

CHAPTER 3

Sitting, watching and talking to teachers

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the nature of qualitative methodology by exploring both its merits and the demerits. I describe the research design, sampling procedures, data collection methods which were interviews, observations, video-recording biographical questionnaire, document review and the researcher's journal. I describe the participants, the research sites and how I gained access into the schools. I discuss how I validated my data and conclude by indicating the importance of the researcher's reflexivity especially in qualitative research.

3.1 Qualitative methodology

My epistemological stance as a researcher is that knowledge is personal, unique and subjective. Of significance to this stance is that people are deliberate and creative in their actions, and the situations in which they are in, are fluid and change constantly. Alison and colleagues (1996:8) emphasise that "each and every event is conditioned by variables such as time, location and culture which are interactive and therefore no two situations...can be identical and cannot be the basis for generalizations." I adopted Silverman's (1993) position that in qualitative research, there are multiple interpretations and perspectives of a reality, hence events can be better understood when situated in the social and historical context of the researched. Qualitative research involves people being studied in their natural context, their experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (Patton, 2002). "Qualitative research also provides an encounter with the world and the ways in which people construct, interpret and give meaning to their experiences" (Roux & DuPreez: 2005:277-278). Silverman (1993) outlines three practical reasons for doing qualitative research, that it is relatively flexible, and it concentrates on what people do in their natural contexts as it studies meanings and causes of events.

I researched four RE teachers in their classrooms. I used a multi-case comparative approach that involved four teachers in two schools, and in each school there were two participating teachers. I focused on the teachers' understanding, experiences and how they teach the multi-faith RE curriculum. Merriam (1988) notes that qualitative methodology is ideal for understanding a phenomenon in a holistic manner in the way it is lived or felt. In this study, the phenomenon was the RE teachers' understanding of RE and their classroom practices that is their knowledge of RE. Of significance in this study was the teachers' professional knowledge as well as their professional lived experiences (Lieberman & Miller, 1999).

Furthermore, I chose the qualitative methodology because it provided me with an in-depth understanding of the inter-relationships between RE teachers and their students, as well as their experiences, and practices such as their grasp of the subject matter, lesson presentation and their assessment skills. Wotherspoon (2004), Harry (1997) and Dey (1993), say that qualitative methodology enables the researcher to identify social bases of meanings by exploring how meanings are related to the participants' social actions. Burgess (1985) indicates that qualitative research focuses on social processes and meanings which the participants attribute to social interactions. In my study, I was able to search for the nature of the environments under which teachers work, and the meanings that they attach to RE teaching. The qualitative methodology deals with people as they interact with their natural environment and in my case it was the four RE teachers in their two schools. In addition, in qualitative research there is flexibility because it is not based on fixed or rigid procedures, even though the work has to be well organised. Furthermore, in qualitative research, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, because it is not a linear process that the researcher is involved in, but both processes occur at the same time. Burgess (1985:9) says that "data are not usually collected to support or refute hypothesis but categories and concepts are developed during the course of data collection. The theory is therefore not superimposed upon the data but emerges from the data that are collected". For example, as I observed and talked to the four participants, several issues emerged hence led me to ask new questions. I was able to connect the present, past and the future in the process, and some issues were unraveled. The data that was generated from this methodology helped me to understand some of the participants' experiences and attitudes. Since one of the characteristics of qualitative research is rigour and detail, I was able to vividly describe events that took place especially in the RE classrooms. Furthermore, that is why when I reported my findings, I

was detailed especially through the constant use of excerpts. Qualitative research attempts to describe and interpret some human phenomenon often in the words of some selected individuals or participants. Wilkinson (2004) notes that in a case study, data can be substantiated by means of extensive illustrative quotations, by using excerpts that are selected for their clear descriptions and portrayal of actions or voices. The researcher has to employ this strategy so that readers are situated in the scene, and are able to “imagine and vicariously experience what the researcher observed” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995:175).

In reporting qualitative data, the researcher has to be elaborate, by clearly presenting the participants being studied for readers who lack direct acquaintance with them. Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995:170) note that the researcher has to “construct from the field notes a narrative that will interest an outside audience” and this is done by selecting a small portion from a set of field notes and the narratives have to help “create” a story that flows. To begin this process, the researcher has to select “potential excerpts that could develop into a story line that leads readers to an ever fuller understanding of the participants and issues that are addressed or that emerge. Since my focus was on the RE teachers’ understanding and teaching practices of the RE curriculum, I had to select and describe their actions and voices in order to make research process clearer for the reader. Thorough thick descriptions in qualitative data, takes the reader into the time and place where the researcher was engaged in observation, so that readers “feel” and know what it was like to have been there. The data has to “capture and communicate someone else’s experience of the world in his own words” (Patton, 2002:47).

When analysing my data several issues emerged which I assigned some codes. The coding was done manually but was later fed into a computer with *Atlas.ti* software for ease of data management and retrieval, for example, with *Atlas.ti* software, I was able to group sentences together that belonged to a code and also enabled me to group codes into themes. Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995) observe that while creating codes, the researcher engages in the analysis of data at the same time. They also note that a researcher can select themes based on topics that have substantial amount of data and that reflect recurrent or underlying patterns of activities in the setting under study. They further note that a researcher may give priority to what seems significant to members, whether it is what they think is the key, what looks to be practically important, or what engages a lot of their time and energy.

Qualitative methodology is interpretive in nature because it allows the researcher to gain insights through discovering meanings by improving the comprehension of the whole (Creswell, 2003, Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). For me to accomplish this, I used observations, interviews, and documents as my main data collecting instruments. The approach helped me to understand the meanings associated with the actions of the RE teachers in their classrooms which are their natural places of work. In carrying out my study, I spent time during RE lessons with the participants in order to understand better their practices and perspectives in relation to RE teaching. I observed RE lessons in the chosen classes for a reasonable time, because in a qualitative research the researcher becomes involved in the world of the researched (Delamont, 2002, Harry, 1997). The point is taken further by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995:2) when they say that the researcher has to be immersed into the world of the researched in order to see “from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities [and] what they find meaningful”. That is why Baszanger, & Bodier (2004:14) observe that the researcher moves away from his or her familiar world-view, to that of the participants in order to understand their world-view which they refer to this activity as “personal proximity.” Furthermore, since the project is a case study I had to make extensive observations of how four RE teachers operated in their natural setting which is the classroom.

3.2 Case study

I chose a case study in order to tease out a detailed understanding of what is happening with regard to the actions and minds of the RE teachers in Botswana junior secondary schools. More (2004: xiii) posits that “case studies ... broadly represent the total population surveyed. They [case studies] will never be representative in a statistical sense but they should reflect the main characteristics of the whole population.” In a case study, it is not frequency or representativeness that is the goal, but it is the depth and that is why in my study I researched four RE teachers in two junior secondary schools. It is in studying a smaller representative that the researcher is able to gather huge chunks of data. What is important to note is that the participants represented two groups of RE teachers, those who taught the Christian based RE and those who were only exposed to the multi-faith RE curriculum. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995:2) suggest that in a case study a

researcher has to ask the following questions; “How is this example the same and different, and what were the conditions under which differences and variations occurred?” Edwards & Talbot (1999:50) note that a case study allows the researcher to have interaction with the context being observed and that its main strength is that it allows “a fine tuned exploration of complex sets of inter-relationships” because the unit of study is small. In a case study the researcher attempts to understand the whole individual in relation to the environment (Verma & Beard, 1981). However, there will be no way I could have studied the participants without paying attention to other factors that influence their perspectives such as the school set up and its culture. Furthermore, since there are emotions involved in a case study there is need for empathy on the part of the researcher (Rager, 2005).

3.3 Design of Setting

When collecting data for this study I chose two public schools in the city of Gaborone which is the capital city of Botswana. In each school I chose to work with two participants so that I could spend considerable time observing their practices.

I used pseudonyms instead of the real names of my participants and their schools. Makala Junior Secondary School is about one kilometre south of the city centre of Gaborone, while Togonal Junior Secondary School is about two kilometres west of the city centre. These two secondary schools are public schools where children who graduated from primary schools have automatic access to. The students in both schools are largely from middle and low income households. The physical plans of the two schools are generally the same and both schools receive full funding from the government. Teachers have equivalent or comparable education, professional training and experience. Three out every four teachers are accommodated on the school premises since government provides teachers with accommodation at a subsidised rate. Enrolments in both schools are similar with about six hundred students in each school, with a student-teacher ratio of one teacher to a class of about forty students.

3.3.1 Makala Junior Secondary School

Makala Junior Secondary School has part of its fence along one main road that leads into the city centre and part of its fence borders the main road. There are 18 classes with only 12 classrooms; four out-door teaching areas, one Science laboratory, one Computer laboratory which holds 20 computers and a library with a seating capacity of about forty students. In addition, there is a dining hall, library, and a design and technology laboratory. A siren is sounded at the beginning and the end of every lesson. A lesson lasts for 40 minutes. In the same school yard there are playgrounds that are used by Physical Education students and also by all other students for afternoon sporting activities such as soccer, netball and volleyball. Furthermore, the windows for almost all the classrooms are broken and the school is on the whole not clean. The desks are old and some have no lids, hence some students use their laps to write on. Some classes use out-door teaching areas. The out-door teaching areas are roofed and seats are made of concrete blocks and arranged in a semi-circle pattern. As for the out-door teaching area, students can be distracted by the noise of vehicles passing by since the school is adjacent to a busy main road. The out-door teaching areas are adjacent to the playgrounds and teaching is difficult to carry out, especially when Physical Education students are in their lessons and going through their paces. For example, one of the classes that I observed used an out-door teaching area and it was a few metres away from an incinerator and in most cases, the smoke and smell from the incinerator enveloped the whole area.

Finally, students are compelled to wear their school uniform except on *civvies days* when they are allowed to wear clothes of their own choice as a way of raising funds for the school.

3.3.2 Togonal Junior Secondary School

Togonal Junior Secondary School has a similar physical set up to Makala Junior Secondary School - the same number of classes, classrooms, four out-door teaching areas, one Science laboratory, and a Computer laboratory with twenty computers, school garden, playgrounds for various sporting codes and a library with a seating capacity of about forty students. The only difference in the physical structures between the two schools is that classrooms at Togonal Junior Secondary School classrooms are two storeyed.

Furthermore, the school is generally clean and there are few broken windows. However, in most cases chairs are not enough for the students in each class. Just like at Makala Junior Secondary School, some students are taught in outdoor teaching areas due to the inadequate classrooms. All the physical facilities in both schools that I mentioned are inadequate for a school that had 18 classes.

3.4 Gaining access

Gaining access into a site is important in qualitative research. I applied to the research unit of the Ministry of Education for permission to do my research in the two Botswana government junior secondary schools. The application took two weeks before I received a positive response. I was granted six months permission (Appendix B) to do my research and had to extend (Appendix B2) my stay since I was not satisfied with my classroom observations.

Before I started my fieldwork, I wrote letters to the school heads asking them to allow me permission to do research in their schools with some of their teachers. A copy of the letter from the Ministry of Education that granted me permission to do research in the junior secondary schools in Botswana (Appendix J) was attached to the letters and that helped ease my access into the two schools. The principals who are the main gatekeepers in their schools granted me permission, even though I never met personally with any of them. On several occasions I had wanted to meet with the school heads but their secretaries told me that they were too busy to meet with me.

In each of the schools, RE coordinators were informed about my project by their school heads and they made an arrangement to meet with members of the RE department. This had to be done so that teachers could meet with me and learn more about my project in order to have adequate information, which would help those who were to volunteer to work with me. When I met the RE coordinators and the teachers, and asked for volunteers, some teachers indicated that they were ready to work with me since I had made my criteria clear in the letter to the school heads and in my meetings with the department. I then wrote an official letter to the volunteering participants with a consent form attached which I collected a day after giving it to them. I then arranged to individually meet the teachers who had volunteered to work with me so that I could explain further the finer details of my envisaged research project, and also as a way of

creating rapport. I also indicated to these teachers that I would be observing them teach for about eight months without me being involved in the teaching activity.

Even though I had explained the aim of my project, one of them Mrs. Koloni at Togonal Junior Secondary School thought that my project was interventionist when she said:

I am happy that you are here to help me with the teaching of this syllabus. You are one of the people who designed this programme because I have seen your name in the list. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9th October, 2006)

Another participating teacher Mr Tiro at Makala Junior Secondary School jokingly said:

Mr Dinama, I will get into this project so that when you become a professor you may take me along. (Conversation with Mr Tiro, 3rd March, 2006)

The comments from these two participants indicated how they viewed me as a researcher who was going to work and assist them with their teaching. To some extent my presence meant that I was going to help enable them realize some of their aims in the teaching of RE.

3.5 Permission

In addition to the permission from the Ministry of Education in Botswana, I had to satisfy the requirements of the University of Pretoria Ethics Committee (Appendix C). In addition, I wrote letters to the parents and guardians of the students that I was to engage their children in focus group interviews. In the letters I asked parents and guardians to grant me permission to interview their children about how they learn RE (Appendix K). Students took the letters to their parents, and on the following day they all brought back the signed consent forms which I collected from their RE teachers. I had wanted to have a focus group interview with only ten students in each school. However, when some RE students at Togonal Junior Secondary School, heard that I was to interview their fellow classmates they asked their teachers to ask me to write letters to their parents as well so that they too could become part of the focus group interviews. I consented to the request of these students because they were going to add more data to my study. I then wrote letters for the second group of students so that they too could take them to their parents and guardians for consent (Appendix K). All the students brought back consent forms

that granted me permission to interview them. I was happy with these students' positive attitude towards my study. That is why at Togala Junior Secondary School I had two focus group interviews with students, one with ten members while the other had eight. I also wrote letters to five Education officers, requesting them to be interviewed. I also verbally requested a lecturer of in-service RE teachers at the University of Botswana to talk to her students to ask them to be interviewed. This group of teachers agreed to be interviewed.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

When conducting this study, I was conscious of the ethical implications, because in qualitative research, consent to participate is sought first since no one has to be forced to participate in a study (Roux & DuPreez, 2005; Hillier & Jameson, 2003). Since the research involved human beings, I had to make known to the participants my research goals and to this end, I had to get their informed consent. I did everything possible not to do anything that might professionally, socially or psychologically harm the participants. I had to protect the physical, social and psychological welfare of the participants as well as their dignity and privacy as human beings (Grinyer, 2002; Cohen *et al*, 2000). Roux and DuPreez (2005) observe that researching RE is an emotive exercise, hence researchers should react sensitively and respectfully to the participants' emotions. In addition, consent had to be sought from participants whether to use their actual names or pseudonyms. The participants were also asked to indicate if they wanted their names to be shown or to remain anonymous in case the revelation of the names harmed them in some way at any other time. The participating teachers indicated that they were comfortable with both options hence I made a deliberate decision to use pseudonyms so that the participants could remain anonymous. I did this, in case there could be a situation that would work against them in future if it was to be known that the views expressed in the study were theirs.

