Advancing Religion Studies in Southern Africa

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Abstract
Since the promulgation of the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (2003), Faculties of Education have worked hard to develop the Religious Component of the Life Orientation curriculum—Religion Education. Schools also started to offer Religion Studies as a full Grade 12 subject. This paper investigates the background to and current state of these developments, some of the thematic focuses on which Religious Studies can impact, and the contours and issues in terms of offering Religion Studies as Grade 12 subject. The article provides a few pointers to important focuses that need further development, such as the articulation of the BA major in Religion with the Religion Education and Religion Studies curricula.

Keywords: Relations between religious organisations and the state, historical background, Manifesto, Religion Studies, curriculum.

Introduction
In his important contribution to the South African Constitution (1996), *Protecting Human Rights in the New South Africa* (1990), former Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs included a chapter 'To believe or not to believe'. After referring to *Nkosi Sikelel'i Afrika*'s status as anthem for national liberation, that it is sung by both believers and non-believers despite its religious content—'[t]he words are religious, the occasions secular'—Sachs (1990:43) states: 'We want a secular state in South Africa, but a

secular state with religion, indeed with many religions ...'. In addition to a number of issues he then touches on, Sachs (1990:45) also pointed to five 'constitutional options' for 'governing the relations between religious organisations and the state'. These are:

> ☐ Theocracy, that is, the acknowledgement of religious organizations as the holders of public power and of religious law as the law of the state.
> ☐ A partly secular, partly religious state, with legal power-sharing between the state and religious institutions — each exercising constitutionally recognized power in its own sphere, usually with religious bodies controlling family law and, possibly, criminal law, and the state controlling all other aspects.
> ☐ A secular state with active interaction between the state and religious organizations, which not only have a constitutionally recognized sphere of autonomy, but collaborate with the state in tasks of mutual concern.
> ☐ A secular state in which religious organizations have a tolerated, private sphere of action, but there is no overlapping or joint activity with the state.
> ☐ A secular state in which religious organizations are repressed.

In his analysis of these options, their related questions, and assessment as to the most desirable—that would attract most support—Sachs' view was that:

> [T]here is no scope at all for the suppression of religion, nor is there any possibility of having a state religion in South Africa, nor of giving religious organizations judicial or other authority beyond the voluntary authority accepted by members. It would seem that in the light of South Africa's history and culture, something along the lines of the third option mentioned above would achieve the greatest support, namely, *a secular state with active interaction between the state and religious organizations*[1].

[1] See Sachs (1990:46) for these two quotations.

Given the wide diversity of religions, religious orders and denominations as well as divergences within these, this system is indeed the best for South Africa in our view. It is this system at base, that best captures and accounts for the plural realities and their attendant challenges South Africa faces in terms of its specific postcolonial and postapartheid condition, i.e. as the religions function at the most basic levels of human society.

One model Sachs did not point to, was the Christian National Education model followed by the apartheid regime where one Christian religious denominational system was used as a central ideological unit of the apartheid order, and which was to be incorporated and inculcated not only in and by educational state apparatuses, but across the board in institutions and systems aligned with and buttressing the apartheid state. Non-Christian religious organisations as well as Christian institutions and organisations that resisted and opposed the state ideology were to various degrees either tolerated—under certain conditions (such as not being forced to attend 'Christian-based' public and other institutional religious gatherings; or not being allowed to use the public broadcaster for their religious propaganda)—or actively repressed through a variety of state-sanctioned measures[2]. This model can rightly be termed 'a state-sanctioned, religiously-founded ideology in the interests of a secular minority regime'.

Even so, more than a decade of deliberations after the fall of the apartheid order, it was perspectives such as Sach's that impacted on and was the main organising principle for the adoption of the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (2003).

The Way towards the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (2003)

Through a wide variety of consultations with stakeholders, tasking of investigative, consultative and policy formulating committees, the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (2003) was eventually adopted on August 04, 2003. In his outline, of the process, Chidester (2008: 273) points to the work conducted and submissions of committees and working groups in terms of the following landmark events (see also Amin 2005: 363ff):

[2] See the experiences of the numerous religious struggle veterans such as Dr. Fatima Meer, Dr. Alan Boesak, Dr. Frank Chikane, and numerous others.

