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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

# **HOW RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS UNDERSTAND AND IMPLEMENT A MULTI-FAITH CURRICULUM – CASE STUDIES FROM BOTSWANA**

by

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**Disclaimer**

I hereby declare that this thesis (*How Religious Education Teachers Understand and Implement a Multi-faith Curriculum - Case Studies from Botswana*) is the result of my original and independent investigation and that all quotations and sources have been acknowledged.

I further declare that the thesis has not already been accepted for any other degree, nor is it being concurrently submitted for any other degree.

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Baamphatlha Dinama

Date

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Nomsa, my daughter Gabo and son Mogale who gave my academic life some meaning.

## ABSTRACT

This study explores teachers' understanding and implementation of the multi-faith Religious Education curriculum in Botswana junior secondary schools. The multi-faith curriculum resulted from an educational policy change in 1996 that saw a move from a Christian-based RE to a multi-faith Religious Education (RE) curriculum. This study is based on qualitative case studies and draws data from classroom observations, interviews with four RE teachers, five RE education officers, eight RE in-service teachers and three groups of RE students. The main participants are two groups of teachers, those who taught the multi-faith curriculum and those who taught both the Christian based RE and the multi-faith Religious Education.

In this study, documents such as the syllabus document, end of month tests, end of term examinations and end of three year junior secondary school national examinations papers were used to further highlight the classroom practices of RE teachers. Furthermore, the study adopts the *teachers' professional knowledge landscape* as the theoretical framework, a view that is espoused by Clandinin and Connelly (1995), that stresses the importance of teachers' knowledge. In the implementation of the multi-faith curriculum, there

The following themes emerge in the study; teachers' understanding of the multi-faith RE, teachers' classroom practices in terms of their content and pedagogical knowledge, their classroom management, and especially discipline. The study reveals that there are no marked differences between these two groups of teachers in terms of their understanding of the curriculum and their classroom practices. It further reveals that there are various factors that impact on the practices of teachers such as their view of the multi-faith philosophy, assessment skills, use of students' textbooks, mentoring and tracking of RE graduates from teacher training institutions. The study suggests that teachers need to have an adequate understanding of students' environment, in terms of their personal experiences and social background. The study recommends that teachers in general and RE teachers in particular need to be involved on an occasion of any curriculum change because they are the main implementers. In addition, teachers need extended periods of professional in-service training on occasions of curriculum reforms.



**KEYWORDS:**

Education policy

Multi-faith Religious Education

Teachers' professional landscape

Classroom practices

Phenomenological Approach

Tolerance in Religious Education

Critical teacher

Diversity in Religious Education

RE teachers

RE students



## KEY ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ATR</b>	African Traditional Religion
<b>CD&amp;E</b>	Curriculum Development and Evaluation
<b>ERTD</b>	Examinations, Research and Testing Division
<b>JC</b>	Junior Certificate
<b>RE</b>	Religious Education
<b>RME</b>	Religious and Moral Education
<b>RNPE</b>	Revised National Policy on Education



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Disclaimer	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Dedication	iv
Abstract	v
Key Words	vi
Key Abbreviations	vii
Table of contents	viii
<b>Preamble</b>	1
Aims of the study	1
Research questions	1
Rationale for the study	1
Significance of the study	3
Research problem	3
Limitations of the study	4
Outline of the thesis	5



<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	7
<b>1. The slippery road of Religious Education</b>	7
1.0 Introduction	7
1.1 Exploring the meaning of the Multi-faith Religious Education	7
1.1.1 Background to the study	6
1.2 Studies done on multi-faith Religious Education curriculum	13
1.3 Religious Education as understood and practiced in different countries	16
1.3.1 Liberalism and multi-faith Religious Education	21
1.4 Tolerance in the Religious Education curriculum	23
1.5 Limitations of tolerance	23
1.6 The capability of education in changing students' attitudes and behaviour	26
1.7 Religious Education and diversity in the classroom	31
1.8 Empowering teachers to teach about diversity	32
1.9 Learning from and learning about Religious Education	33
1.10 Religious Education in Southern Africa	35
1.10.1 Studies done on the multi-faith Religious Education curriculum in Botswana	37
1.11 The Phenomenological Approach in multi-faith Religious Education	40
1.12 Critique of the Phenomenological Approach in Religious Education	44
<b>Conclusion</b>	49