Furthermore, the participants were made aware that they were free to withdraw consent or withhold information as well as to discontinue participation in the project at anytime without prejudice to them (Cohen *et al*, 2000). The confidentiality of the participants is also respected because what transpired during the course of this project was to be kept confidential, unless the participants decided that the information be disseminated.

Furthermore, as a way of protecting the interviewees, I gave them the scripts to read in order to verify statements they made during interviews and in class.

3.7 Sampling

The study comprised four teachers who were solicited through convenient purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher handpicks participants in a study based on identified variables under consideration. There were two main variables, that is, teachers who taught the old Christian based RE and those who only taught the new multi-faith RE curriculum. Decker (n.d.) indicates that purposive sampling is used to study the lived experiences of a specific population and in the study it was the teaching practices of RE teachers. However, this type of sampling restricts the sample population to a very specific one and its main advantage is that it is more economical with regard to both money and time (Decker, n.d.). Furthermore, the sample is usually small and the emphasis is on the context, especially the perspectives of the participants (Jacobs, n.d.). As a result, numerical representativeness is of secondary importance since the emphasis is on the participants' ability to provide the desired information about themselves and their setting (Jacobs, n.d.). Of significance, is the population that appears to be representative of what the researcher is targeting. For example, I targeted two groups of teachers – those who taught the old Christian based RE and those who only taught the new multi-faith RE curriculum. This type of sampling is useful and convenient in situations where the researcher needs to reach a targeted sample quickly and get the opinions of that target group (Trochim, 2006). The strength of purposive sampling is in the selection of cases that can provide information that is rich due to its relevance. Patton (2002:40) says that “cases are selected because they are ‘information rich’ and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest, sampling, then is aimed at insight about a phenomenon, not empirical generalisation from a sample to a population”. Information rich cases are those from which a researcher can talk more about issues that are central in one's research. It is through choosing information rich samples that major questions under study can be illuminated.

All the four RE teachers who were the main participants were teaching in government junior secondary schools in an urban area in Botswana. In each school, one of the teachers had a minimum of ten years teaching experience and the other had less than ten years teaching experience. The teachers who had ten years or more of RE teaching

experience had taught both the old single religion-based type of RE and the new multi-faith RE, while those who had less than ten years were only exposed to the new one. The teachers' experiences were important because the single religion-based Christian RE curriculum had one religion as its content. In addition, there were the teachers' guide and notes, students' workbooks and worksheets which were available. The multi-faith RE, on the other hand, has various religions as its content and different textbooks are the main and easily available resource to both teachers and students.

Furthermore, the two schools were selected for study due to their accessibility and convenience since they were about two kilometres apart from each other since I could observe two teachers in a day. Furthermore, I chose junior secondary school teachers because that is the level where the multi-faith RE curriculum is presently implemented in the Botswana Education system.

The study involved a great deal of classroom observations (Appendix H), as well as pre and post lesson interviews (Appendix F & G) and that is why I had to choose schools that were adjacent to each other. This allowed me to observe more lessons since I could move between the two schools on the same day. I also chose the same class and the same teacher in each of the two schools so that I could constantly observe them, because observation is an essential requirement in qualitative research. At Toga Junior Secondary School I worked with Mrs. Laban who taught the class 2EF and Mrs. Koloni who taught 2AB. At Makala Junior Secondary School, I observed Mr. Tiro and Miss Rabin who taught classes 2AB and 2CD respectively. I observed the same group of teachers and students so that I could establish consistency in my study. The fewer classes and teachers that I chose to observe, helped me to spend more time with each case. I also wanted to find out how teachers prepare their students for examinations especially in the final year of the students' secondary schooling.

All the teachers involved in this study were teaching RE only, even though they had another teaching subject which they did during their teacher training. For example, at Toga Junior Secondary School, Mrs. Koloni told me that she once taught English, while Mrs. Laban had briefly taught Setswana. At Makala Junior Secondary School, Mr Tiro and Miss Rabin had each taught only RE. I chose the two groups as a way of finding out if there were any difference in the teachers' understanding of the multi-faith RE curriculum and in their classroom practices. I also wanted to find out if the number of

years of RE teaching has an impact in the understanding and classroom practices of these teachers.

Miss Rabin at Makala Junior Secondary School had twelve years teaching experience whilst her colleague Mr Tiro had two. At Togala Junior Secondary School, Mrs. Laban had thirteen years of teaching RE experience whilst Mrs Koloni had four years. I also explored the extent to which the curriculum had or had not influenced the RE teachers' lives as persons, especially with regard to their understanding and application of diversity in RE classes, since they taught students who were from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicity, genders and to a lesser extent different religions. In my choice, I explored the teachers' sense-making, feelings, perceptions and opinions about RE. In addition, I discovered that they were all parents even though that was not part of what I was investigating.

In addition to the four participants, I included secondary participants, namely, RE students, and Education Officers. I also interviewed a group of eight RE in-service teachers who were on study leave at the University of Botswana and all these teachers had a teaching experience of at least six years. Out of the eight in-service teachers, two of them were males and the rest were females. I sought the opinions of the in-service teachers as a way of soliciting their views on what they understood the multi-faith RE curriculum entailed and how they taught it. Furthermore, I wanted to find out if their views about the multi-faith RE curriculum were similar or different from my primary participants.

I interviewed five Education Officers of RE from the Ministry of Education - three of the officers were in the secondary school inspectorate, one was an examinations officer from the Examinations Research and Testing Division (ERTD), (Appendix I) and another one was a Curriculum Development Officer from the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation. The reason for choosing the Ministry of Education officials especially in the inspectorate was to hear from them what they regarded as the appropriate classroom practices and what they observed as they visited teachers during inspection. Two of the officers in the inspectorate were interviewed at their homes because they indicated to me that they did not have adequate time to talk to me during working hours. It took me two weeks to have an interview with the examination officer because she told me that she had a tight schedule. I chose Education Officers because

they are better positioned in terms of interpreting issues regarding curriculum change and implementation since information about educational matters especially change, is communicated to them first, before it reaches the teachers. Officers would in turn relay it to the teachers either directly or indirectly through the school principals. In addition, they are the ones who see to it that educational changes are fully implemented by teachers. In addition, Education Officers play a supervisory role to teachers. It is also important to note that these officers in most of the cases possess important documents such as circulars that may not be made available to teachers.

I involved the examination officer because she meets RE teachers at examination centres every end of year in December to mark the junior certificate final examinations. It is at the examination centres where teachers raise concerns regarding issues that concern them in relation to especially testing and examinations (Appendix K). The Curriculum Development Officer meets regularly RE task force members who are mainly teachers for syllabus review, trial and textbook reviews. In these meeting the RE curriculum officer gets a feel of what teachers think of the subject and how they teach it.

I conducted focus group interviews with a sample of RE students (Appendix J) in the two schools. Students were interviewed in order for them to give me their opinions and experiences in as far as what takes place inside RE classrooms and what they think are effective ways of learning and teaching that benefit them. I used convenient purpose sampling in choosing these students, because I had asked their teachers to select students and group them into three categories of those that the teachers thought were very able, average performers and low performers. The different categories were preferred as a way of asking the students to share with me their successes and challenges in relation to how they learn the multi-faith RE curriculum. However, in the focus groups, only the “able” students could answer questions that I posed and also express their views. English could have been a communication barrier to the “weak” students because they kept quiet all the time during the interview. I used interviews to better understand what RE students regarded as effective ways that teachers use to teach RE, especially in relation to their teachers’ preferred techniques. I also wanted to establish the relationship between the teachers’ practices and their preferred learning techniques from the viewpoint of students. The views of students were meant to further inform and guide me, whether what they said in the interviews matched what teachers did in the classroom.

Of significance, is that there were more female teachers in my study because the majority of RE teachers in Botswana are presently females. For example, at Makala Junior Secondary School there were four RE teachers and only one of them was male, while at Togat Junior Secondary School, there were three RE teachers and all were females. That I had one male participating teacher out of the four teachers in the two schools was indicative of the large numbers of females who teach RE in Botswana secondary schools as shown in one government report (Botswana Government, 2004a).

3.8 Profile of the students

The research took place in two government secondary schools in Botswana that have a mixed sex education enrolment and where both the students and teachers were mainly Batswana (citizens of Botswana) of African descent. In both schools, there were few expatriate students and most students that were in the focus group, said that they belonged to the Christian religion. At Makala Junior Secondary School, a few students said that they belonged to African Traditional Religion, and an even smaller number claimed to belong to Islam and Rastafarianism. Some of the comments they made in class also made me to conclude that they mainly subscribed to and were familiar with Christianity.

3.9 Participants at Makala Junior Secondary School

At Makala Junior Secondary School there were four RE teachers – three females and one male. Out of the four RE teachers, two agreed and volunteered to work with me, namely Miss Rabin and Mr. Tiro. Makala Junior Secondary School started its day at 7:00 am in summer and at 7:25 am in winter. A lesson lasted for 40 minutes and RE lessons were always doubles, meaning that they lasted for 80 minutes. Assemblies were held on Mondays and Fridays and they started with a Christian hymn that was followed by the Christians' Lord's Prayer. Lastly, the teacher who was conducting assembly had to make announcements if they were any. In almost all the cases there were announcements, after which students dispersed to attend their first lesson for the day.

3.9.1 Miss Rabin

Miss Rabin was a female teacher who had twelve years of RE teaching experience and a senior teacher of the optional subjects that are referred to as general subjects which include RE. In addition, she coached Chess in her school. This is what she said about her position as senior teacher of the general subjects:

I am a senior teacher Grade One, and I supervise the options general subjects which are Religious Education and Physical Education. What is expected of me is that I should observe all teachers in my unit. I also check teachers' scheme books - they are submitted on a monthly basis. I make schedules for setting tests, setting dates for submission of scheme books and also make sure that they are up to date. In addition I am involved in extra curricular activities. I coach Chess, but I do not have anyone to assist me. (Interview with Miss Rabin, 29th September, 2006)

The above excerpt shows that she was unhappy that there was no teacher to help her coach Chess. Miss Rabin told me that she had previously taught at other three secondary schools before she transferred to her present school. She also indicated that she previously taught Setswana for a short time which was her second teaching subject. Miss Rabin had taught the old RE curriculum and also satisfied the requirements that I was looking for in terms of her experience having taught both the old and the new RE curriculum. In addition, she was teaching students who were in their second year in a three-year junior secondary programme. She was expected to teach fewer classes because she was a senior teacher and had to attend to some administrative matters. She told me that she did not practice any religion.

3.9.2 Mr. Tiro

Mr. Tiro was a male RE teacher with two years teaching experience and by the time I interviewed him, he was doing Pastoral Theology studies part time. He was a lay-pastor of the United Congregationalist Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) in a village about forty kilometers from where he taught. He coached a traditional dance troupe and told me that he was in the process of starting a choral music choir in the school. Mr. Tiro had only taught the new multi-faith RE curriculum, hence he satisfied the requirements that I was looking for in terms of experience of having taught the new curriculum only. He taught first and second year RE students. When I first met him he was teaching a group of students who were in their second year of a three-year junior secondary schooling. In

addition, he was a professional gospel singer and had released two albums which according to him were doing reasonably well.

3.10 Participants at Togonal Junior Secondary School

At Togonal Junior Secondary School there were three RE teachers and all were females and two volunteered to work with me, namely Mrs. Laban and Mrs. Koloni. The school started the day at 7:15 am in summer and at 7:30 am in winter. General assemblies were held thrice a week, that is on Mondays, Wednesdays and on Fridays. Just like at Makala Junior Secondary School, assembly started with a Christian hymn followed by a Christian Lord's Prayer. In most instances a teacher who was conducting assembly would read from the Bible and give a short moral lesson based on what had been read.

3.10.1 Mrs. Laban

Mrs. Laban was a senior teacher responsible for general subjects, which included RE. She had thirteen years experience of teaching RE. As a senior teacher, she taught fewer classes, which were not to be more than three, because I was told that she had to do some administrative work as well. She had taught in four different schools before she was transferred to Togonal Junior Secondary School. She had briefly taught Setswana which was her other teaching subject and she was a member of the disciplinary committee in her school.

3.10.2 Mrs. Koloni

Mrs. Koloni was the coordinator of RE at Togonal Junior Secondary School with four years RE teaching experience. Her teaching subjects were RE and English, and she had taught English for a short time before concentrating only on RE across all the three grades which are called *forms* in Botswana – that is Form 1, 2 and 3. She was a staff coordinator for Scripture Union in her school she told me that she was a staunch Christian, and that her husband was a church minister.

3.11 Data collection procedures

It is important that a researcher makes important decisions regarding the selection of appropriate data collecting tools and techniques. Out of the various instruments available, I chose the ones that best suited my study because each of them has its own unique characteristics. It is also important that as a researcher I had to be familiar enough with various techniques in order to make a wise choice. Turney and Robb (1971) say that in the choice of the instruments, the researcher has to be aware of their characteristics, and strengths as well as their limitations. This knowledge is important because it helps the researcher to gain a better understanding in terms of how the tools will be used in the study. In collecting data for this study, I used observations, interviews, researcher's journal, biographical questionnaire and documents.

3.11.1 Biographical Questionnaire

A questionnaire consists of questions that ask for facts, opinions, attitudes or preferences of the participants (Turney & Robb, 1971). In the biographical questionnaire (Appendix D) I enquired about each of the participants' background, teaching experiences, conceptualisation of the multi-faith RE and the teaching techniques and strategies that they used. The participants were each given the questionnaire to respond to, and I had to collect it the following day. I used a biographical questionnaire on my primary participants, which was followed by an intensive one-on-one interview as well as subsequent interviews in order to solicit their views on the multi-faith RE curriculum. I first used a biographical questionnaire in order to understand better the participants before I could engage them in an intensive interview. The biographical questionnaire demanded me to know the teachers' bio-data and their perceptions regarding their understanding and how they teach the multi-faith RE curriculum including what they regarded as its strengths and the challenges that they faced. The biographical questionnaire was used as an ice-breaker before the interview.