- National Education Policy Investigation (early 1990s)
- National Education Coordinating Committee (1992)
- National Education and Training Forum (1993 - 1994)
- South African Schools Act (1996)
- Report of the Ministerial Committee on Religious Education (1999)
- Ministerial Standing Committee on Religion and Education (since 1999)
- Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (2001)[3]
- National Policy on Religion and Education (2003)

Given its divisionary past, the new policies developed for the new South Africa sought to envision a fully functioning South African nation,

> … brought into the unifying streams of democracy and nation building. Here was born an idea, a South African idea, of moulding a people from diverse origins, cultural practices, languages, into one, within a framework democratic in character, that can absorb, accommodate and mediate conflicts and adversarial interests without oppression and injustice (see Asmal 2001).

Recognising that these values are not yet fully operational in South Africa, the *Manifesto* advances ten values because they 'compel[] transformation', and because they 'express[] South Africans' shared aspirations, and the moral and ethical direction they have set for the future'. They are: 1) democracy; 2) social justice and equity; 3) equality; 4) equality

[3] For general educational purposes, but also for understanding the broader value-environment in which Religion Studies function, amongst others, we need to at least add this landmark document with its subsection number 7 on 'Introducing Religion Education into Schools' to this list (see Amin 2005: 379ff). It was launched after widespread public discussion, and engagement in the media, academia and a variety of submissions to the Ministry, followed by a national conference. As product of this specific process, it functioned as a 'call to all to embrace the spirit of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa' (see Asmal 2001).

—especially in terms of non- and anti-racism and -sexism; 5) ubuntu (human dignity); 6) an open society; 7) accountability (responsibility); 8) rule of law; 9) respect; and 10) reconciliation.

Furthermore, the *Manifesto* outlines sixteen educational strategies, for 'instilling democratic values in young South Africans in the learning environment', e.g.: Making *schools work better*: 1) nurturing a culture of communication and participation; and 2) promoting commitment as well as competence among educators. Using the *curriculum*, the primary means of *instilling knowledge, skills and values* in young people: 3) infusing the classroom with the culture of human rights; 4) making arts and culture part of the curriculum; 5) putting history back in the curriculum; 6) teaching religion education; and 7) making multilingualism happen. Using *sport*: to 8) shape social bonds; and 9) nation building. *Equity, social justice and equality*: 10) ensuring equal access to education; 11) promoting anti-racism; and 12) freeing the potential of girls as well as boys. *Rights and responsibility*: 13) dealing with HIV/AIDS; and 14) nurturing a culture of sexual and social responsibility; 15) making schools safe to learn and teach in and bringing back the rule of law to schools; and 16) nurturing the new patriotism[4].

Building then on a variety of events that preceded it, and using the South African Constitution as cornerstone for its identification of these relevant values and these relevant educational strategies to collectively inculcate these values in the citizenry, the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (2003) was not only the culmination of widespread democratic and consultative processes, but also a policy outcome aimed at providing one of the major building blocs for the new nation in the making. Capturing our Constitution's 'invocation' of religion and giving expression of the 'principles governing religious freedom', it aimed at nation building. Asmal (2003) formulated it as follows:

> As a democratic society with a diverse population of different cultures, languages and religions we are duty bound to ensure that

[4] Mkandawire (2006: 10 - 55) provides a helpful assessment and prospects of the broader issues relating to democracy, development and nation-building on the continent.

> through our diversity we develop a unity of purpose and spirit that recognises and celebrates our diversity. This should be particularly evident in our public schools where no particular religious ethos should be dominant over and suppress others. Just as we must ensure and protect the equal rights of all students to be at school, we must also appreciate their right to have their religious views recognised and respected.

Significantly, and in line with Sachs' sentiments of more than a decade earlier, and the nation-building vision of the Constitution, Asmal (2003) said:

> We do not have a state religion. But our country is not a secular state where there is a very strict separation between religion and the state. The Policy recognises the rich and diverse religious heritage of our country and adopts a cooperative model that accepts our rich heritage and the possibility of creative inter-action between schools and faith whilst, protecting our young people from religious discrimination or coercion.
>
> …. In the Policy, we do not impose any narrow prescriptions or ideological views regarding the relationship between religion and education. Following the lead of the Constitution and the South African Schools Act, we provide a broad framework within which people of goodwill will work out their own approaches.

