

# Religion in Education: Who is Responsible?

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## **Abstract**

Religion in Education<sup>1</sup> (RiE) in South Africa seems to be the playing field of many stakeholders. This subject and/or research domain is hosted in either Departments of Religious Studies in Faculties of Human Sciences or Faculties of Education. During the ‘struggle’, that is in the past 19 years, many opportunities were created for acknowledging the importance of Religion in Education from a social construct point of view, and many expectations voiced. Religious Studies scholars and educationalists formed committees, produced published academic outputs, presented scholarly research results, put curricula together to replace the previous religious instruction mode of teaching. Since 2003, Religion in Education has a democratic government-approved policy document that enhances opportunities to explore religious diversity and to improve and celebrate respect for diversity. One can argue that religion became a force in education that needed well-qualified academe and teachers to present the new social construct for the teaching and learning paradigm. However, all the above-mentioned forces, opportunities and structures are dismally failing the research domain and the educational responsibility to our diverse society.

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<sup>1</sup> Religion in Education (RiE) defines the research domain of religion in schools as subject (Religion Studies) as well as the tertiary subject in teacher training programmes at Faculties of Education (Life Orientation or Religion Studies).

**Keywords:** Religion in Education, research in Religion Education, hermeneutical responsibility, religion in public space.

## **Introduction**

In this article I would like to present a selected and condensed overview of Religion in Education in South Africa, to build my reflection on research being done in SA and to link it with international debates since 1990. I would like to approach this route in a dual manner: a narrative approach (Elliot 2006), to reflect on academic experiences in RiE (Chase 2003; Clough 2002; Hinchman & Hinchman 1997) and present my final arguments from a hermeneutical perspective. I will take the stance that RiE should re-evaluate its position at tertiary institutions and I will support my arguments on the following:

- Personal experiences and observations on RiE;
- South African initiatives on RiE
- Collaboration and contributions of RiE with international initiatives
- Analyses of a selection of publications on RiE in SA;
- A theoretical underpinning for an academic discourse on RiE with Departments of Religious Studies and Faculties of Theology with future possibilities to enhance the rightful place of this research domain.

## **Personal Experiences and Observations**

In the abstract of this article I stated that RiE in South Africa seems to be the playing field of many stakeholders—many of them with no academic responsibilities. RiE was and will always be a controversial research domain as the understanding of RiE hosts many subjective viewpoints (Küng 1987; 1995; Chidester, Stonier & Tobler 1999; Roux 1995; 1997a; 1997b; 1998a; 1999a; 1999b; 2007b; Roux & Du Preez 2006; Tayob & Wiese 1999). Religion in society and the perceptions of academia, not active in this research domain, influences many stakeholders' standpoints on the academic probabilities of RiE. The tendency in SA indicated that this subject and

research domain is hosted in either Departments of Religious Studies, Faculties of Education or in some instances Faculties of Theology and Religious Studies. Religion educationalists in Faculties of Education in SA involved in teacher training especially, have their own 'struggle'. It is a struggle of surviving misconceptions, hidden agendas and attitudes in academia in general and in Faculties of Education in particular. This 'struggle' is also to acknowledge RiE as an important subject and area of research in education in general and in society in particular. When one argues for acknowledgement, a lot of other issues came to the fore. The notions of the *why* and the *how* seem to be old ideas in new arguments.

My experiences derive first as a teacher in RiE (1973-1977) within the Christian National Education policy in schools (Bible Instruction) and as a member of Curriculum Committees for schools, the Departments of Education and the Afrikaans Protestant Churches. Thereafter being lecturer in RiE since 1978 I hosted many workshops within different religious and cultural and school communities. This journey has given me experiences of both sides of the RiE debate since 1990. I experienced changes in academic debates on RiE introduced by Smart (1971; 1989a; 1989b) and explored the new trends in RiE globally and locally, being part of local and international research projects. With the dawn of the new political dispensation (1994) there was a dire need to re-evaluate teacher training in RiE.