3.11.2 Video-recorded observations

Observation is a popular data collecting method in qualitative methodology. Its main aim is to gather first-hand information about naturally occurring activities. Fieldnotes that are taken during observation, have to be rich, by being detailed in their descriptions of events and actions. For example, the setting where the observations take place have to be clearly described to the reader who will not be there. The descriptions must be vivid enough to allow a reader to understand what happened and the manner in which it happened (Patton, 2002). The observer's notes become the eyes and the ears and perceptual senses for the reader because the descriptions must be factual, accurate and thorough. Silverman (1993:21) notes that "most qualitative research describes and illuminates the meaningful social world as prescribed by the interpretivist paradigm". He further notes that observation over a period of time is necessary in qualitative research in order for the researcher to be absorbed in the historical and social world of the researched and that is why I had to spend considerable time with the participants in their natural context which is the classroom. Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995) say that in qualitative research, the researcher enters into a social setting which may not have been previously known in an intimate way in order to know the people involved.

Since I spent about eight months observing teachers in their classrooms that allowed me to fully describe what I saw, and also helped me to avoid my personal judgments and any interpretations to interfere with what was going on. That is why Pugach, (2006) notes that the actions of the participants have to be separated from the researcher's judgments and his or her reactions to it. During observation, the researcher observes the participants' direct behaviour rather than their perceptions and therefore avoids many sources of error. Observations are helpful compared to interviews because at times what the participants say is often different from what they actually do. Patton (2002:262) adds another important dimension to observations when he says that they give the researcher "the opportunity to see things that may routinely escape awareness among people in the society" because no one ever paid attention to them because they could have taken those things for granted.

As a researcher I spent eight months interacting with the participants so that my presence could become familiar to them hence reducing a situation where they may have behaved uncharacteristically. This is appropriate because their natural behaviour is likely to eventually show itself if they contrive any uncharacteristic behaviour (Walford, 2003; Cohen et al, 2003). For example, initially, teachers had contrived not to administer corporal punishment, but with time all the teachers administered corporal punishment on their students. The prolonged involvement with the teachers allowed me to enter their world and gain a better understanding of their practices. Furthermore, repeated classroom observations prevented me from reaching conclusions that could have been based on a single isolated behaviour. The prolonged observations and consistent interaction with teachers helped to avoid creating an artificial world of the teachers' classroom practices.

Furthermore, observations are suitable since they guard against a situation where I might have used interviews or questionnaires alone, and the participants could have misled me by telling me what they thought I wanted to hear while in practice they did something else (Miller & Glassner, 2004). Vulliamy, Lewin and Stephens (1990) observe that at times participants say what they think researchers want to hear and by so doing they conceal reality, hence what people say in interviews can often be checked and verified by observing what they do.

Throughout my classroom observations I wrote observational notes. As Pugach (2006) advises, one can separate the descriptions of the observation from interpretation by using two columns when recording observations – one column for descriptions in a chronological order in which events occur on the left and another on the right hand side, where the researcher records the personal comments, reactions and even questions about what is being observed. In addition to the two columns suggested by Pugach (2006), I developed a third one, where I recorded the codes as they emerged from the data, and I referred to it as the “observer's comments”. The information from the three columns gave me a clearer picture of what was happening. While Newbury (2001) takes the position that there are no fast rules as to how observational notes should be compiled, he advises that researchers should follow a consistent format and style that is workable to them, one that best fits the needs of the research project. According to Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995:4) “there is no one ‘natural’ or ‘correct’ way of writing about what one observes. Rather, because descriptions involve issues of perceptions and interpretation, different descriptions of ‘the same’ situations and events are possible”. The researcher may

emphasise certain things and leave out others, ignore or even marginalize them. In writing observation notes, the researcher is also involved in interpretation and sense-making which is based on selection. The researcher makes a deliberate yet informed decision about what to write, to leave out, emphasise, ignore and trivialise. That is why Patton (2002:303) says that fieldnotes “should contain everything that the observer believes is worth noting”. In writing my fieldnotes, I always had to bear in mind my key research questions so that they could further guide me.

The direct observational notes are statements that describe events experienced mainly through watching or listening and have to be detailed since they form a major component of the data on which later conclusions are based (Newbury, 2001). That is why Patton (2002:303) says that “no skill is more critical in fieldwork than learning to be descriptive, concrete and detailed”. That is why I had to write down what took place in the setting in a systematic way. Furthermore, “fieldnotes also contain the observer’s own feelings, reactions to experience, and reflections and about the personal meaning and significance of what has been observed” (Patton, 2002:303). In the notes, I indicated the name of the participant, time, date, and year. I had earlier on explained this process to the teachers and told them that I would be observing them without me being involved in whatever was taking place in the classrooms. I also indicated to them that I would be taking notes and video-recording their classroom activities

As a way of capturing and retrieving what was going on, I video-recorded the various activities in the classroom such as the teachers’ presentation of lessons as well as their tone of voice, facial expression and any other movements in the classroom. The video-camera allowed me to watch the proceedings after the lessons in order to further understand better the events that took place in the classroom (Moyles, 2002). Observations helped me to clarify some issues that were raised by the teachers during the initial in-depth interviews, pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews. Brock (2002) says that in such a situation, the researcher is able to match the comments in the interviews with the actual practices. Observations helped me to confirm or to refute what teachers said in the interviews. In my observations, I was guided by a semi-structured observation schedule (Appendix H). Each teacher was observed more than ten times over a period of eight months and each observation lasted for two teaching periods which is one hour and twenty minutes because each period was forty minutes long.

During the period, I spent in the field, I was able to observe Mr Tiro 13 times, Mrs. Laban 15, Mrs. Koloni 14, and Miss Rabin 11 times. I engaged in classroom observations in order to have an insight into the classroom activities of the participants in their classrooms. Furthermore, I wanted to establish the extent to which teachers linked the students' experiences with the various topics taught, and the extent to which teachers were able to recognize the students' strengths and the challenges they encounter in learning RE, as well as to find out how teachers teach RE in a diverse class. Diversity here was, especially in terms of students' backgrounds, gender and ability.

3.11.3 Interviews

Holstein and Gubrium (2004:140) say that interviews act as a “window on the world” because they help researchers to generate empirical data about a social world of the participants when they ask them to talk about their lives. They note that during interviews, the interaction between the participant and the researcher leads to a creation of a social world, and that a certain form of knowledge is constructed, hence there is meaning-making that comes about due to the interaction. Another point that they raised is that the researcher has to be open to the participant by willing to “share his or her own feelings and deepest thoughts” (Holstein and Gubrium (2004:147). This too might have its effect just like not saying much about oneself. The point is taken further by Baker, (2004) who indicates that by virtue of being a researcher, one assumes multiple identities, for example, being a colleague, friend and even a confessor.

From the biographical questionnaire I was able to develop an in-depth semi-structured interview guide for the four participants (Appendix E). Using the in-depth semi-structured interview, I asked for further clarification on issues raised in the biographical questionnaire regarding the participants' understanding of the RE curriculum and how they teach the various topics. I had a one-on-one interview whereby I used this questionnaire on participants in order to solicit their views regarding their understanding of the curriculum, their classroom practices and the challenges that they faced.

In all the groups I interviewed, I used a semi-structured interview guide which allowed me to follow-up on questions. The interview guide had questions that guided and gave the discussion a focus, whilst at the same time the discussion was allowed to flow freely (Cohen *et al*, 2000). I used semi-structured interviews because they lead to open responses, which permitted me to see the world as seen by the participants. Furthermore, I was able to adjust the interview schedule depending on the emphasis of the interviewee's responses or the direction of the interview. This flexibility enabled me to develop and use new questions on the spot hence gaining more in-depth understanding of the interviewee's teaching practices, beliefs, attitudes and situation. The semi-structured interview guide had questions I wanted to ask and was flexible since I could vary the order of questions or even wording depending on the responses that I got from the participants. Qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to be flexible in terms of how he or she uses their knowledge, as well as interpersonal skills to further explore interesting or unexpected ideas. Patton (2002:21) says that qualitative interviews reveal the participant's "depth of emotion, the ways they have organised their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences and their basic perceptions". For example, during the interviews, the participants talked about what they thought was important and meaningful to them using their own words.

Interviews help the researcher to gain the interviewee's perspective, experiences, opinions, knowledge and even feelings (Patton, 2002). Qualitative interviews tend to be more personal, hence they allow for follow-up questions. In addition, the participants are allowed to express their opinions. When using interviews, the researcher relies on the fact that people are able to give an account, for example, of their behaviour, practices and actions to those who ask them questions (Walker, 1985). Furthermore, the researcher has to establish rapport with the participant, by being a good listener and also making the participant comfortable by choosing settings where they can relax and talk openly. However, my initial interviews with the four teachers were intensive (Appendix E) and were partly based on the responses from the biographical questionnaire (Appendix D). In the post lesson interview sessions (Appendix G), I met with the participants either in their office or a classroom where there was only me and the interviewee.

The interviews I conducted were audio-recorded, transcribed and the data was coded according to emerging issues as well as the pre-established categories. Initially, I had used a standard tape-recorder, but later on I used a digital voice-recorder whereby I had the privilege to down-load the interviews onto the computer and then onto the compact discs (CDs) for ease of data storage and retrieval. One advantage of recording the interviews was to attend to crucial elements of the participant such as voice and pauses. For example, the participants would at times pause as a way of trying to digest an issue in order to clarify it, while at times they paused and retracted the statements that they could have made earlier. The recorded interviews gave me a chance to listen to them in my own time, hence I was able to make follow ups on some issues, especially that were related to my key research questions. The interviews were both formal and informal, and the formal ones were held at the convenience of the participants, usually when they had free periods during the day or in the afternoons when they were not engaged in actual teaching.

I conducted an intensive interview with each of the four participants before I began the observations. The initial in-depth interview (Appendix E) lasted for about one hour. This interview was semi-structured and consisted questions that were in four parts: background information, teachers' professional activities, teachers' content knowledge, classroom processes and teachers' beliefs about teaching, and the context of the school. These initial interviews allowed me to gain insight into the participants' perspectives about their understanding and implementation of the multi-faith RE curriculum. This intensive interview was meant to explore the teachers' perceptions regarding their classroom practices. The initial intensive interviews were followed by the follow up interviews that lasted for about thirty minutes. The follow-up of the in-depth interviews, allowed the participants to explain further the issues that I felt needed further clarification. At the end of the process I transcribed the interviews from the tapes verbatim. I asked the participants to check for accuracy in transcription especially on my interviews with them. In all the instances, the teachers agreed with my recording of the interviews. In my report, I used excerpts from interviews and informal discussions to capture the exact words of the teachers.

In addition to these interviews, I also conducted pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews (Appendix F & G). The post-lesson interviews (Appendix G) usually took a longer time because I requested the participants to reflect on the lesson they taught with regard to the various choices that they made about the techniques and strategies that they used. I was

able to conduct the pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews only if the participant was not preparing for the next lesson or was to engage on some school activity. Pre-lesson interviews (Appendix F) were shorter because they lasted for 15-20 minutes. I asked the participants to narrate to me what they were going to do in class and how they were going to teach and why they would use certain teaching techniques, and strategies. Participants were to indicate the teaching and learning aids, and ways of making sure that the objectives were to be achieved as well as their envisaged constraints of the lesson.

In further triangulating my data, I interviewed five RE Education Officers in the Ministry of Education in Botswana, so that they could shed light regarding how the curriculum is handled by teachers as well as what they witnessed happening in RE classes during their school inspection visits of selected schools. I also involved in-service teachers and students in focus group interviews. The strength of the focus group interviews is the interaction that takes place between members of a group, and how they express their feelings about an issue (Wilkinson, 2004). Members of a focus group will naturally react to issues raised by the other members of the group. Another, strength of a focus group interview is its diversity in terms of members telling stories, teasing, challenging, agreeing and even boasting. In focus group interviews, participants tend to be more open and would say something they would not say in a one to one interview. Focus group interviews allow for the building up of an argument (Wilkinson, 2004) since there is a dialogue between the participants. The weakness is that it takes up a lot of time just like an interview hence few issues might be discussed at a time. Furthermore, some members may dominate the discussion, as was the case with mine.

Even though the various forms of interviews are helpful in qualitative research, they also have limitations. Miller & Glassner, (2004), Silverman (2001), More, (2000) and Vogt, (1997), note that one major limitation of interviews is that participants always give rational explanations instead of what their beliefs, attitudes and views are. At times interviewees provide answers that they know researchers are looking for. That is why Miller & Glassner (2004) note that the interviewees at times deliberately mislead the researcher. For example, in my initial interview with one of the teachers, she told me that the multi-faith RE was a good programme. Later, during the course of my fieldwork, she told me that she had always had a dislike for it and was wondering why the government introduced it. Had I only used interview as my only source, this particular participant would have misled me.

I was also aware that in my interviews, I was intruding into the private lives of the participants. There could have been certain issues that the participants may not have wanted me as an outsider to know of. However, it is natural that people will not want to reveal a lot about themselves, like when they allow an outsider to know more about them. For example, in my initial interviews with the four main participants, they had indicated that there was collaboration amongst RE teachers, but in subsequent interviews they expressed the contrary. According to Measor (1985:63) interviewing involves “entering another person’s world, and perspective, but remaining alert to its configurations at the same time”. This is an ethical dimension that researchers need to be aware of (Measor, 1985; Edward & Talbot, 1999). Silverman (2001) says that interviews create an artificial social world as the researcher and the participant interact. For example, like when the interviewee gives the researcher rational answers or deliberately misleads the researcher. Measor (1985) highlights one of the problems of qualitative interviews that of the researcher building relationships with the participants. The researcher can be able to access the lives and the world-view of the participants if there is a good relationship between the two parties. The participants have to accept the researcher as a reasonable person who could be trusted with information about their personal lives hence the quality of the interview data will largely depend on the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the participants.

3.11.4 Document Review

Document review or analysis is when the researcher examines a set of documents. These written material and other documents could be official publications or reports, personal diaries, letters and others (Patton, 2002). Records, documents, artifacts and archives constitute a particularly rich source of information. Documents may provide the researcher with information about several things that may not be observed, for example they may reveal events that took place long before the research began. Its strength is the coverage of the historical aspect of a programme or policy. Documents largely provide additional data to the one that the qualitative researcher will have accessed, for example, in interviews and observations. The contents of the document are not affected or influenced by the researcher unlike interviews and observations. I used several documents and these were official circulars, teachers’ scheme of work, students’ tests, class work and some school and national based examinations papers (Appendix L & M).