Reflecting on the diversity of actual religious practice, Asmal (2003) continues, saying that,

> [t]he Policy is neither negative nor hostile towards any religion or faith and does not discriminate against anyone. Rather it displays a profound respect towards religious faith and affirms the importance of the study of religion and religious observances.

Against this background, Religion Education was initiated in the school curriculum, with the Grade 12 subject Religion Studies, following suit since 2005, after the developing of the Curricula for Grades 10 through 12.

Curriculum and Themes: Religion Studies in the South African National Curriculum Statement (Grades 10-12)

In analysing the three-tier curriculum, it is important to look at the issues of progression—the building of curriculum in terms of sound pedagogical principles—the specific themes identified as areas of focus, and the possibilities for the developing of relevant scholarly materials for the training of educators that would themselves become teachers, or at least engage in similar themes in the government and public sectors, as well as the corporate world. Since these and related pedagogical approaches and themes are dealt with elsewhere in this issue of *Alter*nation, we do not engage them here[5]. Important, however, is to highlight the themes engaged in the curriculum.

Below we provide an abridged version of the themes in the Grade 10 - 12 Curriculum. Please note that these themes should not be compared laterally from grade to grade in this graph. The aim is just to show the themes in parallel columns.

As Asmal noted and as is generally acknowledged, curricula only provide the general framework for what actually happens in the teaching of a subject in each of the classes that need to measure up to the curriculum. For this purpose we have curriculum advisers, submissions to the various bodies who decide on actual prescribed curriculum materials as well as the individual choices of teachers. In the final analysis, choice rests with the specific mix of religions in the area in which the school is located and the choice of the pupil in terms of the choice provided at this level.

Grade 10	**Grade 11**	**Grade 12**
Clusters of religions	History of religions	Conceptual distinctions between *identity*, uniqueness, unity, similarity, difference and comparability
Origins of religions (History)	Interdependence of religion and social issues	Internal differentiations in some religions

[5] See especially Roux (2009a; 2009b), Du Preez (2009) and Jarvis (2009) elsewhere in this issue.

World Statistics on religions	Mutual influence and adaptation of religions	Uniqueness of some religions in wider religious context
Concepts on religious interaction	Approaches to inter-religious dialogue	History and present dynamics of inter-religious relationships in SA, Africa and internationally
Various definitions of religion	Significance of religious **symbolism**	The roles of **teaching** in a variety of religions
Religion and related concepts	Theories about religion	The central **teachings** of one religion
Adherents' and learner's Perspectives on religion	Significance of **Narrative**/ **myth** in religions	Oral, written and contemporary **sources** in several religions
Major **dimensions** common to all religions, e.g. **narrative**, **ritual**, etc.	Religious **rituals** and their role in religions	Ways of **interpreting** normative sources or traditions in one religion
Variety of how religions originated	Concepts: **worship**, **mysticism**, **prayer**, **faith**, **spirituality**, **aesthetics**, etc.	The understanding of selected part(s) from normative source(s) in one religion
Variety of **social organisation**, **institutions** and roles in religions	Relationship between *state* and religion	Analysis of any one *secular worldview*
Some t*opical issues* relating to Religion in South Africa, Africa and the world	Relationship between religion and *politics*	The notions of religious freedom, *human rights* and responsibilities in different religions
Public life and religiously founded ethical principles	The interdependence of religions and the *natural environment*	The development of a strategy for seeking a solution to *a major social problem*

The relationship between religions and *economics*	Co-responsibility and co-operation of religions in the improvement of quality of life	The role of the *media* in presenting and influencing public opinion and attitudes with reference to religion
The principles of research into and across religions	Research: *gender* issues as experienced	Research into the involvement of religion in areas of *conflict* in South Africa, Africa and the world
Research through observation: **Ritual**	Research: ethics of *leisure* related to relaxation, recreation, advertising, sponsorships, etc	Research into the relationship between religion and the *natural sciences*
Research through interview: Inter-religious relationships		

Figure 1: Thematic Representation: Religion Studies in the South African National Curriculum Statement

In bold, we find concepts traditionally important for the phenomenological study of religion[6]. In italics, we highlighted themes related to secular life, where these are projected as significant articulations for reflection from within phenomenological studies of religion[7]. The comparative aspects come to the fore in those sections of the curriculum looking at the origins, historical, internal religious and denominational/ order diversity, as well as those who are explicitly comparative[8]. Important to note is that this approach

[6] Cf. Van der Leeuw ([1933] 1938); and especially Smart (1973:47f) and Mugambi's (1987) further development in African context.