<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	50
<b>2. The teachers' professional landscape</b>	50
2.0 Introduction	50
2.1 Teachers' professional landscape: a conceptual landscape	48
2.2 Involving teachers on the occasion of a reform	57
2.3 Teachers' autonomy and their multiple identities	66
2.4 Teachers' professional status	67
2.5 Critical pedagogy and multi-faith Religious Education	71
<b>Conclusion</b>	84
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	85
<b>3. Sitting, watching and talking to teachers</b>	85
3.0 Introduction	85
3.1 Qualitative methodology	85
3.2 Case studies	88
3.3 Design of setting	89
3.3.1 Makala Junior Secondary School	89
3.3.2 Togonal Junior Secondary School	90
3.4 Gaining access	91
3.5 Permission	92
3.6 Ethical considerations	93



3.7	Sampling	94
3.8	Profile of the students	98
3.9	Participants at Makala Junior Secondary School	98
3.9.1	Miss Rabin	99
3.9.2	Mr Tiro	99
3.10	Participants at Togonal Junior Secondary School	100
3.10.1	Mrs Laban	100
3.10.2	Mrs Koloni	100
3.11	Data collection procedures	101
3.11.1	Biographical questionnaire	101
3.11.2	Video-recording observations	102
3.11.3	Interviews	105
3.11.4	Document review	109
3.11.5	Researcher's journal	110
3.12	Validation of data	111
3.13	Reflexivity	112
3.14	Methodological limitations	113
	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>117</b>

<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	118
<b>Students have to treat different religions equally</b>	118
4.0 Introduction	118
4.1 Teachers' understanding of the multi-faith RE curriculum	118
4.2 Religious Education teachers' content knowledge	125
4.3 Religious Education teachers' pedagogical knowledge	128
4.4 Religious Education teachers' main teaching technique – group work	140
4.5 Classroom management and discipline in Religious Education classes	148
4.6 Teachers' faith and their classroom practices	149
<b>Conclusion</b>	150
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	151
<b>5. I am concerned about my students passing Religious Education</b>	151
5.0 Introduction	151
5.1 Assessing a multi-faith RE curriculum	151
5.1.1 Teachers views on assessing Religious Education	152
5.1.2 Teachers' skills in testing a multi-faith Religious Education	156
5.2 Access to official documents	163



5.3	Resources in the two schools	167
5.3.1	Commercially produced materials and other resources	167
5.3.2	Physical resources in schools	175
5.3.3	Educational visits and resource persons	176
5.4	Teaching Religious Education in a diverse classroom environment	177
5.5	Mentoring and collaboration in Religious Education	180
5.5.1	Mentoring new Religious Education teachers	189
5.5.2	Collaboration amongst Religious Education teachers	181
5.6	Religious Education teachers collaborating with the community	185
5.7	In-service professional development	186
	<b>Conclusion</b>	189
	<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	191
	<b>6. Discussions, recommendations, implications for educational practice and research</b>	191
6.0	Introduction	191
6.1	The philosophy of the multi-faith Religious Education	191
6.2	Pedagogy	195
6.3	Assessment	199
6.4	Collaboration, professional development and record keeping	203



6.5	Resources	205
6.6	How teachers view the students' backgrounds	207
6.7	Recommendations	208
6.8	Implications on policy formulation, curriculum development and interpretation and further research	210
	<b>Conclusion</b>	211
	<b>References</b>	212
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	243
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	Letter from the editor	243
<b>APPENDIX B1</b>	Permission to conduct research	244
<b>APPENDIX B2</b>	Permission to conduct research – Extension	245
<b>APPENDIX C</b>	Ethical clearance certificate	246
<b>APPENDIX D</b>	Teachers' biographical questionnaire	247
<b>APPENDIX E</b>	Interview schedule on teachers understanding of RE	249
<b>APPENDIX F</b>	Teachers' pre-lesson interview schedule	251
<b>APPENDIX G</b>	Teachers' post-lesson interview schedule	251
<b>APPENDIX H</b>	Classroom observation schedule	252
<b>APPENDIX I</b>	Interview schedule for education officers	253
<b>APPENDIX J</b>	Interview schedule for students	254
<b>APPENDIX K</b>	Letter to Parents	255
<b>APPENDIX L</b>	RE chief examiner's report	257



<b>APPENDIX M</b>	RE end of term examination paper 2	266
<b>APPENDIX N</b>	RE end of term examination paper 1	276



## **Preamble**

### **Aims of the Study**

This qualitative study aimed to explore how Religious Education teachers at four junior secondary schools in Botswana understand and implement a multi-faith religious education school curriculum in their classrooms.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions are explored in relation to the Religious Education teachers' understanding and their classroom practices of a multi-faith curriculum.