The documents were used to corroborate and strengthen evidence obtained from other sources (Bell, 1999). I referred to documents so that my analysis could not be affected by my own understanding of how RE is taught. The use of documents helped clarify issues that could have been clouded by my own bias and possibly of my participants. Furthermore, some of the documents such as teachers' scheme of work, tests and examinations papers helped me to relate the teachers' professional knowledge with their classroom practices. I went through the teachers' scheme of work and students' examinations and tests and class work that the teachers assigned, in order to understand how they were structured why they were structured in such a manner. I also wanted to determine how consistent these records were in relation to the teachers' classroom practices.

3.11.5 Researcher's Journal

The process of research includes different forms of writing and one of them is a journal. This refers to where the researcher compiles the subjective and objective aspects of a study (Newbury, 2001). In the journal I recorded my fears, thoughts, successes and the picture of the whole research process. For example, I recorded the observations and interviews as well as their successes and shortcomings. Newbury (2001) says that in the researcher's journal there has to be a record of what is done, not done or completed during the fieldwork. That is why Delamont (2002:66) adds that in a researcher's journal, the researcher compiles "sacrifices made, risks taken and hardships taken" For example, I contacted three schools that were not comfortable with my research until I was welcomed at Togonal and Makala junior secondary schools. In one of the schools that I had earlier contacted, the teachers had agreed to work with me, but they later changed their minds. I had wanted to observe the participants every time they had a class, but in some cases they indicated to me that it was not necessary, since they said that they would not be doing anything worth observing like giving back test papers. Similarly, they were not always ready to read through our recorded interviews, indicating to me that they did not have time. If they got the scripts, they would take a long time before they could give me feedback and that affected my schedule. As a result, they did not have the chance to read all the scripts of the interviews as I had intended. At times, the school programme had to change because of an unplanned event

3.12. Validation of data

Validity in qualitative research is the degree to which a study is honest and true to its intent, context and its reporting. I used several data collection sources in order to determine a pattern of emerging issues, themes or contradictions. Triangulation of data was adopted in order to establish consistency of issues or lack thereof. Triangulation refers to the use of a variety of data sources by a researcher in order to obtain a clearer picture of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002; Bell, 1999; Cohen *et al*, 2000; Merriam, 1988). Relying on one source may affect the validity of the findings and lead the researcher to accept initial impressions too readily. I preferred triangulation because the more sources I used the clearer and more complete became the picture I was studying (Newman & Benz, 1998; Padgett, 2004; Scholz & Tietje, 2002). Furthermore, the shortcomings of any one method can be overcome if different data collection methods are used (Kalliomeneimi, 2003). For example, what I did not clearly follow in my observations was further clarified through post-lesson interviews and vice-versa.

In my effort to ensure validity, I made use of a variety of data collecting methods, and these were member checks, interviews, observations, documents, researcher's journal, biographical questionnaire and reflexivity (Drisko, 2004). I used multiple sources of evidence because no single source of data is complete in itself; hence different sources complemented each other (Tellis, 1997). By using a variety of sources, I was able to obtain "a deeper and many faceted view" of the teachers' understanding of the RE and their classroom practices (Kallioneimi, 2003:185). What teachers did and said in my study had to be put side by side with other forms of data gathering techniques.

I transcribed audio tapes and video-recorded materials immediately after the interviews and class observations respectively. I read the interviews several times so that I was able to develop a portrait of each of the participants' experience and practices. For example: Did the data say what I thought it said? I compared my findings with what teachers said during the initial interviews, pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews, and what I observed in classes over a period of time. Furthermore, the time I spent on-site allowed me to obtain an adequate picture of the RE teachers' practices. As a validity check, 50% of the coded transcripts were peer-reviewed by a member of the department at my university to check for agreement on the selection of codes assigned to chunks of information. The

peer reviewer agreed with the codes that I generated. Furthermore, member check can assist the researcher in validating data since the researcher has to go back to the participants with data so that they are verified. Silverman (1993:15) refers to this verification as “respondent validity.” For example, I allowed the teachers to comment on what I had documented during the interviews as a way of making sure that what was documented was consistent with what teachers said. I asked participants to read through my interviews with them in order to allow them to make further comments if any or to correct any data that did not reflect what they said.

3.13 Reflexivity

The researcher’s presence inevitably affects what takes place in the setting of the participants, since the researcher has to necessarily interact with the participants (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). For example, I spent hours in the same classrooms with participants observing them. In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to be clear about his or her biases, presuppositions and interpretations, so that the reader is able to make independent judgment of the report. I brought my various subjectivities into the participants’ researched world because it was natural for me to come with a baggage of my values, beliefs and ideas, for example, of what I regarded as effective teaching which could have been different from the teachers’ views. Furthermore, as a teacher trainer I had hoped to see teachers varying their teaching techniques and strategies, by being innovative like using information communication and technology (ICT), inviting speakers from within and outside school to speak on certain issues related to the syllabus topics and taking students out on educational tours. To my dismay all these did not readily happen. Furthermore, in qualitative research it is important for the researchers to acknowledge their biases because by so doing they remove what Clandinin (1986:27) refers to as the “subject-object dichotomy”. As a researcher I needed to be reflexive, by being aware of and making known both my influence and bias because both self-awareness and self-knowledge are important when carrying out a qualitative type of research. Reflexivity involves a sense of self-consciousness as Delamont (2002:8) says that it is “a means that the researcher recognizes and glories in the endless cycle of interactions and perceptions which characterise relationships with other human beings”. As a researcher, I attempted to explore the world of the teachers while at the same time I had to be mindful of my own biases. Reflexivity emphasises the importance of the researcher’s self-awareness and ownership of one’s perspectives. Patton (2002) says that

in reflexivity, the researcher has to observe the researched, and how one interacts with the participants.

In order to better understand the teachers' practices, I had to move away from my familiar world of being a teacher educator to that of the teachers in order to create what Baszanger and Bodier (2004:14) refer to as "personal proximity". Similarly, Vulliamy, Lewin and Stephens (1990:86) refer to this process as "getting inside the perspectives" of those whom one is studying. It was through getting inside the teachers' perspectives that I began to understand their issues that are significant to them from their own perspective and not mine, because the world of the researched has to be understood from their standpoint and not that of the researcher. Furthermore, it has to be noted that a situation or event has multiple interpretations and perspectives, since reality is multi-faceted. For example, what mattered most to teachers was for their students to pass examinations. Furthermore, teachers did not make extensive and elaborate lesson plans which I had thought they would do. For example, when I first met Mrs. Laban she told me that I should not expect a lot in their classes when she said;

Sir, we do not have any written lesson plans we just teach. (Conversation with Mrs Laban, 4th October, 2006)

Lastly, as a researcher, I assumed multiple identities, such as acting like a colleague to the participants in order to bridge the gap between me and the teachers. For example as a friend I had to always ask how their families were doing and what their future professional plans were. I did this in my attempt to bridge the gap between myself as a researcher and the participants.

3.14 Methodological limitations

The methods that I emphasised had limitation as well. For example, purposive sampling as a form of non-random sampling has a probability of sampling bias. There is, for example, a potential for inaccuracies in the researcher's selection since it depends on willing individuals or groups who may not properly represent the population. Since I was mainly using observations, I could have modified the behaviour of the participants since they were aware of my presence and that they were being observed. They could have

presented the ideal instead of their true selves. Since I spent time observing the participants and also conducted interviews before and after the lessons, the teachers' perceptions and practices may have been positively affected by this process mainly because they knew what I was looking for. For example, Mrs. Koloni said this to me after several interviews:

You really helped me to identify my weaknesses in teaching. You are the only person who is able to say something about my teaching because since I joined teaching four years ago, no one ever observed me teach hence no one ever said anything about my teaching. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 6 July, 2007)

As an overt observer, I was aware of the effect that this research could have had on the participants. One possibility is that the participants' behaviours and attitudes might have positively changed because I was always there and they knew what I expected from them. Patton (2002) and Edwards & Talbot (1999) note that people may behave quite differently especially when they know that they are being observed. That is why Leech (1989:71) says that "even a situation where all we do is observe, as watchers we influence the watched". Furthermore, since I was a non-participant observer, teachers may not have felt that I appreciated what was going on in their classrooms, because I did not physically grapple with their uncertainties and even confusion as they were involved in teaching. To the participants, I might have largely remained an outsider even though I was with them for about eight months. Furthermore, the responses of the participants can be emotionally and conceptually loaded, hence make analysis difficult (Roux & DuPreez, 2005).

In a qualitative case study, the researcher is the main collecting and analysing instrument. Merriam (1988) says that as the main instrument and also as a human being, the researcher is likely to have limitation such as personal biases, making mistakes and at times missing pertinent opportunities that could have enriched the study. For example in my case, there were times when I was unable to observe participants because of unplanned school activities. Furthermore, I had to use my discretion as when to observe more closely, what and when, as well as to know that I had observed enough. Since I exercised discretion most of the time, I may have missed an opportunity which could have added value to my study. In addition, being a teacher educator could have affected my data collection and analysis because I expected participants to be systematic in their teaching in terms of organised lesson plans.

Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995) observe that since researchers in qualitative approach use fieldnotes, that may necessarily reflect and convey their own understanding and not that of the participants. They further note that “the researcher still remains an outsider and a partial stranger to the world of those studied even in ‘immersion’ because the researcher” continues to be a researcher interested in and pursuing research issues” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995:35). There is an element of truth in what they are saying because researchers will always write down what they think is meaningful and important to them.

The limitation of interviews is that the interviewee presents selective perceptions only, and leaves out anything that may seem to threaten their identity. Furthermore, they produce a large volume of data which has to be condensed, categorized and interpreted and made meaningful, which is a time consuming exercise because it is mainly resource intensive (Patton, 2002). Another disadvantage of qualitative interviewing is that the interviewee may say more than he or she could have intended to say only to regret later. I had wanted to always constantly and consistently interview teachers before the lessons but that was not possible, because they were either preparing for another lesson or were just busy with something and hence could not do it. I had few pre-lesson interviews because teachers were either from a lesson, preparing for another lesson, marking, or doing something else and would tell me that they were busy. This meant that I could not always match what the teachers said they were going to do in class and what they actually did. One disadvantage of documents is that they might influence the views of a researcher due to their biased opinion.

Merriam (1988) and Bell (1999) say that a qualitative case-study methodology deals with a restricted sample of individuals, hence it is not easy to generalise the findings even though it is from this small sample that some light could be shed that could be of help in a large survey type study. My study focused on a specific group of participants and setting, hence it is difficult to generalise the results to a broader group of RE teachers. This might suggest the need for a large scale quantitative study that can test generalisability of the insights generated from this qualitative research.

The audio-tape and video-camera at times presented technical problems, and that affected my data collecting process. For example, I started my observation exercise without the aid of a video camera and conducted some of the interviews without a tape recorder. At times the battery of the video recorder went dead and needed recharging, whilst the lesson was in progress hence I had to resort to taking hand written notes. Initially, I used a standard audio tape but I later switched to a digital one, which I found easy to use and portable, since the recorded data could be stored in electronic form. Furthermore, in my fieldwork I used a video camera which was not digital, hence data was not easily transferable. At times, I experienced problems of unplanned changes in the school programme such as unannounced meetings. For example, in both schools, a week was set aside for the writing of end of month tests in all subjects yet in most cases the announcement about when to begin writing tests was done a few days just before the actual writing of the tests. This further meant that I could not observe practical teaching, since the students and the teachers I was to observe were engaged in this exercise.

Out of the four participants one declined to be video-recorded. This meant that I had to take hand-written notes of what was happening in her class and follow up that with a post-lesson interview. As a result, I was not able to watch her classroom practices on video after the lesson, the same way I did with the other three participants. I had to take notes which meant that I summed up most of the issues and this left a gap in my data gathering process.

I had initially intended to use *stimulated recall* technique which was meant to remind teachers of their actions during the lesson, as well as to gain access into their thoughts and decision-making processes as they were teaching. If I had used the technique, I could have watched the video-recordings with the teachers as a way of gaining access into the thought processes and decision-making of the teachers. The technique could have been helpful, because unlike other behaviours, it is difficult to predict someone's thoughts. This technique could have assisted teachers to recall what they said and did. Teachers could have told me why they did certain things and why they said certain things at various times. If I had used this technique I could have been able to understand the teachers' decision making process as they reflected on their classroom practices. I asked teachers to watch the video with me in order to clarify events that happened during the observed lessons (Calderhead, 1981) but they declined, indicating that they did not have time to watch that. In addition, one of the participants was taken ill just before I started

the observations but later joined the school, but was again taken ill in the last month of my fieldwork, where she was given a two months sick leave. I had fewer observations and interviews with this particular participant compared to the rest.

Furthermore, though I had the teachers' teaching time-tables, I still had to contact the teachers to further confirm if there were no changes. There were times when there were unplanned changes in the school programme such as when there was an important day to commemorate. In almost all the cases, I had to confirm if the participants were teaching and were ready to be observed and I had to phone them or send a mobile short message to confirm their readiness to be observed.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the qualitative research method in terms of its strengths and shortcomings. I indicated that I chose the method because it provides the researcher with an in-depth understanding of how participants interact with their natural environment. I also indicated that I used a case study within the qualitative paradigm in order to pay attention to minute detail. I showed that the setting was in two public junior secondary schools in Botswana and involved four teachers of RE who were my main participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of both the schools and the participants. I narrated the procedures that I followed in order to get permission from the Ministry of Education of the Government of Botswana. I used various data collecting techniques which were observations, interviews and documents in order to enhance validity and trustworthiness of the study.

CHAPTER 4

Students have to treat religions equally

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present my findings according to themes that emerged from the study. I present data on the participants' understanding of the multi-faith RE curriculum, their content knowledge, pedagogical skills and knowledge. I show that even though there are several teaching techniques, the commonest technique that the RE teachers, used was group work. I also report that teachers said that their religious beliefs or lack of them did not necessarily affect their classroom practices. Finally, I present data on how RE teachers manage their classes. In reporting my findings I used excerpts that were taken word verbatim especially from interviews. These excerpts reveal the participants' different views and concerns.

In this chapter, I will present data mainly from the four principal case-study teachers in the two case-study schools and occasionally I will use information from other data providers like the in-service teachers, students and Education Officers to stress an issue. The data is from interviews, observations, documents and field notes. Since my research is qualitative, the report is detailed through using excerpts in order to put the reader in a clear light about what was taking place. Furthermore, when reporting especially on interview data, the inter-related statements by interviewees, contradictions and consistencies are borne in mind.