During the struggle of the past 19 years (since 1990) in acknowledging the importance of RiE, many opportunities were created and expectations formed. Religious Studies' scholars and educationalists formed committees, produced published academic outputs and presented scholarly research results internationally and nationally on many platforms (Chidester 1992; Chidester Stonier & Tobler 1999; Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa [ICRSA] 1992; Du Toit & Kruger 1998; Kruger 2003; Steyn 2003). Curricula were put together to replace the previous religious instruction mode of teaching and learning in public schools (a Christian-only curriculum) (Roux & Steenkamp 1995; 1997; Roux 2000; 2003; Stonier 1999; Chidester *et al.* 1999). International scholars were invited to form research groups with their SA colleagues and many international conferences were organised and outputs published. Scholars in RiE formed international networking groups on religion in diverse economic, cultural, religious and social societies which had to overcome an intolerant past (Weisse 1996b;

Andree, Bakker & Schreiner 1997; Chidester *et al.* 1999; Du Preez [forthcoming]; Ferguson [forthcoming]; Roux 2005a; [forthcoming]). Society expressed the need to form a new democratic dispensation for all its citizens based on the inclusive and democratic constitutional values (SA Constitution 1996; The School Act 1996). The *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (DoE 2000) is another example where democratic values were brought into the education realm. In many ways South Africans took the lead in exploring religious diversity and its values in all its appearances with a tendency to learn from one another and to explore new research opportunities across international borders.

Since 2003, RiE has also a democratic government- approved policy document (DoE 2003a; 2003b) that enhances the above-mentioned opportunities with the possibility to make an impact on society (Chidester 2008; Kruger 2003; Prinsloo 2008; Roux 2007a). This document summarizes the importance of religion in society, adopts a co-operative model for RiE and outlines the professional approaches for teaching and learning as well as teacher training (DoE 2003b). The main aim of this policy is to facilitate the next generation educationally about diversity and the religious realm and reality of SA and the world as a global village. This document was scrutinised by many stakeholders and representatives<sup>2</sup> of Religious Institutions<sup>3</sup>. One can argue that with this policy, religion became a new force in education. The need for well qualified academia (as lecturers) and teachers in schools to present a new social construct for the teaching and learning paradigm was well documented and discussed (Ferguson & Roux 2003a; 2003b; 2004; Du Preez & Roux 2008; Roux 1997b; 1998a; 1998b; 1999a; 1999b; 2001; 2005a; 2005c; 2006c; 2007a; 2007b; 2008).

Since 1994 many publications (Mndende 1996; Mitchell 1995; Rossouw 1991; Summers,1992; Summers & Waddington 1996;); empirical research (Roux 1993; 1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1997a; 2004; Roux & Du Preez 2006) and post-graduate studies outlined the importance and processes of RiE in a democratic SA (Baatjes 1997; Braaf 1994; Ferguson 1999; Hoblyn

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<sup>2</sup> This term indicates members who represent the religious affiliations and religious communities.

<sup>3</sup> This term includes churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and other well-defined places of worship in different religions and belief systems.

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1997; Jarvis 2008; Prinsloo 2008; Rhodes 1997; 2003<sup>4</sup>). Studies undertaken in SA were scrutinized and assessed on their merits to represent the subject matter of a diverse religious education environment. However, all the above-mentioned forces, opportunities and structures are dismally failing RiE as research domain and circumvent its educational responsibility towards the diverse SA religious society. Although the Policy (DoE 2003a) on RiE was approved there is still a reluctance to implement it in schools (Chidester 2003; 2008; Jarvis 2008; Roux 2007a).

I argue that RiE must be rescued from its ‘fairy tale’ position in the minds of many stakeholders and must be connected responsibly, on a scholarly manner, to its purpose at tertiary institutions. Many processes on RiE in schools and at tertiary institutions are driven by academics not involved in RiE teacher training, for example in theology, law, philosophy, etc. We need to be honest about RiE’s current academic stance in SA. Initiatives taken and built up over many years seem not to be sustainable in teacher training. In many Faculties of Education, RiE is outsourced to part-time lecturers or ‘unqualified’ lecturers, or lecturers in Life Orientation, teaching RiE but not interested to become part of the RiE discourses. The reason, I detected in an enquiry, is that the status of RiE in the school curriculum is transmitted to Faculties of Education. The survival of RiE is constantly under pressure from managers and colleagues at Faculties of Education. The academic discourse of this research domain is questioned. Instead of leading the educational realm in SA, RiE at tertiary institutions is following the processes of RiE set by secondary and primary education as well as the religious and political stances in the public space.