- a. How do Religious Education teachers in Botswana understand the multi-faith curriculum?
- b. Have the classroom practices such as teaching techniques and strategies of Religious Education teachers in Botswana changed in response to the multi-faith Religious Education curriculum?
- c. How do conditions inside and outside classrooms shape the Religious Education teachers' translation of the multi-faith curriculum into practice?

### **Rationale for the study**

The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) in 1994 introduced major educational changes in post-colonial Botswana. One of the key policy shifts was the termination of the Christian Religious Education curriculum and the introduction of a multi-faith Religious Education (RE) curriculum (Botswana Government, 1994). A Christian based RE refers to a variant of RE that has Christianity as its content and where there is a deliberate fostering and nurturing of the students' faith. A multi-faith RE refers to a curriculum whose content is a variety of religions and whereby students are helped to know, understand and reflect on the basic tenets that form the concept of religion. In addition, the students are expected to bring to the learning environment their various

experiences, knowledge, backgrounds and are not expected to be necessarily practitioners of religion.

Furthermore, the fact that the new RE curriculum emphasises student-centredness instead of teacher-centredness, means that it has major implications in the way RE teachers and students interact and engage with each other (Botswana Government, 1994). More than ten years after the introduction of this curriculum, little is still known about how RE teachers use student-centred pedagogies in Botswana classrooms. Similarly, little is known about how RE teachers of different religious persuasions understand and implement a multi-faith RE curriculum.

In conducting my literature search, I did not find any studies that showed RE teachers' practices that resulted in students who are autonomous, tolerant and have a sense of respect for other people as envisioned in a multi-faith RE curriculum. Autonomy, respect and tolerance are tenets envisaged in the RNPE, which is a document that presently guides curriculum development in Botswana (Botswana Government, 1994).

Another reason for embarking on this study is that I have a strong professional interest on how Botswana RE teachers currently understand and implement the multi-faith RE curriculum. By understanding I loosely mean the knowledge or familiarity with a particular thing. According to Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian (1987) two conditions are necessary for understanding to occur. Firstly, the content of what must be known has to be meaningful, and secondly, that person must relate his or her prior knowledge to the new one. Understanding could be viewed in terms of a person being able to contextualize, compare, as well as analyse. It is the ability of being able to take knowledge learned in one instance and applying it to another situation (Settlage & Wheatley, 2005). I am a Religious Education teacher by training, and taught the subject for five years at secondary school level in Botswana. I also taught pre-service RE teachers for eight years at tertiary level which is a diploma awarding institution. I am currently teaching RE to prospective and in-service RE teachers at university level and have been in contact with practicing RE teachers mostly in workshops. In all these years, I observed that junior secondary school RE teachers have several successes as well as constraints in teaching this curriculum. Of significance, is the necessity to gain insight into the work of RE teachers as they work in the classrooms.

Though I have been an RE teacher trainer for several years, I cannot claim knowledge of what teachers do in their classrooms, until I study their practices, beliefs and values about RE teaching. It is against this background that I embarked on this doctoral study in order to suggest possible practical RE teaching techniques and strategies where possible. I engaged in this study because research is a human endeavour that is characterised by its persistent and deliberate effort to extend people's understanding about the world in which they live (Verma & Beard, 1981). I hope my research will add value to an existing pool of knowledge in RE and might suggest some teaching techniques and strategies that correspond with the philosophy of a multi-faith RE curriculum that might be helpful to RE teachers and teacher educators.