[7] See especially Beckford's (1990) article opening some relevant issues on engaging 'social problems' from Sociology of Religion perspective.

[8] For a History of Religions perspective in the context of theoretical and methodological pluralism, see especially Geertz and McCutcheon's (2000) edited volume of the *Adjunct Proceedings of the 1995 Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions*.

sees the religions as an important resource for addressing the social and economic challenges in secular, public context and importantly link up with:

- The Lifelong Learning Paradigm and the religions in Africa;
- Comparative Religious Ethics—similar structures of attitude, etc.;
- Research for, with, in and by (geographical urban and rural) community involving all religions.

Contours and Issues: Religion Studies in the South African National Curriculum Statement (Grades 10 - 12)

South Africa offers the ideal case study for analysing the shifting paradigm from a religion specific curriculum—i.e. the apartheid form of the 'Christian National Education Policy'—to a more inclusive representation of the religious diversity present in the country. The thrust of a more inclusive approach prompts recognition, understanding and appreciation of the variety of religions, in the context of a civic understanding of religion with a view of creating a platform for enlightened religious literacy.

As a new subject in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), Religion Studies is a relatively new option for students in Grades 10 -12. Hence, it prompts a major paradigm shift from the early 1960s context of the Christian National Education paradigm, to the desirability of a new approach provided by the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (2003). Based on the premise that Religion Studies is situated in the civic context and is about how humans live together and the role that religion plays in that context, it is crucial to understand the significance of its implementation to social interaction as well. As part of the NCS Grades 10-12 (General), Religion Studies is based on the following principles: social transformation, human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice, and valuing indigenous knowledge systems (cf. *Sub Statement - National Curriculum Statement*, Grades 10-12: Religion Studies).

As a relatively new subject, the emerging concerns and challenges with implementation and a comparative analysis of the pass rates over the past two years need to be analyzed to plot the way forward for a more strategic implementation. Hence, the aim of this section is to provide a comparative analysis of the 2008 - 2009 National Senior Certificate (NSC)

results and foster a discourse on the evaluation of the statistics, and a selective problematization of important concerns.

2008 - 2009 National Senior Certificate Results

(a) Number of Schools offering Religion Studies per Province

In comparing the national total of schools offering Religion Studies (RS) as a NSC subject, there is an increase from 52 schools in 2008 to 54 schools in 2009. However, at closer analysis, one can deduct that amidst the gradual

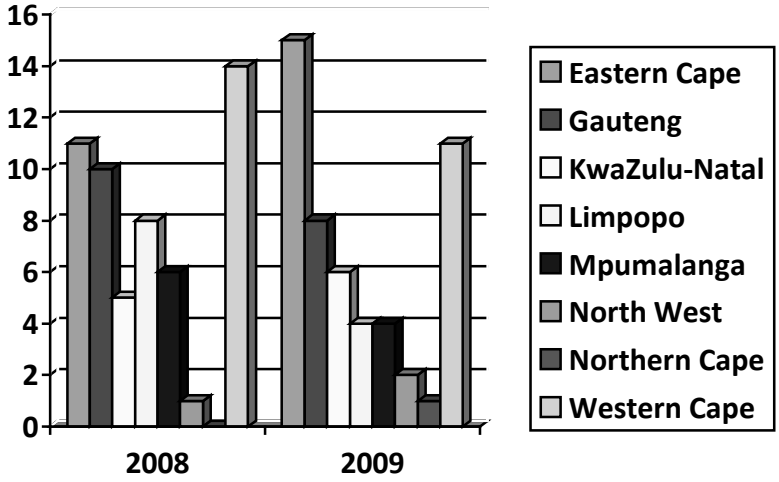

Figure 1: Graph of Number of Schools Offering Religion Studies[9]

gradual increase with the offering of RS in some provinces, there is also a substantial decrease of almost 50% of the schools offering the subject in other provinces (cf. Figure 1). In Eastern Cape, there was an increase of 4 schools with 11 schools offering RS in 2008 to 15 schools offering RS in

[9] These statistics have been obtained from the Department of Basic Education, February 2010 and made available for this publication by Ms. K. Molete (Deputy Director for FET School Curriculum), for the purpose of Higher Education Research.