Rob Packard (1990) wrote in the *Oxford Farmington Papers* that he attended a lecture of Ninian Smart<sup>5</sup> in the same year. The passion for this subject turned out to be Smart’s sad news about another Religious Studies department that was about to close.

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<sup>4</sup> Only theses relevant to this article will be referenced.

<sup>5</sup> Prof Ninian Smart was then a professor in Comparative Religion at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and published widely (Smart 1974; 1989a; 1989b) on approaches and possibilities for RiE.

... [H]e expressed his concern at the closure and instilled in me a sense of importance of the subject that goes beyond the confines of those who actually decide to study it.

Packer says that Smart encouraged them to be the future of the subject. He stated further:

I fear the twin-pronged attack on the subject from those who view religion with disdain and religious groups who want a return to religious instruction, and I think we need to evaluate our own shortcomings about what we have done to the subject (Packard 1990:2).

I detect from this quote that there is nothing new on the horizon—the playing field has just shifted its audience.

### **A Selection of South African Initiatives on RiE**

Two main initiatives commenced in South Africa at the beginning of the 1990s on an inclusive approach in RiE. The one initiative was launched from the *Institute of Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (ICRSA)* in 1992 under the directorship of David Chidester from the University of Cape Town. Their initiatives are all well documented and many publications argued for a RiE programme that will not establish again ‘a kind of “religious apartheid” in public schools’ (ICRSA 1992:2). These initiatives were working in the diverse environments of the Cape Town’s southern suburban and township schools. ICRSA’s important contribution was initiating discussions and debate around RiE on many fronts and putting RiE on the political agenda of these initiatives before the democratic elections in 1994. Their involvement on the development of the first draft on a policy document for RiE initiated further discourses and is still a driving force, although not as vigorous as it was before the final policy on RiE was accepted and published in 2003 (Chidester 2003; 2008; DoE 2003b).

The other initiative commenced in 1992 at the Faculty of Education of the University of Stellenbosch. The main initiative driven from Stellenbosch was to explore through empirical studies the understanding of

religious diversity in SA. Although many Departments of Religious Studies at Faculties of Human Sciences at Universities developed and engaged in Religious Studies, teacher training curricula at Faculties of Education and Colleges of Education were mono-religious (Roux 1997a; Roux & Steenkamp 1997). Biblical Studies and Christian religious education (Bible Education) were then the only departure point in the curriculum and for the training of teachers in RiE (Steyn 2003).

The main focus of the research undertaken at Stellenbosch then, was to explore the phenomenon of an inclusive RiE with student-teachers from Afrikaans-speaking Christian communities. Most of the students in the teacher training programmes at this tertiary institution were from the above-mentioned community. One of the reasons was that these communities benefited the most from the pre-democratic political dispensation and policies on religious education (instruction) in schools (Roux 1996b). One could also foresee that there might be a resistance towards an inclusive RiE as the perception prevailed that a multireligious education curriculum is only politically motivated. Perceptions of SA being an only Christian society were a last hope of social survival in the new political dispensation (Chidester 1992; 2003; 2008; Kumar 2006; Mdende 1996; Steyn 2003; Summers 1992).

The debate on religious diversity and the educational responsibility of the school as a public space for religion were the main point of departures of the research projects and many variables were taken into consideration (Roux 2005). Although the policy on religious instruction was mainly applicable to the then Afrikaans and English-speaking public schools in the former Department of Education (Chidester 1992; Roux 2001) schools in different cultural and language communities taught Christian religious instruction (Rossouw 1995). It was then obvious to involve schools in suburban and rural environments within these multireligious and multicultural communities.