### **Significance of the study**

This study is likely to give insight to policy makers and curriculum developers on how RE teachers understand and implement the multi-faith RE curriculum in Botswana. It may also alert policy makers and other professional developers such as teacher educators about the challenges faced by RE teachers in their classrooms as they respond to educational policy reforms initiated by government. The findings from the study might influence teacher educators to include in their teacher training programmes some relevant skills that teachers might use in their classrooms. I envisage that the study will help curriculum developers and policy makers understand better the teachers' practices as well as inform them about the teachers' professional knowledge, in terms of their content, pedagogical and curricular knowledge. This understanding particularly on the part of teachers and teacher educators might lead to relevant and improved classroom practices. Lastly, the study might act as a knowledge base for future research in Botswana because, in my view, there is inadequate literature on how RE teachers understand and practice a multi-faith RE curriculum.

## Research Problem

It is on the basis of the fundamental changes in a multi-faith RE curriculum in Botswana and on the evidence that many teachers seem to be struggling to translate the multi-faith RE curriculum into practice that my study focuses on. Sepotlo (2004) notes that teachers struggle to translate the RE curriculum into classroom practice, largely due to lack of resources especially relevant textbooks. However, it is not clear if teachers possess relevant and adequate professional knowledge to teach the multi-faith RE curriculum. Currently, for RE teachers to be employed in public junior secondary schools, they are expected to have a minimum qualification of a diploma in secondary education with RE as one of their specialisations.

When the multi-faith RE curriculum was introduced, practicing RE teachers were invited to attend workshops conducted by the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation (CD&E) of the Ministry of Education. The Department aimed at making teachers aware of the new curriculum so that they could re-align their classroom practice according to it. However, from my experience as one of those who attended some of the workshops, and also as a teacher educator from a college of education, I observed that the emphasis was on the philosophy of this new curriculum rather than on how it was to be implemented in class. It is against this background that this study explores RE teachers' understanding and classroom implementation of the multi-faith RE curriculum. In the workshops that I attended, the curriculum was received with mixed feelings because there were teachers who thought it better to stick to a single religion type of RE, on the one hand, and those who welcomed the new multi-faith RE curriculum, on the other. Those who were against the introduction of a multi-faith RE, argued that Botswana is a Christian country hence Christianity is the religion that has to be taught. They further indicated that the single religion type of RE had one religion as its content, and had ready-made resources in the form of students' worksheets and teachers' handbooks which according to them, made learning and teaching easier for students and teachers respectively. On the other hand, those who welcomed the new curriculum argued that a form of RE that was not inclined to a particular religion with the clear intent to convert the students was likely to be respected due to its non-partisan nature. They further contended that since RE is a low status subject with a poor career path, by being non-partisan, it was likely to establish a more stable and respectable status compared to high status subjects such as Mathematics and Science.

## **Limitation of the Study**

The study explores how teachers understand and implement a multi-faith RE curriculum in Botswana junior secondary schools. It focuses on four teachers, in two schools, and in each school there were two teachers who participated in the study. Furthermore, since my study lasted for only eight months, I am of the view that a longitudinal qualitative study would have produced richer results.

## **Outline of the thesis**

This study is presented in six chapters. Chapter One reviews literature on multi-faith RE; how the phenomenological approach is used in a multi-faith curriculum, how RE is understood and practiced in different countries, and the concept of tolerance is discussed in relation to RE.

Chapter Two explores the professional landscape under which teachers in their multiple identities operate. It discusses the extent to which teachers may be involved on an occasion of reform, teachers' autonomy and how critical pedagogy can enhance both learning and teaching.

In Chapter Three I discuss the qualitative methodology that I adopted, describe the research setting in terms of my four participants and how I gained access. I describe the sampling procedures and the data collection instruments that I used. Furthermore, I indicate the importance of ethical considerations that have to be borne in mind especially when conducting a qualitative study.

In Chapter Four, I present my findings which I divide into themes. The major themes are: teachers' understanding of the multi-faith RE curriculum, teachers' classroom practices in terms of their content and pedagogical knowledge, their classroom management, and especially discipline. Lastly I discuss how RE teachers' faith or lack of it thereof is shown in their teaching.

In Chapter Five, I present data on assessment, mentoring and collaboration, access to government documents, and resources. I further indicate the processes involved in using and showing respect for students' knowledge and experiences.

Lastly, in Chapter Six, I discuss the implications of my research in terms of RE teachers' context, their practices and their understanding of the curriculum. I further suggest some recommendations regarding future research on multi-faith RE.