2009. In Gauteng there was a decrease of 2 schools with 10 schools offering RS in 2008 and 8 schools offering RS in 2009. KwaZulu-Natal increased with one school—i.e. 5 schools offering RS in 2008 and 6 schools offering RS in 2009. The Province of Limpopo decreased by 50% with 8 schools offering RS in 2008 to 4 schools offering RS in 2009. Mpumalanga also decreased by 2 schools with 6 schools offering RS in 2008 and 4 schools offering RS in 2009. school (1 school offering RS in 2008 to 2 schools offering RS in 2009) and Western Cape (11 schools offering RS in 2008 to 14 schools offering RS in 2009). In 2009, Northern Cape introduced RS with 1 school offering the subject.

The following list of schools per province provides a further analysis Both North West and Western Cape have shown an increase in the number of schools offering RS. North West increased with 1 of the regions/ districts in which RS is offered. This indirectly serves as an important foundation to profile the type of schools and students recruited for RS.

Eastern Cape (15 schools)

Dimanda Senior Secondary (Eastern Region), Joubert Ludidi Senior Secondary (Eastern Region), Smuts Ndamase Senior Secondary (Eastern Region), Toli Senior Secondary (Eastern Region), Tshongweni Senior Secondary (Eastern Region), Ekuphumleni High School (Northern Region), St. James Senior Secondary (Northern Region), Asherville Senior Secondary (Western Region), Gamble Street Secondary (Western Region), Humansdorp Senior Secondary (Western), Khanyisa School (Western Region), Mary Mount RC Secondary (Western Region), Sakhisizwe Senior Secondary (Western Region), Solomon Mahlangu High School (Western Region) and Willowmore Senior Secondary (Western Region).

Gauteng (8 schools)

Blue Hills College (District 9), Illinge Secondary School (District 16), Ithuba-Lethu Secondary School (District 11), Lethukuthula Secondary (District 16), Providence Academy (District 11), Sedaven High School (District 7), Sheikh Anta Diop College (District 11) and Sijabulile Secondary (District 16).

KwaZulu-Natal (6 schools)

Mountview Secondary (eThekwini), Theo Hlalanathi Secondary (eThek-

wini), Umqhele Public School (eThekwini), Arthur Blaxall (Pietermaritzburg), Heritage Academy (Pietermaritzburg) and Bizimali High School (Zululand).

Limpopo (4 schools)
Makgoka High (Capricorn), Mashianyane High (Capricorn), St. Josef's Secondary (Greater Sekhukhune) and Vhulaudzi Secondary (Vhembe).

Mpumalanga (4 schools)
Dlumana High School (Bushbuckridge Region), Magigwana Secondary (Bushbuckridge Region), Mawewe High School (Bushbuckridge Region), Mzimba Secondary School (Bushbuckridge Region).

North West (2 schools)
Mayflower Educational School (Dr. K. Kaunda District) and St. Paul's High School (Dr. RS Mompati District).

Northern Cape (1 school)
Volkskool Orania (Pixley Ka Seme Region)

Western Cape (14 schools)
Breë-Rivier High School (Cape Winelands), Bridges Academy (Cape Winelands), Bastiaanse Secondary (Eden and Central Karoo), De Rust Secondary (Eden and Central Karoo), George Secondary (Eden and Central Karoo), Morester Secondary (Eden and Central Karoo), Parkdene Secondary (Eden and Central Karoo), Dominican Grimley School (Metropole Central), Holy Cross Convent (Metropole Central), Athlone Skool (Metropole North), Bishop Lavis Secondary (Metropole North), Elswood Secondary (Metropole North), Uitzig Secondary (Metropole North) and Woodlands Secondary (Metropole South).