The research was defined then within the insider/outside paradigm in the study of religion (McCutcheon 1999; Roux 2001). The research initiatives explored teachers' understanding of RiE; student-teachers as well as learners in primary and secondary schools' perceptions of their own, and religions other than their own (Ferguson & Roux 2003a; 2003b; 2004); developing curricula for multireligious education; exploring teaching and learning strategies; developing phenomenological reflective teaching and

learning approaches (Roux 2006b; 2007b) within a social-construct theory on RiE (Roux 2007a). Theoretical positions, research data and analyses, policy options and developments for a democratic society and RiE were outlined, well documented and published (cf. reference list). It was during this research endeavour that religious institutions of the Abrahamic religions were the most concerned about the input and influence of a curriculum on promoting teaching and learning about social justice and religious diversity (cf. Roux 1997b; Steyn 2003).

The research findings at Stellenbosch were elucidated to Departments of Education at national and provincial levels, the then Colleges of Education, Christian Societies in the Afrikaans and English speaking communities, the Biblical Society and professional Education Societies. Workshops were presented at schools and to religious communities. The educational committees of the then three Afrikaans-speaking traditional churches were targeted with research data to reduce fear and to clarify different options for RiE. It is a fact that some conservative and fundamental Christian communities (Chidester 2008; Du Preez 2009a; Kumar 2002; Steyn 2003) from different cultural groups were lobbying against these initiatives. However, the assumption, as depicted by Steyn (2003), Du Preez (2009a) and Chidester (1992; 2003; 2008) that this was only in reaction to a multireligious policy and clinging to a pre-apartheid RiE policy, is only partially true. Protestant religious instruction was first introduced by Martin Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century against Roman Catholicism in Germany, and secondly Christian National Education initiatives have a very long history in SA dated back to 1861 (Rossouw 1995:2). CNE was part of the grand narrative of the religion in public space in the Cape Colony between 1700 and 1900. The reason was the policies of oppression introduced by the Dutch and British conquerors of the Cape since 1652 on cultures and religions. This dominating stance reflected on the many cultural, religious and political differences.

Only a few educationalists, trained in Religious Studies, taught at two Faculties and Colleges of Education. Two universities' Religious Studies Departments took part in research and instigated processes towards an inclusive approach in RiE, whilst in the meantime Religious Studies Departments, at some universities, closed. This ambivalence created a discourse of scepticism on the future of RiE. Not one Faculty of Theology in



SA took the opportunity to be part of these academic discourses and to reflect with Religious Studies on RiE as ‘public space’. Faculties of Theology and many Faculties of Education and Colleges of Education took the option to be silent or to opt for no interaction with these new initiatives in RiE. On the contrary many academics in Education and Theology saw these initiatives as threatening to the position of the religious institution in public space (Braaf 1994; Swart 2003) which involved public schools. A feeling of distrust was created. Instead of using this opportunity to become involved in RiE and making a contribution to the discourse on RiE in an inclusive diverse society (multireligious and multicultural), their silence and vigorous opposition influenced social justice in teaching and learning within the religious realm (Roux 2007a). One may ask the question whether the reconstruction and interpretation of RiE at that crucial point in time could have developed differently if all the stakeholders were part of the deconstruction of and reflexivity on religious education of the previous dispensation. The social construct of schools, religious, cultural and political communities, as well as the input of the printed and visual media, influenced academic scholarship (Boyer 1990), as well as the reconstruction of RiE in academic circles. RiE became part of the political arena and the emotions of broader society and the scientific results of RiE’s academic studies were questioned by non-conversant outside forces.

## **Collaboration and Contributions of RiE-scholars with International Initiatives**

Research on RiE in SA, although on a small scale, was disseminated internationally. Collaboration between scholars in RiE started in the early 1990s. There were only three SA members of the International Society of Religious Education and Values (ISREV) a prestigious organisation with membership on invitation only. Fortunately more colleagues joined this international interest group, and in 1995, international collaborations commenced on multireligious education as a result of research publication on the SA contexts.