4.1 Teachers' understanding of the multi-faith RE curriculum

Teachers' understanding refers to how they interpret a curriculum, especially in terms of its philosophy and how it is taught and how students learn it. A key to promoting effective curriculum implementation is an understanding of how and why teachers interpret a curriculum in the way they do. In implementing a curriculum, teachers will naturally interpret a curriculum, including its materials, and decide how they can use them in their classrooms. This is so, because teachers have different meanings for the different processes in curriculum implementation.

From the interviews that I conducted with teachers, it emerged that the multi-faith RE curriculum involves teaching a variety of religions, yet Christianity tended to be dominant. When I asked Mrs. Koloni about the strengths of the multi-faith RE curriculum, she said:

I think it opens up one's eyes, and one learns more about other religions that are different from Christianity. I never had any interest in learning about other religions but can now sympathise with some of their practices. We should have continued with the old syllabus. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9th October, 2006)

Mrs. Koloni indicated that the strengths of a multi-faith RE curriculum were in terms of exposing both the teachers and the students to other religions that were different from Christianity. She further indicated how the multi-faith RE curriculum influenced her view of other religious traditions since she never had any interest in them, except in her religion which is Christianity. Mrs. Koloni indicated that a multi-faith RE enhanced one's knowledge about "other" religions, and that the "teacher is forced to do research and read beyond what is found in the students' textbooks". Even though she articulated the strengths of the multi-faith RE curriculum, she maintained that the former Religious and Moral Education (RME) curriculum that was Christian based was better than the present one in terms of its emphasis on one religion. She indicated that if she had the powers, RE could be Christian based because according to her that was the best form of RE. She told me that she had never taught the old curriculum but had learnt it years back as a secondary school student. Mrs. Koloni also indicated that she did not have any conflict between her religion and her professional commitment because her aim was not to convert.

When I asked Miss Rabin about the strengths of the multi-faith RE curriculum, she said:

It broadens the children's understanding of the different religions that are found in their country and elsewhere and prepares them to relate to different groups of people. (Interview with Mrs Rabin, 29th September, 2006)

Miss Rabin indicated that the multi-faith RE broadened the students' understanding of the different religions, hence prepares young people to relate well with people with different cultures, especially in the area of religion. By "different people" she meant people who came from outside Botswana, whom she said have beliefs and practices that are different from the people in the country. She went on to indicate why a multi-faith RE was introduced in Botswana.

There were a lot of things taking place and there were a lot of people coming into our country for business and other things. I think this was a way of preparing students to accept people who are different from them.
(Interview with Miss Rabin, 29th September, 2006)

She emphasised that the RE curriculum was meant to enhance a sense of tolerance, since students introduced to it are capable of accepting other people. When I asked her if she knew about the RNPE on which the curriculum was based, she indicated that she did not know anything about it, and that the document was not even available in her school library. She further said that the multi-faith RE enabled students to fit in the global world especially if they could internalise a sense of tolerance.

When I asked Mr. Tiro about the strengths of the multi-faith RE he said.

With other religions, I think we need to try to understand them too. We tend to concentrate only on what we know and believe in. Even my students get shocked when I indicate to them some strong aspects of other religions other than my own [which he said was Christianity]. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 3rd October, 2006)

Mr Tiro lamented that there was too much emphasis on the Christian religion at the expense of other religions. He accepted that other religions were part of the curriculum, and that they needed to be treated in the same manner as Christianity because students needed to understand various religions. In his view, the belief systems of other religions need to be made known to the students, as a way of cultivating a spirit of tolerance. Mr Tiro said this about the multi-faith RE curriculum.

I think it is about exposing different religions to the students. No religion should dominate. We need to make students aware that these religions exist. We do not convert anyone in class to a particular religion. What we do is to let students know that they have to treat religions equally.
(Interview with Mr Tiro, 3rd October, 2006)

Mr Tiro indicated that the multi-faith RE was introduced in order to expose students to as many different religions as possible. He maintained that the curriculum is not meant to elevate any one religion above others because religions are supposed to be treated equally. He further stressed that the multi-faith RE curriculum does not aim at converting students. In his explanation of the multi-faith RE at times, Mr Tiro conflated other religions to the different Christian denominations because his examples in class were about the variants of Christianity. He also indicated that due to the teachers' emphasis on Christianity, at times students may take other religions as myths. However, he argued that

it was the teachers' duty to help students acquire knowledge and a better understanding of any religion under discussion.

When I asked him if the concepts *knowing* and *understanding* which are stressed in a multi-faith RE curriculum could change the students' perceptions in terms of developing tolerance, Mr. Tiro said:

As a teacher you help students to question a lot of things. Yes, this is the time that they start to know about other religions as teenagers. One problem is that, presently they could be belonging to different church denominations, but as a teacher, one can help them understand more by questioning a lot of things. From that standpoint they may or may not decide to follow a religion. You enable them to make choices and by so doing they are able to discover truth.

(Interview with Mr Tiro, 3rd October, 2006)

Mr Tiro indicated that a teacher is expected to be instrumental in enabling the students to have a full understanding of a multi-faith RE curriculum. In helping students to develop a sense of questioning many things, teachers could be enhancing critical thinking. For example, students would be enabled to decide to follow or not to follow a religion. Their decisions will be based on what they know and understand.

When I asked Mr. Tiro if Botswana is a Christian country or not, he said:

It is not. For example when the former specially elected MP Mr. Satar Dada was sworn in, he was free to use a Koran because he is a Muslim. Botswana is a multi-religious state where different religions are allowed to operate.

(Interview with Mr Tiro, 3rd October, 2006)

According to Mr Tiro, Botswana is a multi-religious country which promotes religious freedom and where different religions are allowed to operate side by side.

Mr Tiro further said:

As an RE teacher, I can say that all these religions are praying to the same Supreme Being but they use different ways to reach him. All these religions may be talking about the same God but it is only that the revelation is given to different people and it comes differently. People need to have the freedom to worship God in their own way. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 3rd October, 2006)

According to Mr Tiro, there are various religious paths that lead to one and the same deity. He further stressed the need for people to be allowed to pray to God in the best possible way that they feel comfortable with. He said that part of the reason why there are different religions or even denominations is because God's revelation was given to

different people and came to them in different ways. However, despite the possible strengths of the multi-faith RE curriculum, Mr. Tiro said that there could be some intolerance in the Botswana school system because of its emphasis on Christian prayers. Mr. Tiro also acknowledged that he learnt a lot from his students because of the nature of the RE curriculum.

It is very good and interesting in that you gain a lot of knowledge from students. When I came here, I had little knowledge about certain things. I had little knowledge of the different religions and of the different church denominations. I got a lot of information from the students because this is what they see happening daily in their churches. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 3rd October, 2006)

According to Mr Tiro, a teacher could learn from the experiences and the knowledge that students brought to the learning environment. He further indicated that the knowledge that the students brought to the classroom was important because they drew some of it from their personal religious experiences.

Mrs. Laban, a teacher with thirteen years experience teaching RE, was of the view that the multi-faith RE curriculum was not relevant for the junior secondary school level. She indicated that on the whole students understood what they were expected to do. She further argued that knowledge and understanding of different religions which is expected to bring about a sense of tolerance in a multi-faith RE curriculum was inadequate. According to her, despite the emphasis on *knowledge* and *understanding*, that does not necessarily bring about any change in attitude and behaviour as shown in her comment below:

The students mainly *learn about* [emphasis hers]. What is important is the information that the students get which does not change behaviour. For example, after being exposed to this curriculum, a child may not start praying facing Mecca, or handling the Bible the way the Sikhs handle the Guru Granth Sahib [Sikh holy book]. As a way of showing their understanding our students tend to be shocked, for example, by all the rituals associated with the handling of the Guru Granth Sahib. (Interview with Mrs Laban, 5th October, 2006)

Mrs Laban further indicated that the strength of the multi-faith RE curriculum was in providing teachers with knowledge and understanding of the various religions. However, she lamented that it did not equip teachers with skills that would positively affect the behaviours of their students. Mrs. Laban also indicated that a teacher of RE has to be a moral exemplar, even though she was not elaborate on the issue. She was also of the view that in most instances RE teachers who are committed to their religions emphasise their

religions in class to the exclusion of other religions, hence they do not give students a chance to learn about the practices of other religions, and especially how the adherents appreciate their religions. According to her, excluding other religions on the curriculum is indoctrination. When asked if there still could be indoctrination within the multi-faith RE she said:

Yes. That is what I am saying. Such teachers, after teaching, they would usually end their lessons with something like: “Jesus is the way.” (Interview with Mrs Laban, 5th October, 2006)

Such a conclusion of a lesson was an expectation in the former single religion type of RE curriculum. According to her such teachers need to be reminded of the aims and instructional objectives of the multi-faith RE, which discourage conversion. She suggested that in-service workshops could be conducted in order to deal with the attitudes of those teachers. According to her, for a teacher to do that, it shows inadequate understanding of the curriculum and pedagogical skills to teach a multi-faith RE curriculum.

Education Officers had their own views about the multi-faith RE curriculum. A Religious Education Curriculum Officer Mrs. Gatt said this about the multi-faith RE curriculum:

This is an open subject whereby everybody thinks they know what it is. Some people still think that this is a mono-faith curriculum. I have been having a lot of difficulties with my immediate supervisors, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education and even the Minister of Education himself when I tried to explain to them what the multi-faith RE curriculum is all about, but with very little success. It is hard for them to imagine a form of RE that is not Christian. (Interview with Mrs Gatt, 15th August, 2006)

In her view, many people still claim knowledge of what RE generally entails and also that some still mistake the multi-faith RE to a Christian single religion based curriculum. According to her, even though the multi-faith RE curriculum has been in schools for over ten years now, some people in positions of leadership in education still do not understand what it generally entails.

Mr. Moks a Religious Education Officer in the Southern Region Inspectorate area, said that a multi-faith RE curriculum is relevant because Botswana is not a Christian country and that the country was never founded on Christian principles. However, he indicated that the majority of Batswana are Christians. He said that:

The Constitution of Botswana is secular and does not refer to Botswana as a Christian country. Botswana is not a theocracy. (Interview with Mr Moks, 6th September, 2006)

However, he was not clear why public and official functions in Botswana are started and ended in a Christian prayer. When I further asked him if teachers of a multi-faith RE curriculum needed to be religious, Mr Moks said:

A teacher need not be religious because teaching is a profession where one has to be knowledgeable about religions. A teacher of RE can choose or not choose to be religious. However, it is unfortunate that when talking about religions it becomes an area where everybody claims some knowledge. (Interview with Mr Moks, 6th September, 2006)

He, like Mrs. Gatt was worried that many people usually claim some knowledge regarding what RE entails mainly because they think it is an extension of the church. Mr. Moks complained that RE is not given the respect that it deserves, because people feel that one needs no expertise to teach RE, which according to him, is not the case in other subjects.

Another Education Officer for RE based in the Northern Region Inspectorate, Miss Timon, was of the view that RE was not popular since it has fewer periods and that most school administrations have a negative attitude towards it. However, she laid most of the blame on teachers whom she said do not take the subject seriously.

Teachers are to blame because they cannot market it. Even pupils do not like it because most of the subjects are linked to specific job opportunities and careers while RE is not. (Interview with Miss Timon, 22nd August, 2006)

In addition to blaming teachers for not popularising the subject, she indicated that students link it to job opportunities and careers in terms of what students can be after doing RE, which she said was not the case with RE. She indicated that since RE dealt with attitudes and behaviours, it enabled students to fit in different working conditions by the time they would be following their career paths. She, however, admitted and lamented that there were no in-service RE workshops, and in her view, that had a bearing on teachers' understanding and classroom teaching of the subject. Furthermore, even though she blamed teachers she did not show that teachers were initially involved in the design of the syllabus document and that they were fully aware of what it entailed.

The focus group of in-service RE teachers concurred with my four main participants and Education Officers, that the multi-faith RE curriculum has as its content multiple religions whilst its aim is to cultivate a sense of tolerance amongst students. They indicated that it would have been better if the multi-faith RE programme was started at primary school so that at secondary school level the students could not be overwhelmed as they said was the case now. They further observed that it was not likely that if students are introduced to various religions they may fall prey to some “radical religions” as some people suggest. They said that people who hold that view are the ones who are not versed with a multi-faith RE curriculum. They argued that the curriculum cannot promote chaos because it aims at instilling in young people a sense of acceptance through tolerance.

4.2 RE teachers’ content knowledge

Teachers need to have a deep understanding of the subject matter because it can make them flexible in their presentation of lessons. If they fully understand the subject matter, it is probable that they will help students to relate ideas to one another as well as to deal with misconceptions especially in an area that is full of controversy like religion. In their study, Chazan *et al.* (n.d.) found that when teachers possess the right sort of knowledge, they are likely to be effective in their teaching. As a way of showing in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, teachers have to master a repertoire of teaching techniques and strategies. However, teachers can employ a variety of techniques and strategies if they have a rich knowledge of the subject, how it is organised and how it is related to other disciplines. Furthermore, teachers need to have adequate knowledge of the subjects that they teach so that they are able to solve and provide answers to the questions that they pose to students and questions which students pose to them (Shulman, 1986).

Teachers’ deep knowledge of the subject matter helps them to make their ideas accessible to the students. On teachers’ content or subject knowledge, McNeil (1983:125) says that, at times due to lack of content knowledge, teachers attempt to “mystify a topic” in order to make it look complex and very important. This is another way of showing the teachers’ sense of insecurity because they will be the only repository of knowledge. In such a case, students will not have been given access to some other forms of information and hence leads to a dependency syndrome that will have been deliberately created by the teacher. Furthermore, McNeil (1983) makes another revealing observation that as a way of further mystifying the subject matter, a teacher may leave out topics or issues and divergent

views because the teacher does not subscribe to them. When teachers deliberately mystify and avoid certain topics they do so in order to “control knowledge access” as a way of protecting their territory (McNeil, 1983:137). Depending on the topic or issues, teachers may mystify, omit, treat topics or issues as if they were too complex or too simple, in order to cover up for their inadequate content knowledge. Below is an example of a teacher attempting to treat a topic as if it was irrelevant. This is what I recorded in Mrs. Koloni’s class when she was teaching the topic “Freedom.”

There was an argument as to whether a nun can have children or not and what qualifies one to be a nun. One student was adamant that nuns can start off as mothers and then later join the order. There was no one who seemed clear as to whether a nun can start off as a mother or not, including the teacher who just kept quiet to let the issue pass by. The argument was mainly focused on virginity. As the argument heated up, the teacher advised students to forget about the issue since she said they were not dealing with virginity. (Fieldnotes from Mrs Koloni’s class, 9th May, 2007)

It is not clear why Mrs Koloni advised students to abandon the issue. Was it because she felt that the issue was irrelevant and students were wasting time discussing it?