(b) Comparative Analysis 2008-2009 Religion Studies Pass Rates

In 2008, 1 471 students wrote the NSC Religion Studies examinations and in 2009, the number increased to 1 870 students. There was an increase of 399 students in total. In 2008, the national pass rate was 87.3% with the national average performance being between 50-59%. In 2009, the national pass rate was 86.3% with the national average performance being between 40-49%. Although, there is a 1% decrease in the national pass rate in 2009, the overall

Average Performance Levels	Total Students	L1 (0%-29%)	L2 (30%-39%)	L3 (40%-49%)	L4 (50%-59%)	L5 (60%-69%)	L6 (70%-79%)	L7 (80%-100%)	Total Pass	Percentage Pass
Eastern Cape										
2009	441	37	45	74	88	82	80	35	404	92
2008	444	80	118	78	55	34	44	35	364	82
Gauteng										
2009	196	0	2	6	24	48	48	68	196	100
2008	205	0	15	48	64	53	23	2	205	100
KwaZulu-Natal										
2009	297	71	70	50	39	23	21	23	226	76
2008	67	10	4	2	12	9	13	17	57	85
Limpopo										
2009	256	63	49	50	46	23	19	6	193	75
2008	368	75	83	61	60	49	27	13	293	80
Mpumalanga										
2009	245	44	52	79	41	19	8	2	201	82
2008	43	19	17	5	1	0	1	0	24	56
North West										
2009	38	0	1	0	14	14	6	3	38	100
2008	29	0	2	8	11	6	2	0	29	100
Northern Cape										
2009	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	100
Western Cape										
2009	396	42	68	81	61	63	55	26	354	89
2008	315	3	19	64	87	85	37	20	312	99

Figure 2: Religion Studies Average Performance Levels per Province: 2008-2009, Department of Basic Education, February 2010.

pass rate needs to be analysed against the background of an increase by 399 students. There is a 2.7% increase in the number of students passing RS with distinctions. In 2008, 6% students passed with distinctions and in 2009 it increased to 8.7%. In considering that RS is a subject in the NSC, and has

implications for university entrance, it is imperative to emphasise that there needs to be a paradigm shift from the focus of obtaining high national pass rates to strategically maintaining a significant level of succinct national performance—i.e. the quality of the pass rate. The table in Figure 2 illustrates the provincial performance of RS in 2008 - 2009 within the various percentile levels.

In 2008, the average performance of most students in Eastern Cape was in L2; however in 2009 the performance increased to L4. Gauteng also showed an impressive increase in its average performance. In 2008 the majority students were situated in L4; however, in 2009 the majority students obtained a L7 pass. Also in Gauteng, there is a significant increase in the number of students obtaining a L7 pass—i.e. a substantial increase of 2 students in 2008, to 68 students in 2009.

KwaZulu-Natal shows a vast increase in the number of students opting for RS, i.e. from 67 students in 2008 to 297 students in 2009. Although, the table exhibits 141 students situated at L1-L2 for 2009, there is also a substantial number of students at the higher levels of L4-L7 for 2009. A decrease is noted in the pass rate for 2009 (76%) as compared to the pass rate for 2008 (85%). However, this can be misleading if not considered against the background of the student increase.

There is a substantial decrease in the number of students taking RS in Limpopo. In 2008 there were 368 students and in 2009 there were 256 students. The pass rate has also decreased by 5% and the performance of most students have moved from L2 (2008) to L1 (2009). North West Province is performing fairly well with an increase in the number of students from 2008 to 2009. The majority of students are situated between L4-L5. Northern Cape has one student; however, the one student is currently situated at L2. Western Cape has an increase in the number of students for 2009. However, majority of the students for 2009 are situated in L3.

The above statistics provide a synopsis of the state of RS nationally and provincially. However, the impressive 2009 national pass rate for RS of 86.3% needs to be critiqued against the declining NSC pass rate of 60.7%.[10] As a new subject in the NSC curriculum, it is evident that RS pass rates are

[10] Cf. *Report on NSC Grade 12 Examination Results for 2009*, Minister of Basic Education, Mrs. A. Motshekga.

detrimental to evaluating the success of its implementation. However, one cannot ignore the importance of the student performance levels against merely obtaining high national pass rates. Against this synopsis, the next section aims at problematizing selective issues in the implementation of RS nationally and provincially.

A Problematization of Selective Issues in the Implementation of Religion Studies Nationally and Provincially

The following concerns are central to understanding the present state of RS in South Africa. These concerns have developed over the past two cycles of Grades 10-12 and the NSC Grade 12 examinations. They also come to the fore from national and provincial workshops conducted with RS Subject Advisors and RS Teachers.