In 1997, initiated by ICRSA, an invited group of eight countries from Africa, Britain, Europe and Scandinavia made an effort to put the different

issues on diverse religions in education on the table and discuss research taken by all these participants (Chidester *et al.* 1999). The discourse on RiE became more international and many countries struggled with an approach in RiE on the inclusion of diversity and simultaneously honouring the particular. It became clear that there were no differences on concerns regarding RiE internationally; however the context of the previous political system instilled a deep divided understanding of what was needed in RiE in SA schools. The IRED group<sup>6</sup> (*InterReligious Education and Dialogue*) became also a force of interest and importance. More SA scholars at tertiary institutions joined this discussion group and cutting edge research regarding RiE was shared. It is however interesting to note that participants and members of this interest group consist of RiE-educators, psychologists, theologians in Practical Theology (Netherlands), researchers, lecturers, curriculum developers and post-graduate students. This interest group became a forum that enhanced the possibilities of research in RiE especially between Southern African countries and countries in Britain, Europe and Scandinavia (Wiesse 1996b). These initiatives were not only fulfilling its goal, but many articles, books and conference publications brought important RiE issues to the fore (Andree, Bakker & Schreiner 1997; Chidester *et al.* 1999; Weisse 1996b; Roux 2005a; TerAvest & Weisse [forthcoming]). Although denominational religious education organisations planned conferences and took part in RiE discussion, the formal tertiary collaboration was mainly done within a tertiary collegial discourse.

Other initiatives and collaboration were interaction with the Nürnberg initiatives (Lähnemann 1998), the University of Warwick Initiatives (Jackson 1997; 1999), Hamburg Initiatives (Doedens & Weisse 1997a; 1997b); Comenius Institute Munster (Schreinder & Spinder 1997), and Leuven (Belgium) initiatives (Pollefeyt 2007; Roeben & Warren 2001; 2008;). It is well known in RiE academic circles that Britain has had a very strong group of scholars on RiE since the 1980s. Scholars (Jackson 1997) questioned the phenomenological approach from ethnographic research to curriculum development and the implications of an interpretative approach. As Britain became part of the enlarged European Union, issues about

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<sup>6</sup> Countries taking part were Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Namibia, Botswana and SA.

religious diversity and the importance of religion in diverse cultural societies in Europe were defined and sponsored (cf. REDCo-projects<sup>7</sup>). SA scholars in RiE were invited to publish in one of these publications (Roux, Du Preez & Ferguson 2009) and it is further testimony that RiE in SA contributed to international discourses.

RiE scholars in Southern Africa (Botswana, Namibia and Zambia) also published widely and promoted a similar RiE stance as in SA. Their contributions on empirical research on RiE are noteworthy and reflect an intensive research on the social cohesion of RiE in religious and culturally diverse societies<sup>8</sup> (Imbunya 2008; Timile 2008).

### **An Analysis of a Selection of Publications on RiE in SA**

In order to introduce a theoretical underpinning for RiE and to open up a discourse with Departments of Religious Studies and Faculties of Education and Theology, I took the liberty to identify the undermentioned categories on publications in RiE in SA. I did not include any publication on the philosophy of religion that mentions RiE, or legal issues on the Policy (2003a), or any publication of specific religious institutions. However, I analysed two postgraduate studies, one in educational psychology (Walton 2002) and the other in theology (Swart 2003), which contributed to my arguments. Publications underscoring the conservative Christian school communities that portray notions imbedded in the previous CNE policy are not included. I am not arguing for a stance in RiE where there should be no interaction and discourses with philosophy, anthropology, school law or any other field of interest. I acknowledge interaction and collaboration as one of the most important aspects of research. I wanted to concentrate mainly on the educational discourses and contributions of empirical research which strengthen the theoretical arguments and outcomes on RiE and teacher training.

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<sup>7</sup> The REDCo-projects (2006-2009) were sponsored by the European Union and many publications on the stance of *Religious Diversity and Education in Europe* were published (see reference list).

<sup>8</sup> For the purpose of this article the research and postgraduate studies done in these countries will not be discussed.

The period before the announcement of the Policy (DoE 2003a, 2003b), research and publications were mainly on issues relevant to the academic discourses for an inclusive RiE policy. Thereafter publications underpinning theory for curriculum development, teaching and learning theories and strategies, philosophies and policies in RiE were of high standard and contributed to the vigour of the research domain.

