

## CHAPTER 5

### **I am concerned about my students passing Religious Education**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

In this chapter I present data on how RE teachers assess their subject, and how they access official documents which are expected to enhance their classroom teaching. I also present findings on the use and role of commercially produced materials and other resources that teachers use. In addition, I report on the physical resources found in the two schools. I present data on how teachers deal with issues of diversity in RE classrooms. I further report on what takes place in schools in terms of mentoring, tracking teachers after completing their training in teaching, and collaboration of RE teachers. Finally, I present data on how RE teachers collaborate with community members and the role of in-service professional development in multi-faith RE teaching.

#### **5.1 Assessing multi-faith Religious Education**

Assessment is an important aspect in teaching and learning. Emphasis on testing has always resulted in large coverage of disparate topics while narrowing the range of instructional practices. It seems that there will always be an increased focus on test preparation and drilling students for tests. Such emphasis can also discourage teachers from integrating pedagogies that are considered desirable in terms of critical thinking (Falk & Drayton, 2004). Such focus can compromise teaching for high order thinking skills.

I was interested in how the RE teachers assessed their students' work since that is a major component in the teachers' practices. Teachers are professionally accountable for what happens in their classrooms. Students, too, on the other hand have both an individual and a collective responsibility in their learning. I was interested in the different forms of assessments, especially the ones that were easy to observe such as formative and summative forms of assessment. Formative assessment refers to assessment that is done during a lesson and it helps monitor instruction as well as remediate the instructional process. Formative assessment can have problems because classroom teachers may lack

objectivity when assessing the adequacy of their teaching and its effects on students' learning. Teachers derive their main professional satisfaction from instructional successes, which they attain through various forms of assessment. Airasian (1995:292) says that "every time a favourable judgement about instruction or learning is made, teachers are in part rewarding themselves". Summative assessment aims at assessing the learners at the end or completion of an instruction to ensure that students demonstrate how much they have learnt. In my study, summative assessment was in the form of quizzes, end of month tests and end of term examinations. It emerged in my study that one of the problems that teachers faced was on assessment. For example, they had challenges in constructing multiple choice test items, and test scoring especially in essays.

### **5.1.1 Teachers' views on Religious Education assessment**

Throughout my fieldwork, the common concern for all the teachers and students was the poor results in RE at national level. The RE teachers largely blamed the Examination, Research and Testing Division (ERTD) for these poor results. Furthermore, the four RE teachers and some Education Officers were unhappy that ERTD was not transparent in terms of sharing information on assessment. Miss Rabin's remarks show that she was uncomfortable with the state of affairs with regard to RE assessment, when she said:

When we mark the national examinations the students tend to be passing as shown in the raw marks. The raw marks that we enter may be pleasing enough, but when the national results come out they will show that students had performed badly. (Interview with Miss Rabin, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

She indicated that as one of the RE teachers, she did not know what exactly caused that inconsistency. She said that such a scenario frustrated RE teachers because they are viewed as failures especially by principals, parents and by RE students, when compared to their colleagues who teach other subjects. She indicated that at school level they are constantly blamed by the school administration for poor RE results. She said that since many students failed RE, it put the teachers in a collision course with the school administrators. She further indicated that school administrators at times accuse them of setting sub-standard tests and school-based examinations. However, she observed that RE is not being done well countrywide. Teachers indicated that RE was performed well at school level, but not at national level.

Mr Tiro was also unhappy about the marking at national level, and this is what he said:

My colleague who goes for marking, told me that as they mark, students pass but from there, teachers do not know what happens to the results in the process of normalising the results. We understand that there is a formula that is used to adjust marks. For example, if they find that few students passed, they lower the pass mark using the standard deviation, whatever that means. If many students pass, they raise the pass mark leading to students failing. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2006)

In addition to that, Mr Tiro was unhappy with the poor results, he was not conversant with standard deviation, a statistical formula that was said to be used to grade students. Mrs. Koloni a newer teacher amongst the four teachers had never been involved in marking national examinations before but was unhappy with how ERTD and those who mark, and she said:

They are very unfair during marking. They expect too much from these students. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

Mr. Tiro suggested that one way in which RE assessment could be made easier was to enumerate religions to be studied. He blamed ERTD for unnecessarily raising grades, and according to him, that was unfair for both teachers and students mainly because teachers in the Botswana education system are judged in terms of the results that they produce, especially at national level. He further observed that due to poor RE results, the relations between school principals and RE teachers are usually strained. Mr Tiro went on to say:

I am convinced that teachers are able to teach well since they understand what the syllabus requires of them, and have adequate assessment skills. The problem is at the marking centres and at ERTD. Students and teachers do not have any problem, but ERTD has. If there is need to make the examination difficult, then that has to be communicated to the teachers so that they do that at school level. The RE examination reports too are usually not elaborate enough to help teachers regarding where they went wrong. For example there will be something like **Question 2 was not well answered**. That type of information is not useful to the teachers. The report has to be precise and has to provide a key in order to help teachers in the future. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2006)

He also suggested that teachers need to be exposed to in-service training on how examinations are standardised, so that there is a form of moderation at school level instead of depending only on raw marks. He further suggested that there has to be involvement of all the stakeholders on how marks are processed. These stakeholders are teachers, Education Officers at inspectorate regions, Education Officers at ERTD and statistics officers at ERTD who process the raw marks.