My interview with Mrs Laban on an examination question shows how she views the RE teachers’ content knowledge.

Question 33. *What is common to scientific and religious theory of evolution? Would you agree that science has a theory, and that religion does not since it is based on belief?*

We also err as teachers because we teach children that there are religious theories. What I discovered is that this topic is problematic to teach. Even students usually raise a lot of questions on what scientists say about evolution theory. The other problem is that we emphasise only three religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism on this issue. (Interview with Laban, 23rd May, 2007)

Mrs Laban indicated that teachers at times make mistakes in their presentation of the subject matter, and the mistakes are mainly due to the nature of the curriculum or the textbooks that teachers mainly depend on. However, the other problem emanated from the teachers’ grasp of the content knowledge. For example, one student from Makala Junior Secondary School indicated that at times teachers get angry when a student tries to correct them. She gave the example of one teacher who said that Hinduism has a founder even though the students attempted to correct her. Miss Rabin complained that the content knowledge she received at both teacher training college and the university was inadequate because she said that there are some topics that were not covered in detail at those institutions, and that she learnt a lot while in the field.

There were times when teachers used the concept Botswana Traditional Religion (BTR) and African Traditional Religion (ATR) interchangeably yet they are not the same. However, none of the teachers tended to view that as an issue of concern. Teachers used the phrase Botswana Traditional Religion, following one of the textbooks, *Religion for All*, whilst the other textbooks that students and teachers had access to, used African Traditional Religion (ATR). However, teachers tended to be comfortable with both terms since they could use them interchangeably. They did not make the difference between African Traditional Religion and Botswana Traditional Religion neither did they show the relationship between the two as shown in my interview with Mrs. Koloni on the issue.

The two textbooks use different phrases, that is, Botswana Traditional Religion and African Traditional Religion.

Personally I use Botswana Traditional Religion and not African Traditional Religion in Botswana. I never use ATR at all. But I still do not see any problem because the other authors have specified to say African Traditional Religion in Botswana.

In your view what is Botswana Traditional Religion?

It is the religion of Botswana that has not been diluted by Christianity. It is just a pure traditional religion, without any traces of Christianity. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 6th July, 2007)

There have been debates especially on the term African Traditional Religion which spans more than two decades by African scholars, especially Idowu (1973) who argued convincingly why there has to be African Traditional Religion which according to him is found throughout Africa. He did not want to compartmentalise ATR because according to him, that would render ATR non-existent.

The Examination Officer Miss Ray was unhappy with what she referred to as the RE teachers' limited content knowledge. According to her, from the responses that they got as examiners from the students' scripts it was clear that teachers hardly researched, and as a result they had inadequate content knowledge. This is what Miss Ray said:

Teachers tend to use one umbrella name for God, yet God is referred to differently depending on the religion. Each religion has its own name for God. Another weakness is in festivals and ceremonies where teachers cannot make the difference between the two. This has been a problem for a long time. Teachers rely heavily on students' textbooks and pick up concepts as they are, despite the errors found in the books. (Interview with Miss Ray, 7th November, 2006)

The four RE teachers had adequate content knowledge, even though at times its presentation was not satisfactory as shown by Mr. Tiro's presentation of a piece of information to students when making a point about the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Brazil.

Last week the Pope visited Brazil where the issue of abortion was discussed especially by political leaders who supported abortion. The Pope told political leaders that life according to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church begins at conception, and that committing abortion was murder. (Fieldnotes from Mr Tiro's class, 21st May, 2007)

In this particular instance, Mr. Tiro did not indicate or ask if his students knew that the majority of Brazilians were Catholics because students may not have known this information.

4.3 RE teachers' pedagogical knowledge

Teachers need to show their complex and multi-dimensional nature by displaying virtues such as curiosity, tolerance, honesty, fairness and respect for diversity as they teach. They need to have adequate pedagogical knowledge in order to teach the subject matter. Though no religions had been enumerated as the ones to teach, the four RE teachers uniformly concentrated on some religions mainly because they were well covered in the students' textbooks. For example, when I asked about what mainly guided him as a teacher to choose what religion to teach in his lessons, Mr. Tiro said:

I look at the students' textbooks and identify a religion with more information. But I need not have more information on one religion like Christianity, while I don't have anything on other religions. At times I choose a religion because I think it could be of interest to students, partly because its followers will be known to students. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 7th March, 2007)

In this regard, Mr Tiro did what he thought was practical under the circumstances he was in, such as when he had to teach a religion because he thought the students had some knowledge about it. Furthermore, the textbooks guided him on what religions to teach.

At times the instructional objectives in the syllabus document were problematic to teach mainly due to the way they were structured. For example, when Mrs Rabin was teaching about "*Authority*" one of the students asked her about the difference between the "*Functions of a leader*" and "*The importance of a leader.*" These were two related

instructional objectives in the syllabus document. She had given the students a task, which was based on the syllabus objectives which she had picked verbatim. The textbooks which the teachers and students largely depended on were not helpful either in this regard.

Teachers allowed debate and accepted various viewpoints in their lessons. For example, in one lesson, Mrs. Laban asked her students to state the “*Disadvantages of capital punishment.*” One student said “*It robs society of important people*” and this sparked a debate. Some students were of the view that if one committed murder, then that person was no longer important to society whilst others disagreed. The teacher agreed with the response that this particular student gave. The teacher then ruled that the issue should not be pursued. In addition, she expressed her personal viewpoint on the issue.

When she taught about HIV and AIDS in relation to religion, Mrs. Koloni allowed students to discuss the issue, and this is what I recorded in my field notes.

One of the students indicated that in Christianity AIDS is viewed as a punishment from God. Some students did not agree with this view. They indicated that there was nothing in the Bible to that effect because AIDS is a recent phenomenon. One of the students who declared that he was a committed Christian from a charismatic church told the teacher that his church did not subscribe to the teaching that AIDS is a form of punishment from God. On realising that there was a debate on the issue, the teacher asked students to go and find out more about the perspectives of the different denominations on AIDS: mainline, Pentecostal, African Independent Churches and others. (Fieldnotes from Mrs Koloni’s class, 2nd February, 2007)

Miss Rabin, too, in one of her lessons, allowed a discussion to proceed and students exhibited their general knowledge about religions, as shown in my field notes.

Teacher: Anything that you would like us to discuss? [There were no questions from the students]. Then take your books and read on the topic “Loyalty”. [Ben then raised his hand]

Ben: How many disciples did Jesus have?

Class: [There was a chorus response from the classmates] Twelve.

Ben: How many of Jesus’ disciples were women?

Class: None.

Ben: There was a disciple by the name of Mary.

Teacher: Was Mary not the mother to Jesus?

Ben: No. in fact there are several Marys in the Bible. [The class was not settled on this one – there were murmurs].

Teacher: Where did you get that?

Ben: From the Holy Bible that is in the library.

Teacher: You people, you must go to the library and read. Ben is coming up with something that I don't know too.

Karabo: It has been proven that the woman was the wife to Jesus. [The rest of the class except Ben was further unsettled yet they could not articulate their position. There were murmurs. Some students were complaining that Karabo and Ben were irrelevant and wasting their time].

Ben: Jesus was an ordinary man. The information that Mary was married to Jesus was taken out in case Jesus would look like an ordinary human being. [Other students derided him but they could not articulate their position. Some students were saying that Ben could not be serious at all].

[Karabo was the only student in class who agreed with Ben. What the two students said is found in theological debates. What the rest of the class did was to chide the two students on what they were saying, and at times there was even a burst of laughter of mockery from the classmates. The teacher did not deride Ben and Karabo but she allowed them to articulate what they said they knew].
(Fieldnotes from Miss Rabin's class on 13th June, 2007)

Even though the discussion was not directly related to the topic at hand, the teacher allowed the debate to take place. The teacher was able to ask Ben for his sources of information, hence making him and other students know that she acknowledged their knowledge. It is important to note that this particular teacher openly indicated that her student had come up with information that she herself did not have. In this particular instance, the teacher allowed and accepted information that her student brought to the learning environment. She was happy that Ben researched and got some information from the library, and that his peers had to do the same thing. Even though the discussion was mainly between two students and the teacher, Miss Rabin allowed these students to articulate their views. The teacher even allowed her students to ask her some challenging questions. For example, during this discussion, one student Karabo asked his teacher Miss Rabin why Jesus had to cry if he was not a human being. The teachers said: "We are told that he felt some pain." The teacher was patient with her students and provided the best possible answer she could come up with.

Miss Rabin always asked for students' views after they had written a test and had got their scripts back. This created rapport between her and the students, since students were free to make comments. This also allowed students to be more open and even to acknowledge what they regarded as their own faults. For example, some of the students used the opportunity to express their unhappiness about the teacher for being unnecessarily strict. What is not clear was how the teacher was going to use the comments to improve her teaching practice. These were some of the students' comments in Miss Rabin's class after they got their scripts after writing her test:

Bob: My answers were not specific because you kept on asking "how".

Mercy: I made spelling mistakes but you know what I was trying to write.

Silo: Teacher, I do not know who was marking.

Boiki: Time was too much and must be shifted to Maths!

(Fieldnotes from Miss Rabin's class, 6th March, 2007)

In this enabling environment, students could complain, demand and confess to the teacher.

When revising either tests or examinations, Mrs. Laban allowed students to play teacher which according to her was a way of further involving them. When I asked her why she adopted that technique, she indicated that students feel at ease when it is their classmate doing what a teacher should be doing because they feel freer. Just like in group work, those who felt comfortable in playing teacher were the ones who had less problems with the subject and also with English language which is used as a second language by some and as a third language by others.

At times, as a way of showing their pedagogical knowledge, teachers held views that were not in the textbooks. For example, when I asked Mrs. Koloni why she said there were advantages and disadvantages of capital punishment yet in some of the textbooks it was "*possible advantages and disadvantages*" she said:

I don't know, may be it could be right that it is possible that capital punishment can deter criminal activities. But with us, we are guided by the syllabus. We cannot add a word like "possible" to advantages and disadvantages. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30th May, 2007)

When I further asked her if it made any difference when leaving or adding the word "possible" she said:

To me it wouldn't make such a big difference. I would leave it as an advantage, without adding "possible." Most of the points are advantages – they are issues that

happen. If a criminal is sentenced to death, obviously the society is going to be secure. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30th May, 2007)

In addition to what she viewed as pedagogically correct, she also expressed what she felt was morally correct.

There were times when some teachers followed what was in the textbook because they thought that examinations were based on this resource. For example, even though Miss Rabin knew that the information that robbery was a crime punishable by death in Botswana was not correct, she still provided it to the students mainly because it was in the textbook. In her view, what was in the textbook was likely to be examined hence if students could use that information they were likely to pass.

There were times when teachers expressed their personal views on issues. For example, when Miss Rabin gave her personal opinion on the topic “*Capital Punishment*” and said: “those who commit serious crimes need to be decapitated.” Similarly, Mrs Laban expressed her opinion to her class that Capital Punishment robbed society of important people.

One of the strengths of Miss Rabin is that she at least once used short stories that she had herself created when she was introducing the topic “*Punishment*” and that the students were able to pick up certain relevant points from the story. One of the stories is shown below:

Two men broke into a house and shot the husband in that home. After killing the man, they tied up his wife and then stole several items in the house. Below are the teacher’s questions that followed the story.

- a. What is the nature of the crime?
 - b. What would happen to the men if they were caught?
- (Fieldnotes from Miss Rabin’s class, 6th March, 2006)

The story was created in such a way that it was easy to understand. Using this activity as a measuring stick of the success of teachers’ innovation, it was likely that if they varied their techniques, teachers could own their lessons since they would be their own creations.

When it came to giving examples from religions, Miss Rabin mainly used examples from Christianity. For example when she was teaching about *Loyalty in Religions*, she used examples mainly from Christianity and to a lesser extent from Islam. In Christianity she quoted the verses that buttressed whatever point she made while it was not the case in Islam where she made general statements without any reference for example to relevant Koranic verses. Since most of the examples were from Christianity, that in itself did not encourage her students to explore various religions as they worked in their groups. For example when she was teaching about the “*Importance of Contraception in Religion*” she spent most of the time discussing with students the various Christian views on the issue and very little on other religions. However, she mentioned Islam and Judaism just in passing. Similarly, in Mr. Tiro’s class, when he taught about: “*Authority in Different religions.*” there was emphasis on Christianity and to a lesser extent on African Traditional Religion and from other religions.

Mrs. Koloni also restricted herself to Christianity on the topic “*Freedom*” and spent half the time talking about it. When one student suggested a different religion the teacher objected as shown in my observational field notes below.

Student: Can we talk about Sikhism?

Teacher: No. We will talk about Sikhism next time. Why should we talk about Sikhism? I am the teacher and I decide what has to be done. We are left with 10-15 minutes and I want to give you some work. (Fieldnotes from Mrs Koloni’s class, 9th May, 2007)

This particular student had interest in Sikhism which was also covered in the textbook. Even though the teacher indicated that they were to attend to Sikhism later, it was never discussed at all or given as an example in another topic at any other time in Mrs. Koloni’s class during my eight months stay in her school.

Mrs. Koloni had a bias towards Christianity, for example, when she gave students a piece of homework to revise the topic, “*Human Rights in Religions.*” Throughout her lessons, Mrs. Koloni used examples from Christianity but seldom used examples from other religions. She deliberately favoured Christianity even when giving notes as shown in my conversation with her:

In the notes that you gave to the students you used capitals and pronouns *Him and Himself* referring to Jesus and also capital F for *Father* referring to God. Why?

It is just in me. It is my religion. At times we take the religion to class.

Don't you see the danger then?

Yes I do, but at times you cannot help it. I cannot imagine writing **F**ather (referring to God in Christianity) with a small letter. It is difficult for me. But I can write **A**llah with a small **A**.

Is that not dangerous for an educator to do that?

Obviously there is a danger. Indoctrination is bad but it is obvious that some of these things are within our system. The danger is there. But I don't think students will lose marks for that. Whether it is a small or capital **F**, there is no problem. After all, in RE we do not mark grammar like in English. It was made clear to me when I started teaching here that I should not mark grammar. What one can mark students down on are religious terms. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30th May, 2007)

In my initial interview with Mrs. Laban she indicated that she encouraged openness in her treatment of religions yet in practice she concentrated mainly on Christianity followed to a lesser extent by African Traditional Religion and then Islam, because these three religions had been covered extensively in the students' textbook.