(a) Religion Studies Recruitment: Perception vis-a-vis Conceptualization

The current challenge confronting the successful recruitment of students to RS is the negative perception of what constitutes Religion Studies. To a great degree, the discourse of Religion Studies has been categorically grouped with Christian National Education. Hence, RS is still perceived by many as Biblical Studies, Religious Instruction or a religion specific subject, i.e. Christianity or Islamic Studies. These perceptions have largely impacted on the manner in which students approach and perceive the subject. The subject is often perceived as an 'easy subject' and hence, when students encounter the content of the subject, they are immediately confronted with the challenge of reconceptualising what RS actually entails.

According to Ms. K. Molete (Deputy Director for FET School Curriculum, 25th February 2010), another direct challenge on Religion Studies is the negative perception construed by parents. Due to this mistaken perception, many parents believe that if their children opt for Religion Studies it will inevitable affect their spiritual grounding in their specific religious traditions. This prompts a critical question of religious identity and solidarity in the context of being exposed to the religious diversity that exists within a country. In emphasising the importance of this discourse, Weller (2008: 129) states that:

> The education system is also an arena within which family traditions and identities, including religious identities and convictions, come into interaction with the beliefs and values of the wider and more diverse society. Such interaction can result in significant tensions for parents, children and teachers alike. These tensions can either take the form of conflict and/or negotiation.

Thus, the conceptualization of Religion Studies according to the *Sub-Statement: National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12 (General) Religion Studies* (2008:9) needs to be emphasised with the objective of a paradigm shift in public perception:

> Religion Studies is the study of religion as a universal human phenomenon and of religions found in a variety of cultures throughout history. Religion and religions are studied without favouring any religion or discriminating any religion, whether in theory or in practice and without promoting adherence to any particular religion.

Hence, there is a need to emphasise the rationale for the study of religions that is based on the mutual recognition of citizens, for all their religious diversity, in a common interreligious society (cf. Chidester 2002: 6). Thus, the purpose of RS is to enhance knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to equip the student to function in an open and democratic society. Weller (2008: 129) affirms this thesis by stating that:

> The education system is also important because at school level, it can be the means by which attitudes and values are initially formed and, later, for those who enter higher education, critically evaluated. In can thus play a significant role in shaping perceptions and approaches to issues of religious diversity.

(b) The Religion Studies Teacher as an ad hoc Teacher

The success of RS is largely dependent upon its facilitators. Hence, the current state of the South African education system cannot be ignored. It was clearly evident at the Religion Studies National Subject Advisor

Workshop in Mpumalanga (25-27 May 2009), that many teachers, who are currently teaching RS, do not have the necessary skills and the knowledge of the content needed to fulfil the curriculum requirements. Hence, the question that posits a critical reflection relates to who are the subject facilitators. Many of these teachers were recruited on the basis of either having some experience of Biblical studies, religious instruction or experience in facilitating Life Orientation. Indeed, this becomes problematic when considering that RS is a new subject that requires new skills and familiarization with the new content, i.e. the requirement of new skills for effective facilitation and application of new methods for appropriate assessment.

Hence, teachers are required to share their time on developing the new subject amidst teaching other subjects. Indeed, RS is not like other subjects, it requires the application of the appropriate skills to create a conducive environment for reflexive engagement. It also implies that the teacher familiarise himself/herself with his/her students to understand the type of environment that needs to be created to secure respect, trust and freedom for active participation.

In addressing this crucial issue, the Department of Education in Gauteng exemplifies an ideal model for sustainable training and development in RS. In both 2008 and 2009, Gauteng achieved a 100% pass rate. The success of these achievements can be attributed to the intense support structures that are currently in place—i.e. regional workshops to collectively engage with content and assessment methods, and small group district support structures where teachers engage with each other sharing experiences and challenges.

(c) Induced Outcomes versus Strategic Outcomes

In this section, we employ the terminology ‘induced outcomes’ versus ‘strategic outcomes’. The term ‘induced outcomes’ refers to the pass rates both nationally and provincially which serve as the persuasion factor for evaluating and concluding the state of RS. This is contrasted against the term ‘strategic outcomes’ which takes into consideration the performance levels of the students and their demonstration of the respective competencies. Indeed, as a new subject forming part of the NCS, one cannot ignore the impressive

national pass rate of 86.3% (2009) and 87.3% (2008). Also the number of students passing with distinctions in 2008 (6%) and in 2009 (8.7%) needs to be commended. These induced outcomes provide a promising future for RS.