All the four teachers were not happy with ERTD because they indicated that the examining body has certain expectations which they as teachers were not made aware of, such as how they should assess their students. For example, Mrs. Laban was unhappy that there was no communication between ERTD and the teachers regarding RE assessment. She suggested that to take care of the gap, the following should be done; mounting workshops for teachers, reviving RE clusters, and that teachers who are invited for marking should brief those who did not participate in national marking.

Students in both schools were also unhappy with RE results at national level. For example, students at Makala Junior Secondary School indicated that RE was not popular in their school, because it was not passed well, because there were never any first class passes in RE in their school.

Just like the teachers, other Education Officers had a vague idea regarding how grades were arrived at and what happened to the grades once they left the marking centre. They too, did not know the statistical formulas that were used. Mr Mathias, an Education Officer, was unhappy with ERTD. He said:

We do not know what the ERTD people do, because students get high marks as we mark, but we then get the shock of our lives to find that the schools that were doing well when we were marking failed. For example, schools will not have A's or B's as compared to the As and Bs that we saw when we were marking. (Interview with Mr Mathias, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

He too had problems with ERTD because he said that he did not know what happened to the raw marks that they enter during the marking session. Mr Mathias also said:

If I had my way I would suggest that there should be a change of markers every three years so that as many teachers as possible are given the feel of what marking entails, because those involved in marking gain a lot of experience as they mark, hence improve on their classroom teaching. (Interview with Mr Mathias, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

He was of the view that different teachers should be exposed to national marking in order for them to improve on their teaching skills and interpretation of syllabus objectives. However, he indicated that it was unfortunate that as Education Officers, in the inspectorate they had little say in the nomination of teachers who were invited for marking at national level. Another Education Officer, Miss Timon indicated that part of

the reason why the multi-faith RE curriculum tended to be difficult and cannot be passed well was because the teachers' testing skills were not good enough.

The RE Examination Officer indicated that, she too, did not know what happened once the marks left the marking room. She further indicated that she did not know what formula was used to arrive at the different grades, because what she did was to forward marks to the data processing unit within ERTD. She said that she was not involved in the computing of marks. The general picture is that teachers and Education Officers responsible for RE were not aware of the formulae that were used to arrive at the different grades once the marks were forwarded to the data processing unit of the ERTD. This could be the reason, and that is why RE teachers felt that grades were "doctored." When I asked the RE Examination Officer to give me a picture of how RE was generally performed in the country she referred me to the data processing unit within ERTD. However, she indicated that the cause of poor results could be that teachers may not be emphasising important aspects of the curriculum because that is revealed in the way students answered questions. She said, for example, students spell wrongly certain religious concepts, such as names of festivals. Furthermore, she indicated that students fail to answer high order questions and that some of them have a poor grasp of basic religious concepts. She also indicated that the marking key is a problem since it has to cover "*six major religions.*"

Due to the teachers' approach that emphasized passing of examinations instead of internalizing concepts, students too were pre-occupied with accumulating points or marks at the expense of an entrenched knowledge. The tradition was that success was viewed as being equivalent to collecting more points in quizzes, tests and examinations. It is interesting to note that the four RE teachers, drilled students in preparation for the final Junior Certificate (JC) examinations hence little time was spent exploring issues in depth. For example, the teachers used exercises in the students' textbooks for classroom work and also for tests. Teaching for examinations which is information-based was largely the case in the two schools. This practice left little opportunity for both the teacher and the students to see beyond information and facts, hence making interpretations and inferences which are integral in a multi-faith RE difficult to achieve, hence learning became a short term goal. The aim of the curriculum to produce critical thinkers was then defeated.

### 5.1.2 Teachers' skills in testing multi-faith RE

Even though teachers taught for tests, I observed that teachers did not always attach marks in most of the work that they gave to the students in terms of formative classwork assessment, unlike in the final national examination where there are marks attached against a question. This led students not to know how much they were expected to write on a question. For example, when I asked Miss Rabin how she awarded marks on an end of term examination question: *“Discuss the creation of human beings according to the scientific explanation”* she said.

I expected them to write on evolution but they were confused, because most of them wrote everything they knew about the creation of human beings. (Interview with Miss Rabin, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2007)

When I asked her if there was a way in which the question could have been framed, and also to make awarding of marks easier since she suspected that students were confused Miss Rabin said:

Yes, for example, I could have asked it like: *Describe the 4 stages of human development according to science.* (Interview with Miss Rabin, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2007)

Miss Rabin used the instructional objectives from the syllabus document as it was, without any modification to it. It was more of an instructional objective than an examination question. An instructional objective could be taught in several lessons and a variety of issues could emerge. At times she asked test questions that demanded a lot but with little marks as shown in the following question. *Give and explain the two types of leadership.* (2 marks) It is reasonable that 2 marks would be awarded for naming “the two types of leadership”, and the explanation which is of a high order cognitive level would be worth much more.