The identified categories are:

- *Religion and politics in public life from apartheid to democracy* (Chidester 1992; 2002; 2008; Chidester *et al.* 1999; Roux 2001, 2004; 2007a; Tayob & Weisse 1999).
- *Academic discourse on the relevance of an inclusive RiE* (Ferguson 1999; Jarvis 2008; Roux 1995; 2001; 2007a; Swart 2003).
- *Theoretical underpinnings for the social construct from a historical and contemporary SA society* (Braaf 1994; Du Preez 2009a; Roux 2006b; 2007a; Steyn 2003).
- *Empirical research on teacher training and students' understanding of multireligious education* (Ferguson 1999; Roux 1996a; 1996b; 1997a; Roux & Du Preez 2006).
- *Facilitation and mediation of RiE at tertiary institutions and teacher training* (Ferguson 1999; Ferguson & Roux 2003a; Du Preez 2009b; Roux 2006c; 2007b; 2009b).
- *Empirical research on learners' understanding of RiE from Grade 1-12 (primary and secondary schools)* (Snyders 1999; Baatjes 1997; Hoblyn 1997; Rhodes 1997; Roux 1993;1994)
- *Empirical research on teachers' perceptions and professional development for RiE, from deeply rural, small towns (platteland), township, suburban and metropolitan schools* (Du Preez 2008; Du Preez & Roux 2009; Roux 1997b; Walton 2002)
- *Processes on the development of the Policy on RiE* (DoE 2003a), *from a philosophical and theoretical stance to practical implementation strategies* (Prinsloo 2008; Chidester 2003; 2008).
- *Critique and academic discourses on the development of RiE as part of Life Orientation in the school curriculum* (Christiaans 2006;

Chidester 2003, 2008; Roux 2000; Rhodes 2003; Rhodes & Roux 2004; Du Preez 2009b)

- *Theory, research and epistemologies in RiE* (Kruger 2003; Kumar 2006; Roux & Du Preez 2006; Roux 2007a; Du Preez 2009b)

The discourses in the above-mentioned categories were done with such rigour that the printed media also reported on some of the empirical findings. The debate on RiE became part of religion in public space and the academic discourses were kept well and alive. The world events in 2002 with 9/11 and the issues thereafter brought also a new dimension to RiE. The awareness of the diversity of religions became a force, some laden with negative perceptions. RiE research took this sad world event and turned it into opportunities for research in teaching and learning (Roux Smith Ferguson Small Du Preez & Jarvis 2009) and to foster respect for diversity (Roux 2007c; Du Preez 2006; Roux, Du Preez & Ferguson 2009).

However, I detect that since 2008 a few publications, dissertations and theses in RiE and Religious Studies did not portray new research or theoretical notions as one should expect in a subject domain currently under threat. I sense a lack of new ideas and arguments. My reason for taking this stance is that some articles, theses and publications seem to repack old ideas in new bags, with arguments relevant before 2003. I identify research undertaken without taking note of the vast body of knowledge produced over the past 19 years. There is also repetition of arguments in current publications. For ethical reasons I will not quote or reference my concerns. I want to argue that if RiE is under threat, as outlined and argued in this article, scholars in RiE and Religious Studies need to produce cutting-edge research; if not, the question to be asked is, are we our own enemies?

## **Theoretical Stance of RiE; Religious Studies and Practical Theology**

In my own research since in RiE 1984, I have studied different theories, processes and research in RiE. I tried to understand the process of being a researcher in RiE that is important to the hermeneutical and social construct of the school community, and the development of the whole person in a

religious community and its responsibility toward social justice (Roux 2009b; Roux Du Preez & Ferguson 2009; Roux *et al.* 2009). In essence RiE has always been part of a conflict between *scholarship* as outlined by Boyer (1990) and the understanding of religion in the *public space*, defined here as the school environment. As a lecturer and researcher in RiE for 30 years I have seen the transformation of RiE and the academic scholarship in the reconstruction of RiE. What if forces like departments of Religious Studies and departments of Practical Theology (Faculties of Theology) and Faculties of Education adopt a responsibility as collaborators of religion in public space and guard RiE as a research domain as well as its scholarly inputs? There are many arguments from scholars in Education, Religious Studies and Theology against this notion. RiE should be 'independent' from any theological and religious influences and doctrines as argued by Cush (1999), Chidester, (2003; 2008), Chidester *et al.* (1999), Kruger (2003), Kumar (2006), Roux (2001; 2007a) and Steyn (2003). I adhere to this notion and remain cautious of my argument that a theology in one religion has the propensity to support different religious contexts and content. However within the reality in SA on RiE, the debate should be opened for an inclusive approach of Religious Studies and Theology towards RiE. This notion is not unfamiliar when one explores the work and research of international scholars in Religious Studies and Practical Theology (cf. Doedens & Weisse 1997a, 1997b; Roeben & Warren 2001; 2008; Pollefeyt 2007) and a few others. My arguments are that the core sciences need to explore and underpin the educational domain of RiE. Theology and Religious Studies are the origin of religion in private and public space and need to develop and support a full hermeneutical circle.