However, on substantiating that RS is a relatively new subject, with potential of attracting more students, there needs to be a paradigm shift that brings into balance the induced outcomes and the strategic outcomes. In evaluating the present state of RS (provincially and nationally), there needs to be a shift in focus which now places emphasis on improving student performance—i.e. improving the percentile levels in which passes are achieved, and the demonstration of the required competencies which empowers students for Higher Education and lifelong learning. The critical competencies that come to the fore in RS are competencies in communication, investigation, data handling and problem solving (cf. *Subject Assessment Guidelines—Religion Studies*: National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12, Department of Education).

Hence, this paradigm shift requires a strategic change in assessment and evaluation methods. There needs to be a shift of focus from the regurgitation of textbook knowledge to creating a cohort of students that have acquired the skills of critical engagement through the demonstration of the various competencies. Thus, the correct facilitation, and active engagement with the content and specified learning outcomes have the potential to promote the strategic outcomes with the implementation of the acquired skills in the larger social discourse.

(d) Marketing RS through Strategic Career Paths

In both the National Subject Advisor Workshop and the Gauteng Subject Advisor Workshop, the critical question that surfaced pertained to career paths –i.e. "once the student takes RS, what then?" This proved to be an important facet that crossed two dimensions: (a) student recruitment for RS and (b) career guidance. The common perception of RS, mentioned earlier, brings to the fore only one career path. Many students and parents believe that RS is in preparation of a position in religious vocation—e.g. a church minister. In a changing global context and with the active interaction of people from different religious backgrounds, there is a dire need for the creation of more relevant career paths that require the understanding of

religion as a career and post or position requirement in strategically vital systems for the benefit of the equitable socio-economic development of he country at local as well as national levels.

A career in religion crosses all dimensions and serves as an integral part in the informed understanding of social interaction and social systems. For instance, some career paths are: business (i.e. national and international; customer relations; marketing; company and market management of religious diversity, e.g. Islamic banking); governance (ranging from municipal to international relations and their equitable accommodation of diverse religious organisations and institutions), non-profit and non-governmental organizations; counselling and social work service; journalism; law; tourism; information technology; etc.

Hence, this posits the need for a creative religious studies curriculum at Higher Education (i.e. Degree Programmes in Religious Studies—BA Major in Religion) that can serve as a strategic path enabling students to enter into these various careers—i.e. plotting a career direction.

Conclusion

The South African Education community has taken significant steps towards realising perceptions and expectations on the organising and governing of the various kinds of relationship between the religious organisations and the state. In order to educate and train future leaders and citizens, we need to ensure that learners are educated in terms of appropriate continentally and internationally respected moral value systems[11]. On the one hand, we need to research, learn about, and foster the significance of each of the major religions in Africa and more broadly speaking. On the other, we need to ensure that their impact on our social systems and their various transformations and interactions work toward the common good of all. Since it is especially religious formations that are represented at all sectors and levels of society, religiously-founded oganisations and institutions can play

[11] It is especially informative to learn from significant leaders and incentives in this area in secular state systems that do not exclude, oppress or repress religions but rather seek cooperation, as well as the variety of systems which have been developed since the advent of the various forms of modernization on the African continent.

important roles in addressing the socio-economic, institutional and moral-ethical challenges our developing continent faces. That Religion Education and Religion Studies will play a very important role in this endeavour, is indicative of the challenges we face. In this brief article we attempted to point to a few of the issues we need to consider in our pursuit of this route. The next phase is to sharpen the education and learning environment and practices in our classrooms. An important further requirement would be to focus the articulation of the BA major in Religion/ Religious Studies more closely with the Religion Education and Religion Studies curricula. A stronger partnership between the study of religion and education programmes may yet prove crucial for advancing Religion Studies and its particular niche in southern Africa.

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Interview

Interview with Ms. K. Molete, Deputy Director for FET School Curriculum, 25th February 2010.

Workshops/Presentations

Religion Studies National Subject Advisor Workshop, Mpumalanga, 25-27 May 2009, conducted by HC Steyn and D Chetty.

Religion Studies Gauteng Province Subject Advisor Workshop and Teacher Workshop, 31st July 2009, conducted by HC Steyn and D Chetty.

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