more and more refugees and asylum seekers migrate into South Africa adding to the complexity of diversity. More research is required however to determine how teachers learn about the dynamics of diversity, whether in communities of practice, or other conceptualisations of teacher learning communities, in different contexts and regions. A problem that remained unresolved in this research was how to sustain the community of practice beyond the life of the research project (Ferguson 2011a: 256). This problem would also benefit from further research. When I set out to conduct this research I assumed that much time would be spent attempting to ‘transform’ the teachers’ thinking to accept and appreciate religious diversity. However, it turned out that these teachers remained committed to the project, because they had a genuine interest in learning about citizenship, democracy and religious and cultural diversity

(Ferguson 2011a: 257). Nevertheless, the teacher's propensity to accommodating and conceptualising participatory forms of democracy in the classroom and therewith for mediating deeper knowledge of religions and beliefs could also be researched in communities that are more religiously, culturally and ethnically diverse than the community where this research was undertaken (*cf.* Peck, Thompson, Chareka, Joshee & Sears 2010). A final recommendation therefore is for other researchers for whom citizenship/religion education is a domain of interest, to replicate this research in other contexts in order to refine it and extend it, with the intention of serving the interests of social justice and peaceful co-existence (Ferguson 2011a: 256; Young 2000: 27).

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