There are no fixed examples when analysing the contexts and interface between RiE and Religious Studies and/or Theology in Australasia, Britain, Europe, Scandinavia and Northern America. RiE is structured according to the context and challenges of a specific society, be it secular, mono- or multireligious. Feinburg (2006:125) quotes Jean-Jacques Rousseau who advised that 'children must be allowed to grow up free of religion instruction until they were able to decide moral issues on their own terms'. It is also true that religions are not the only source of spirituality, value and morals for society (Hull 2000; Kumar 2006; Roux 2006a). This is the reason why people believe that education should be a 'religion-free zone'. This

debate on a 'religion-free curriculum' in education has been shown not to be sustainable in many countries and SA is no exception.

In his book *Rationality and Religion: Does faith need reason?* Trigg (1998:10) argues that people with deeply opposed thought and comprehensive doctrines could live together under the same constitution. Trigg (1998:9) questions the notion whether a 'religion binds a society together, and that an official religion was essential'. He further discusses the reality that, for example, immigrants coming to the USA and England are questioning the place of religion in society. He argues later (1998:13) that religion 'be excluded from the public sphere because of its essentially controversial nature' (cf. Küng 1987) which is applicable to all religions and worldviews. It is true that religion in public space has been challenged in post-modern societies, and that theology's stance on religion in public space will differ from the main purpose of RiE. Küng (1987:xiv) however states in his book *Christianity and World Religions* that 'ecumenism' should include 'the inhabited world' and one can argue that we all live in a global community of diverse religions. In the social world the boundaries between religions are fading and as Küng (1987:xiv) argues 'a consensus should be possible among representatives of various religions' because we are all on a way to 'a greater truth' (Kruger 2003; Roux 2007a).

According to Lähneman (1998:112), there are circles and systems in society that work together, and that education is just one of those parts. I want to argue further that these systems are intertwined with one another to such a degree that religious institutions and their dogma cannot be separated from the discourses in public spaces and their influences in schools. This does not mean that religious instruction, as defined by religious institutions, is part of RiE in public space (public schools) but should be recognised as part of the circles in society.

The SA Constitution (1996) and Policy on RiE (DoE 2003a; 2003b) recognise religion as integral part of society and therefore RiE needs to deal with religion in public space. I argue that there is a dire need to embrace hermeneutics as methodology of understanding in order to comprehend the social construct of society (Roux 2007a). This notion has implications for the responsibility of Religious Studies and Theology towards RiE. Religious Studies and Theology at tertiary institutions have a responsibility towards RiE. The notion that these three sciences are not intertwined is a

misconception. The subset between RiE, Religious Studies and Practical Theology is superficial as all three domains contribute to religion and worldviews in public space. Coherent collaborations can contribute to understand the different spheres and contexts of religion in public space. Roebben argues (Roebben & Warren 2001:268) that:

practical theology research in the field of religious education tends, moreover to constitute a significant catalyst for the development of theology itself.

These realities occur in the multireligious education environments and the practical issues of religion in modern life in SA. It will be important to challenge the position of fundamental theologies and the implications thereof on RiE. Discourses might elevate the tension of RiE in public schools as well as the implementation of the Policy (DoE 2003a) at present. The question remains: What messages do Theology and Religious Studies send to our multireligious communities?