There were times when teachers were inconsistent when they presented their lessons. For example, when Mrs Laban was teaching about "*Authority in Religion*", she asked students to mention the roles of a "*rabbi*" in Judaism and one student said that it was "*to teach the law of Moses.*" The teacher accepted the response as correct but contrary to what the student had said, the teacher wrote on the board "*teachers of the law.*" That was likely to cause some confusion because the teacher asked a question which was answered correctly by a student, yet the teacher wrote on the board something different. In the same lesson, Mrs. Laban asked the students what "*the role of a scribe*" was, and the response was "*to read the law*" of which the teacher accepted as correct, yet she wrote on the board for students to copy "*They are knowledgeable in the law.*" This inconsistency could bring about some confusion to the students.

There were certain practices that were peculiar to some teachers. For example, Mr. Tiro often called out marks of students from a quiz or test. He said that if students' marks were called out they were likely to be ashamed of themselves if they scored low marks hence they would always strive for higher marks. When I asked him about the effectiveness of the practice, he indicated that there were those students who would want to hear their marks being called out especially those who would have done well. He said that, there were those who would have performed poorly and would not want their marks to be called out. Mr Tiro said that he used the strategy at class level unlike other teachers who would pin up the end of month tests on a school notice board for all to see. Mr. Tiro also

indicated that some teachers beat up their students forcing them to read their subjects, hence passing them. He said that he did not adopt any of his colleagues' methods and that is why he resorted to calling out of names and marks. When I asked him if he followed those students whose names were called out to check if they improved with time in their performance Mr. Tiro answered in the positive. When I asked him to comment on the assumption that the improvement in grades might not necessarily be due to the calling out of names and marks but due to some other factors, Mr. Tiro agreed. Miss Rabin also called out marks of the students after they had written a test, for the same reasons.

There were times when teachers were not clear with instructional objectives as shown by Mr Tiro's comment below in relation to how RE is taught.

When talking about the reasons for teaching RE there is one objective which says that students have to know BTR (Botswana Traditional Religion) and other religions of the world. In this case it suggests that all students who are learning RE are members of a religion called BTR hence they need to know more about their religion compared to other religions out there. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 3rd October, 2006)

There is no instructional objective in the syllabus document that expects students to know BTR, because the curriculum does not enumerate religions to be studied. Furthermore, BTR is a label for African Traditional Religion in one of the textbooks which is not used in the syllabus document. In this particular instance, the teacher had lost sight of the fact that a multi-faith RE is not supposed to compare and contrast religions. When I later reminded him in a post-lesson interview that religions need not be compared in a multi-faith RE curriculum he said:

I think that it is true because the whole idea of doing RE is if students are to have a religion they should choose it themselves. We need not open up their eyes. Let students make their own choices on religions. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 3rd October, 2006)

Mr Tiro indicated that a multi-faith RE is not meant to convert students because being religious was a personal choice. However, Mrs Koloni was of the view that instructional objectives that compared and contrasted religions were in order, and she emphasised why religions have to be contrasted.

Let the students see for themselves when they compare the religions. For example, in ethical teachings of Christianity and other religions students need to see which ones are better than the others. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 6th July, 2007)

She stressed that students have to know that some religions are better than others. She indicated that issues of truth and falsity were important in RE. She went on to say:

If you are comparing and contrasting something, you are just comparing. You do no wrong. I think they did well to include those objectives. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 6th July, 2007)

While RE teachers were of the view that they did not have problems with instructional objectives, Education Officers held a different view. An RE officer based in the Southern Region Inspectorate area, Mr. Mathias, observed that students do not perform well largely because RE teachers lacked the content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Teachers have problems with some of the syllabus objectives such as “the **importance of** certain objects or practices and the **use** in different religions.” Some teachers use the terms interchangeably, hence the need for workshops to be mounted in order to inform teachers more about these differences. In addition, in the classes and in all schools that I visited and observed lessons, I found that the lecture method was common. (Interview with Mr Mathias, 17th October, 2006)

Even though the Education Officer said that the lecture method was common during his school visits, it was not the case in the two schools that I did my fieldwork. There was not much lecturing because teachers preferred to say little and then divided students into discussion groups as they tackled questions from their textbooks. The RE Education Officer suggested that in-service workshops be mounted for teachers in order to alert them about some of their inadequacies in their teaching practices. He further indicated that teachers were expected to produce lesson plans which they only did when they heard that a team of inspectors was visiting their school. This is what he said:

When teachers are observed they try their best to vary the methods but the lecture method will still dominate. Teachers will also suggest group work in their lesson plans, but as one observes them, it will be clear that the technique is not well thought out. For example, on realising that they are lecturing, the teacher will jump on to say; “*sit in your groups.*” Group work tends to be the easiest way out for the teachers. In most cases I realise that they are unable to achieve most of their objectives as stated in the lesson plan. (Interview with Mr Mathias, 17th October, 2006)

It is true that teachers used the group work technique, and less lecturing. Even though Mr Mathias said that teachers lectured, there was very little of it in the classes that I observed. Furthermore Mr. Mathias was of the view that most teachers do not do research because according to him, their reading only goes as far as the students’ textbooks. In his view, this crippled them when it came to classroom teaching. For example, he was

unhappy that teachers do not know how the Botswana Education System operates, and that they are unaware of other important issues in the country like the country's Vision 2016 which is expected to influence the way they live as citizens.

Another RE officer in the Northern Region Inspectorate, Miss Timon, also indicated that lessons were teacher-centred when she said:

At times teachers can disappoint you! Most of the time they lecture; they are teacher-centred. On the whole teachers do not prepare for lessons. In most instances when we go out for inspection there will be lesson plans designed specifically for us yet there would be no record of work. Though there was a circular to the effect that there should be lesson plans, some schools are reluctant to implement that. In some schools the issue of lesson plans never saw the light of the day. Where there are lesson plans, a school has to have a common format so that an officer can observe across the subjects, and in addition have a record of what is happening in the section. In most cases RE teachers do not have anything to give to me. Teachers' preparations for lessons are not thorough at all – they cannot even go out to get an artifact to use in their lessons. There is a general lack of commitment to duty and lack of innovation on the part of the teachers. (Interview with Miss Timon, 22nd August, 2006)

Miss Timon, was unhappy that RE teachers were teacher-centred in their lesson presentations especially in their emphasis on the lecture method. She also complained about the teachers' lack of professionalism and commitment to their work. However, Miss Timon did not indicate if her office has ever provided teachers with, for example, a template of what is expected of them in a lesson plan, and even how lessons can be executed in class. This can happen if there is consistent contact between the education officers and the teachers. It is not clear where the teachers have to get skills of involving students in their classroom teaching. Teachers did not prepare written lesson plans at all, unless they knew that they were going to be observed by a member of the inspectorate. Miss Timon observed that even when they prepare impromptu lesson plans for Education Officers, their lessons still lacked creativity. When I met Mrs. Laban and arranged for my first observation in her class she said:

Mr. Dinama, we do not have any written lesson plans, but we do teach. If you expect those, you will not find them. (Interview with Mrs Laban, 22nd September, 2006)

Similarly her colleague, Mrs. Koloni, also asked me:

Are you going to need written lesson plans? If you do I can make them for you. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 22nd September, 2006)

The statements of Mrs Laban and Mrs Koloni confirmed what the Education Officers in the inspectorate had told me. It emerged that teachers did not make any written lesson plans but in most of the cases, what I observed is that, they would browse through the instructional syllabus objectives and what the students' textbooks suggested were possible class and homework tasks before going to meet their classes. However, I did not ask either Mrs. Laban or Mrs. Koloni to make lesson plans for me, because my study was focusing on what teachers did everyday in their classes and not to intervene in their teaching. If it was part of their normal practice, to make lesson plans I would have asked for them. Though teachers were expected to have lesson plans they did not always have any.

Another Education Officer Mr. Moks also complained that teachers were not creative in their lesson presentations, and suggested that they should always look for better ways of teaching. He also indicated that in the lessons that he observed, lessons were teacher-centred, and that there was need to move away from that practice and look for better ways of teaching the curriculum that could involve students more. What Mr Moks, Miss Timon and Mr Mathias were saying were inconsistent with what I observed, because I witnessed teachers giving students work to do on their own, especially in groups.

When I asked Miss Ray, an RE Examination Officer, how religions should be chosen by teachers when they present their lessons, she indicated that it should depend on the religions that students are familiar with, such as Christianity and ATR. However, the question is: what about introducing students to other religions? However, this is in contradistinction with the syllabus document that does not enumerate religions. If what the Examination Officer said was the case, it would prove that some teachers were correct, that instead of exposing students to various religions, they emphasised one or two religions only. Furthermore, this information was never relayed to RE teachers, especially through circulars or in the RE examination report. This could be one reason why RE is not performed well because some information is not relayed to teachers so that they could adjust their teaching practices in line with the expectations of the examination department.

In their classes RE teachers used the information that students brought along with them in class discussions only but did not use it in tests and examinations. Teachers mainly depended on books and on their own knowledge. That made students feel that their knowledge was not valued and that knowledge existed elsewhere outside of them. Since the teachers said that they valued students' knowledge, is shown in Mrs Laban's statement below.

We first make use of the learners' knowledge and what they bring into the classroom which is very important, for example, through brain-storming. (Interview with Mrs Laban, 4th October, 2006)

The learners' knowledge was important only in as far as brainstorming was concerned as shown in the classes of the four RE teachers.

The teachers' questioning skills is another pedagogical area that is important because there were times when some teachers were inadequate in this area. For example, when Mrs. Koloni introduced the topic "The value of the family and the importance of living in a family" she started by asking students this; "*What is the value of the family and the importance of living in a family?*" The question was loaded because there were two questions in one. The result was that the students did not immediately answer the question. Below are my field notes on that lesson.

The teacher then tried other means so that students could answer the question. She first broke down the question by asking what a family is, and then asked students to mention different members of the family. It was only after breaking the long question into shorter questions, that the students started to respond. From this, the teacher asked about the value of the family of which students provided answers such as *love* and *identity*. (Fieldnotes from Mrs Koloni's class, 31st January, 2007)

It is important to note that when Mrs Koloni realised that the question was loaded, she quickly thought on her feet and broke down the question. She immediately and quickly thought of a way of asking the same question in a different way. In this particular instance, as would be expected of her, the teacher thought on her feet. In fact, the long and loaded question that she had previously asked was a combination of two objectives taken from the syllabus document.

I also observed that all the three teachers and their students code-switched in their lessons except Mr. Tiro and his students. When I asked Mrs. Koloni about code-switching, she said there was no particular reason even though she later said that some students learn better in Setswana (the national language of Botswana) and that code switching was done to cater for the “slow” learners. However, even in instances where there was code-switching, those students who were referred to as “slow learners” still did not participate.

In addition, in both schools, the keeping of records was inadequate, for example, there was no file where the RE department could keep and retrieve information at ease. For example, when I asked Mrs. Koloni, who was the RE coordinator at Togonal Junior Secondary School if there was an RE file that contained information about her department she said:

No. Not really. We only have a file for examination papers. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9th October, 2006)

4.4 RE teachers’ main teaching technique – group work

There are several techniques that the RE teachers could have used, but they instead emphasised group work and to a lesser extent individual and homework. For group work to be successful, the teacher has to give clear guidance regarding a task. For example, the physical structure of the learning environment should be flexible and be guided by the nature of the task and the needs of the students. Furthermore, in group work the teachers have to relinquish their powers by moving away from the centre stage, hence transferring some degree of control and accountability to the small groups which in turn can be controlled by the students themselves. For that to happen, the “students must be convinced that the teacher has in fact empowered them to make a wide range of decisions regarding the selection of the learning tasks and the nature of the process of investigation” (Sharan, 1995:257). However, teachers have to make available a wide range of resources for students in order for group work to be effective. For example, in addition to the textbooks, other sources such as newspapers, magazines, recorded radio discussions could be used.

Small group work is a departure from the traditional classroom setup, where the teacher is the only person who determines the course of instruction. In small-group discussions, teachers have to design the learning tasks in a manner that would facilitate cooperation and mutual assistance among members of small groups so that they have a common goal and purpose for working together (Sharan, 1995). The task must enable students to work together and to view their group as a social unit worthy of achieving certain academic goals. If the teacher does not create an enabling environment for group work, the small group is likely to disintegrate into a collection of individuals who will be working towards uncoordinated goals. The classroom environment calls for teachers to be always making decisions, about how they organise their instruction. In group work, students can learn to support whatever position that they take, and by so doing, they can develop critical thinking.

In the different classes that I observed, students in their groups chose their own chairperson and recorder, and either the chairperson or the recorder was the one who presented the task to the rest of the class. There was free exchange of ideas at peer level even though there were some students who were dominant in the groups especially during presentations.

Even though teachers mainly used group work, in most instances they did not provide guidelines and skills to students for the groups to function effectively. Each class had 45 students, and groups ranged between 8-10 members. It was only Mr Tiro who had fewer students, who were 13 in number, and the groups in his class consisted of 3-4 members.

In almost all the lessons I observed in the two schools, each class was divided into a number of small groups of students and given a task. This is an example of a task that Miss Rabin gave to her students in their groups. The task was in the form of a story which she had herself created. Below is the task.

A man raped an old woman and two boys saw that man and reported him to the police. The man was arrested but was later granted bail. While on bail, he strangled and killed the two boys. The questions that followed were:

- a. What was the first crime that the man committed?
- b. Why did the suspect kill the two boys?

(Fieldnotes from Miss Rabin's class, 6th March, 2007)

Similarly, when Mrs Koloni taught the topic: “The Value of a family” she divided her students into six groups and gave them the following questions:

- a. Discuss the changes in the roles of women and men (boys and girls) in three religions.
- b. Discuss the role of family members in three religions. Discuss how the roles of males and females complement each other.
- c. Discuss the effects of HIV/AIDS on the individual and community. What do any three religions say are the causes of HIV/AIDS?
- d. Discuss how different religions help in controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- e. Discuss how religions assist in making AIDS victims feel accepted and the role of religions in counseling people with HIV/AIDS.
- f. Define contraception. Discuss the views of three religions on contraception. (Fieldnotes from Mrs Koloni’s class, 31st January, 2007)

By dividing the students into groups meant that the role of both the students and the teachers differed considerably, since roles and responsibilities were shifted. The teachers assigned students tasks and students were to search for information on their own, using a variety of sources such as books, magazines, videos and television. Furthermore, students had to engage in a dialogue with their peers. In carrying out the assignment in their groups, students assigned each other responsibilities. It is interesting to note that they largely cooperated, hence leading to a collective response. At the end of the group discussions, students in their groups presented their work to the rest of the class. During group reports, the rest of the class in almost all the cases participated, and even evaluated their peers’ presentation even when they were not asked by the teacher to do so. The students usually pointed out especially the weaknesses of the presentation by the group, especially in terms of the relevance to the task.

I asked Miss Rabin what she regarded as the best way of teaching students to learn Religious Education and she responded by saying:

Normally they work in a group and then they present. They research and present on a topic. Since we have four periods a week, most of the time is lecturing and discussion. Normally we give them some objectives to work in a group followed by a presentation. They are expected to research and then present on a topic. Here and there we do presentations and debate. We give them group work where they will be able to help each other. Probably that will be more effective than a teacher standing in front of the class. We divide students according to their abilities by mixing high and low performers. They don’t choose their groups, but I choose for them. I do try to balance things and I know that high achievers will be able to help the low achievers. (Interview with Miss Rabin, 29th September, 2006)

Even though Miss Rabin said that they had limited time, hence they tended to lecture most of the time, in my observations, there were few incidents of lecturing. What was happening is that most of the time students were engaged in discussions in their groups. Miss Rabin also said that she at times engaged her students in debate even though in all the months that I visited her in class, she never engaged students in debate. When she said that she engaged her students in research, she meant her students referring mainly to their textbooks. Even though she said that she combined “high and low performers” so that they could help each other, there was no sign in the groups that such assistance was coming forth.

Miss Rabin rewarded her students verbally for responses made to questions during class. She also thanked her students for being a good audience at the end of every lesson. This attitude was likely to enhance the students’ sense of self-worth since by thanking them, she acknowledged their contributions. She also shared some jokes, hence making classroom environment less threatening. When teachers reward their students and have a sense of humour, it can enhance their students’ learning. Praise can be extremely effective because it encourages students to attend diligently to the task assigned hence they are able to appreciate their self-worth (Wellington (1994)). In addition, she emphasised the use of English, because she said that most of the concepts were in that language. Furthermore, after giving students some work she would move from group to group making some further explanations where needed. She would always remind them about the remaining time. Furthermore, her groups were permanent.

Most of the time, the four RE teachers asked students to work in groups so that the students could help each other. They also encouraged their students to cooperate and collaborate in carrying out given tasks. The teachers had earlier on indicated to me that it was easier to have students in groups so that weak students could be helped by the gifted ones. It was difficult to establish if “weak” students were being helped by the more “able” ones. For example, when I asked Miss Rabin if there was a way in which she made sure “gifted” students helped the “weak” ones, she said that there was no way. This is my interview with Miss Rabin on the issue.

You say that if students are mixed, the high achievers will help the low achievers.

If they know that I expect them to come up with something, definitely they will do something. I also encourage the low achievers to present instead of the high achievers doing it.

How do you know that they will help the low achievers?

Not really. The fact that they will be discussing as a group, one would assume that they will be helping the low achievers.

How do we know that in a group the discussion might be between the high achievers only?

We go round to check whether they are all participating.

Do you spend enough time with each group to make sure that all speak?

We are just assuming they are helping each other.

(Interview with Miss Rabin, 15th June, 2007)

She indicated that there was no mechanism in place to make sure that students helped each other as they worked in their groups. Though Miss Rabin mixed the students as they worked in their groups, there were still some students who would not talk in class or make any contributions in their groups.

I also asked Miss Rabin if there were any specific skills given to the students as they worked in their groups, and she said:

There are no specific skills, given to students. We just tell them to read and then present. I just give them the work. I don't tell them how they should do it, except that they should pick from the book what they think are correct answers to the questions. No particular skills are given as what to pick or not to pick. Nothing.
(Interview with Mrs Rabin, 29th September, 2006)

She indicated that there were no particular skills that were given to students on how to present to a class. However, she expected that anyone from the group could present because they would have discussed as a group. Group work was more of routine to the RE teachers. I had expected that students would be given specific skills when working in their groups since it was the commonest teaching technique. In addition, teachers rarely made any additions to what the students presented or brought along because the information was from the students' textbooks that both students and teachers solely depended upon. Though teachers mainly engaged students in group work, there were no lesson plans to indicate the stages that teachers were to go through during their lessons. Instead of preparing for teaching lessons, teachers mainly depended on their store of knowledge. Even though the teachers' store of knowledge is a good thing, it has to be presented in a logical and consistent manner.

At times, teachers were unable to balance the classroom environment by not involving the majority of students because there were times when only a few vocal ones would be talking, almost throughout the whole lesson. Below are my field notes when one of the groups was presenting in Miss Rabin's class on the topic: "*Functions of a leader.*"

This group was made up of students who seemed assertive hence intimidated their classmates. For example, one female student, Neo, asked the group a question. Before she could finish, the group members who comprised boys only, booed her down. The girl then kept quiet. The teacher did not come to the rescue of the girl by bringing the boys to order. (Fieldnotes from Miss Rabin's class, 18th May, 2007)

When students in both schools were asked about the commonest teaching technique that was used by their teachers they indicated that it was group work. They also mentioned that debate and drama were occasionally used in lessons, though none of techniques was used during my fieldwork.

When I asked Mrs Laban about particular classroom activities that she engaged her students in, she indicated that she mainly used group work as a teaching technique. She told me that debate was one of the techniques that she used in her lessons, but she used it only once. When it was used, almost all the students were involved and were eager to talk and defend their positions. However, she indicated that group work has some challenges largely due to the nature of the class composition where students were of a mixed ability.

In response to how she organised her group work she said:

A slight problem arises when it comes to presentations, because one would want to ask those who are able to talk confidently to present to the rest of the class. This is a problem because we tend to use the same students because the main purpose of a presentation is for the audience to hear what the presenter is saying. We use the same students because they can teach their classmates and explain to them. We try to mix the students. For example in each group there has to be one intellectually gifted child in order to balance the group. (Interview with Mrs Laban, 4th October, 2006)

In her use of group work, Mrs. Laban used the same students in presentations because she indicated that others in the group might be intellectually challenged. In addition, in most cases, she did not announce time to be taken on a task, and did not move from one group to another to see whether students followed the instructions on the task and to make further clarifications where necessary.

Regarding the best way that he thought his students learnt, Mr Tiro also mentioned group work. He indicated that in almost all the cases he achieved his objectives when using group work, mainly because students contributed in various ways in their attempt to respond to the demands of the task. He said that when dealing with the topic “Family Planning,” for example, in groups, students were able to identify the importance of “Family Planning” and that every group was able to defend the points they raised.

Unlike other teachers, groups were not permanent and kept on changing. When I asked him why he kept on changing the groups he said:

I keep on doing what I think will bring some form of learning. In fact mixing students from the two classes make them talk. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 7th March, 2007)

In Mr Tiro’s class there were few interruptions from fellow students when a group presented. When I asked him why it was orderly during presentations, he said that he had laid down some ground rules.

When I asked him what students could have particularly gained in group work from one of the lessons I observed on “Human Rights” Mr. Tiro said:

When presenting and especially when elaborating on their points, I could sense that the students were being conscious of these rights. Some of them suggested examples that do not appear even in their textbooks. It shows that they were able to connect the topic with some human rights organisations, such as those fighting for the rights of women and children. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 2nd February, 2007)

Furthermore, Mr Tiro always announced time that was to be spent on a task. Even though it cannot be clearly be verified, it seemed that Mr Tiro’s group work strategy was successful largely because his students were fewer in the class, hence he could make manageable small groups from it. He also made additions on what students would have said or presented as shown in my field notes below.

The teacher gave students a task and he asked them to use their textbook to answer the questions. He spent few minutes explaining how the task was to be carried out. He asked the students to contact him if they experienced problems in carrying out the task. The teacher gave students 20 minutes to do the task. The students’ discussions were both in English and Setswana.

While students were doing their work in groups the teacher was called once in a while by a group to make explanations. The teacher kept on reminding the students of the time. Finally, the teacher announced that time was up and it was time for the groups to present. (Fieldnotes from Mr Tiro’s class, 29th January, 2007)

During group discussions and presentations, there was a lot of debate that took place amongst students in Mr Tiro's class. At times students posed to him some challenging questions, and expressed views that were different from those of their teacher. In most instances, there was a dialogue between the teacher and the students. Furthermore, there was always an applause for each group after it had made a presentation.

When Mrs. Koloni was asked about the activities that she engaged her students in she said:

Class discussion. I tried debate but unfortunately students don't take it seriously. They take it to be entertainment and not learning. You see, with debate, you end up wasting time. Since it is about arguing, they take that to be some form of entertainment. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9th October, 2006)

Mrs. Koloni said that she gave up on debate and that she never revisited it. There was a problem with group work especially during presentations, in the way Mrs. Koloni handled it as shown in my field notes.

The presenter was so fast that the rest of the class could not follow especially those who were not from that group. The group that was presenting did not answer questions that were directed to them by the class. For example, the group said that they did not know the name of worship place for the Sikhs and Buddhists yet that was vital information as far as their task was concerned. The information was in their textbooks. (Fieldnotes from Mrs Koloni's class)

In addition, this particular teacher rarely made any additions to what the students presented. I tried to find out how she rated one presentation as shown below in my interview with her.

Most of the time during presentations, the presenters read their findings and rarely made clarifications, unless there was a question posed. Why?

For the intelligent ones, that might not be a problem, but not for the slow learners. Some of them will not even ask a single question, even when they do not understand. But I think that it is generally helpful when students ask presenters questions.

At times presenters were asked to repeat the presentation by their classmates. Why?

Yes, at times. It happens, if it is a genuine request from the rest of the class because the group's presentation will not have been clear enough. In most cases, it happens when the presenter was fast or when the presentation itself was mixed up. In such a situation the class will be justified to seek clarification. At times they will still ask for a repeat out of sheer playfulness. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30th May 2007)

When I asked her about the skills she equipped her students with when they worked in groups and when presenting their tasks to the rest of the class Mrs. Koloni said:

None. I just tell them to work in their groups in readiness for presentation.
(Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9th October, 2006)

She did not announce time when she gave students a task and when I asked her why, she said it was routine which students knew about.

They know. We had done something in the first half and they know that we have to do group work in the remaining time. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 24th October, 2006)

4.5 Classroom management and discipline in RE classes

Classroom management is one important area in teaching and learning. Wong and Wong (2000) say that good planning reduces incidents of indiscipline in class by three quarters. They assert that students' achievement is directly related to the degree in which a teacher establishes good classroom management and that the teachers' relationship with students is important. When students are engaged in class activities there is less likelihood that a teacher will encounter behaviour problems. For example, if students or a group of students finish a task early, they may start making noise because they may not have been told what to do next.

On the whole, the four RE teachers had reasonable rapport with their students except Mrs. Koloni who had class control problems. One possible reason was that there was very little preparation that she did, since she just followed the syllabus instructional objectives accompanied by the students' textbooks. It seems she did not think rigorously as to how she was going to manage the class activities. Mrs. Koloni did not have robust classroom management procedures. When I asked her why there seemed to be some classroom management problems, in terms of discipline, she said that her students were not motivated enough and that is why they never stopped talking, and she described them as a badly behaved group. In Mrs. Koloni's class there was a high incidence of classroom disciplinary problems and this had an impact on her teaching and the learning of her students. In attempting to manage the class at times she used threatening language and even blackmail, which to her embarrassment and anger the students did not take seriously as shown in my notes below.

The teacher wrote the topic “Freedom” on the board and asked the students: “What is freedom?” Students immediately opened their books searching for the answer. The teacher was not amused by their attitude because she shouted in what was a form of desperation: “Form 3s!!” She had expected students to answer without consulting their books. About 2 minutes passed before any student could attempt a response. On seeing that students did not answer the question the teacher threatened them by saying: “If you don’t want to talk, you will write notes for 80 minutes. Most students protested because it seemed they did not like to write notes for such a long time. The teacher then pointed at Philip, who did not answer the question but just kept quiet. Joseph raised his hand to attempt a response and said: “Freedom is making responsible choices.” The teacher wrote on the board “responsibilities and choices.” (Fieldnotes from Mrs Koloni’s class, 9th May, 2007)

In trying to bring order to her class, Miss Rabin would tell students who were disorderly that she was going to reveal their secrets to the rest of the class. According to her, the strategy worked because on hearing that students usually keep quiet. When I asked her if she really knew any of their secrets she responded in the negative but indicated to me that it was a way of keeping order in class.

4.6 Teachers’ religious beliefs and their classroom practices

There were no marked difference in teaching skills between RE teachers who said they were actively religious and those who were not when it came to classroom practice. Mrs. Koloni, Mrs. Laban and Mr Tiro indicated that they were Christians, while Miss Rabin said that she had nothing to do with established religion. However, all the teachers mainly drew almost all their examples from Christianity though the curriculum does not spell out any particular religion that has to be used. Similarly there was no visible difference in the teaching styles, content, pedagogical and curricular knowledge between teachers who were Christians and the teacher who claimed that she did not subscribe to any religion. The only difference between the four RE teachers was their perceptions with regard to the role of the multi-faith RE curriculum. For example, Mrs. Koloni declared that she was a staunch Christian. In my initial interview with her, she told me that the multi-faith RE curriculum was good, but in my subsequent interviews with her, she told me that it was a mistake for such a curriculum to have been introduced. She acknowledged that at times she found herself over-emphasising Christianity, which she said was her religion. Though this was the case, there was nothing that showed that religious convictions or lack of them largely influenced the classroom practices of the four RE teachers because all the teachers used group work and emphasised Christianity as the main religion in clarifying

issues. This could have been the case because in their training almost all the teachers were mainly exposed to Christianity. Christianity comprised three quarters of their curriculum especially at university level, because the Theology and Religious Studies courses were Christian based (University of Botswana, 2006). Furthermore, emphasis on Christianity is likely to have been due to the teachers' constant exposure to that religion in their lives and in what was contained in the students' textbooks.

Conclusion

I presented the views of the teachers about how they understand the multi-faith RE curriculum. It emerged that teachers have an inadequate understanding of the multi-faith RE curriculum, as they emphasized a particular religion of their own choice and taught around it. The teachers' classroom techniques were limited to group work which was not also adequately coordinated. I described how teachers' knowledge of the curriculum affects their classroom teaching and the different activities that teachers engage in as they teach. I also indicated that the classroom practices of RE teachers are not necessarily influenced by religious affiliation or lack of it.