## **A Hermeneutical Circle**

I want to challenge the three sciences to further take up a social hermeneutical responsibility towards RiE in our religious diverse society. The cultural and social orders in the post-modern 21st century need a hermeneutical understanding of the context of texts in historical contexts. These ‘grand narratives’ should be imbedded in sound curriculum discourses. Curriculum development and research also constitute the ‘art and science of interpretation’ which is the central enterprise of education (Roux 2007a; Slattery 2009). Hermeneutics, social construct, multiculturalism, social justice, human rights values and praxis are important issues in RiE (Lombaerts & Pollefeyt 2007). One is aware of the vast complexities in teaching and learning RiE, especially with an audience of learners and its social construct of religious and cultural diversity. I argue that:

[S]tudents and teachers are constantly involved in dealing interactively with the content and text that they interpret from their own and others’ perspectives. The action (*praxis*) that they apply, in



whatever way in the teaching and learning environment, becomes a direct product of a hermeneutical exercise (Roux 2007a:471).

In the SA education system the underlying principles and outcomes of the curricula in schools are knowledge, skills and values. In RiE these principles are imbedded in understanding the *I* and the *Other* (Roux 2008; 2009b; Levinas 2006). Hermeneutics in RiE is a learning process by

asking original questions and generating information which can be used to broaden one's own knowledge and open discussion or dialogue with *the Other* (Roux 2009b).

It is also true that hermeneutic inquiry has the propensity to infuriate and incite those from traditional stances, especially in RiE. Slattery (2009:115) constitutes the importance of the 'hermeneutical circle' in post-modern curriculum development. He states that a

post-modern community of interpreters and teachers will enter the hermeneutic circle and engage in each other in the process of understanding the text, the lived experiences and the self in relation to the Other (Slattery 2009:141).

Scholars in all three domains should become part of a 'community of practice as researchers' as Descombe (2008:278)<sup>9</sup> argues that

... communities of practice should be open to change. The changes are that there will be some movement between communities and that researchers might well belong to more than one community at a time.

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<sup>9</sup> Descombe argues his notion of 'Communities of Practice' within a mixed methods approach, and on the practice-based research paradigm of T.S. Kuhn 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University Press. I took the idea of this argument of a community of RiE researchers as a basis for interaction between three sciences.

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Descombe further quotes Morgan (2007:62) and Kuhn (1970) that there should be a ‘sense of shared beliefs amongst members of a speciality area’ and that there should be ‘an understanding for the claims of another’. I regard the professional body of knowledge of religion in public space as a ‘community of practice’ driven by inquiry in RiE. The collaboration and/or collective responsibility as service providers for religion in public space need to be further explored.

## **Conclusion**

Why were the initiatives between 1990 till 2008 so successful in RiE in SA? The answer is simple. RiE was, in 1990, also on the threshold of a new dispensation. The dawn of the new political democracy in 1994 kept research and publications in RiE alive. Working towards a new Policy in RiE (DoE 2003a) initiated new research endeavours. The small group of scholars at Faculties of Education encouraged young researchers to become part of the vibrant national and international debates. Many books and articles were published, proposals compiled and funding to conduct research received. International recognition and well sought-after bursaries (Deutsche Ausländische Auslands Dienst: DAAD) and tertiary prestige bursaries received by postgraduate students contributed to the development of the knowledge production in RiE. However, within our own scholarly encounters, we did not have the support of many colleagues at Departments of Religious Studies or Faculties of Education and Theology to embrace RiE. In retrospective it seems that RiE fought a lonely battle at some tertiary institutions. Cutting-edge research of 17 years at a Faculty of Education was shut down because of short-sightedness and perceptions that RiE research was part of a ‘lonely ranger’ research approach. Young scholars in RiE are not acknowledged and old practices that anybody can lecture religion, even at tertiary level, prevail. RiE in the public space seems to be forever the layperson’s pulpit. It seems that the sad story told by Ninian Smart in 1990 is also pertinent for RiE in SA in 2009—and nobody is taking notice—so what went wrong? The ‘force’ becomes a ‘fairy tale’ and academic scholarships regarded as ‘hobby horses’. These actions will impact further on RiE and influence the contextualised social environments. RiE is the force that fosters respect and tolerance for religious diversity in educational environments in

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South Africa's multireligious and multicultural society. SA is currently inflicted by religious and cultural xenophobia—and who will take responsibility?

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