When asked about her view regarding the assessment of the RE curriculum Mrs. Gatt, an RE Curriculum Development Officer said:

We should have a way of examining it. At the moment we have multiple choice and short answer questions. This tends not to assess RE fully because the subject is very open. For example, a question such as: **“describe marriage in a religion of your choice”** – students are likely to answer that one correctly. There are times when students are afraid to venture into other religions, hence stick only to Christianity and African Traditional Religion leading them to get high marks. Since we are going to review it, we will have to think of how we can reduce the openness of the syllabus. We are thinking of having core religions, like in England where they have two or more religions as core ones. (Interview with Mrs Gatt, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2006)

She largely blamed the nature of the curriculum for students’ poor performance, and suggested that the solution was to have core religions so that the bulk of questions could largely be based on those religions. Another RE officer Mr Moks was of the view that the syllabus was too open hence most students passed leading to a lot of moderation of the grades, ending in the pass mark being raised and if that happened many students were likely to fail. He complained that the RE examinations do not discriminate against candidates because they are open and easy.

Contrary to what the RE Examination Officer Miss Ray had told me earlier, that she did not have an idea how students were graded, she indicated that ERTD use T-Score in grading the students. She said that they were moving towards what he said was judgemental grading, whereby according to her, teachers would determine the final grade of the learners. This is what she said about judgemental grading:

This is whereby we empower teachers because they know their students better. The teacher looks at the question and then provides answers. From there the teacher marks scripts according to his or her own judgement but against a marking key. However, a teacher might overrate or under rate a student. After marking, the grades are then forwarded to the data processing unit within ERTD for computation. In judgemental grading, teachers look at questions, mark them and make judgements as to what grade a student should get. We discovered in our pilot grading that in judgemental grading, the grades were spread as compared to when we used T-score, where they were crowded in pockets. (Interview with Miss Ray, 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2006)

According to the Examination Officer, in judgemental grading, teachers determine the cut-off point, which is not the case now. She was, however, not clear as to how the cut-off point was going to be determined by teachers, especially without the guidance of ERTD officers.

Most of the tests and quizzes that teachers set were of a low order, because they comprised knowledge or recall questions as shown in the common test that Miss Rabin and Mr. Tiro at Makala Junior Secondary School gave to their students.

1. Define friendship.
  2. Give 3 qualities of good friendship.
    - i. -----
    - ii. -----
    - iii. -----
  2. State 2 ways in which people may become friends.
  4. State 2 things which can attract someone to the other person in making friendship.
    - i. -----
    - ii. -----
  5. Give 3 importance of friendship.
    - i. -----
    - ii. -----
    - iii. -----
  6. Give any 3 obstacles to friendship.
    - i. -----
    - ii. -----
    - iii. -----
- (Fieldnotes from Miss Rabin's class, 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2007)

There were no marks attached to the above questions, yet marks allocated to a question can give students a hint regarding the depth of a question. The other problem is that at times some of the questions that teachers asked were poorly constructed like Question 5 (Give the three importance of friendship) above, because it flouts grammatical rules.

When Mrs. Laban was revising a multiple choice examination paper that was written in the previous term, I observed that there were several grammatical rules that were flouted, for example words such as “*Allah*” and “*Modimo*” (Islamic and Setswana words for God respectively) were written in small letters yet they are proper nouns. Some of the distractors were too long hence making them obviously correct or incorrect. For example, there was one question that had three of the options being phrases and one being a word hence making it to be the key or an obvious distractor. This is shown in my field notes below.

**Question 5**

Which of the following best describes puberty?

- A. end of life
- B. birth
- C. new stage in life
- D. readiness for marriage

(Fieldnotes from Mrs Laban's class, 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

Alternative **B** in the question is obviously wrong or correct because it is a word whereas the rest are phrases.

**Question 7. Which of the following are types of festivals?**

- A. Christmas and new year
- B. Eid-ul fitra and hajj
- C. Succot and letsema
- D. Passover and eid-ul-adha

(Fieldnotes from Mrs Laban's class, 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

Students had problems with **Question 7**, because of the way it was phrased. When it was revision time, students wanted to know the difference between a festival and a ceremony but the teacher was not sure on the difference. The teacher later on indicated that the question was not well-phrased and that it should have been phrased like **festival/ceremony**. Unfortunately, students had already lost marks and were not given free marks in retrospect even though the examiner was at fault. In addition, all the words are proper nouns and should have had the first letter written in a capital letter. (Fieldnotes from Mrs Laban's class, 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

I had an interview with Mrs. Laban after the revision exercise of a school-based examination as shown below.

**There seems to be some inconsistency in the examination paper?**

One reason could be that the examiner lacks the assessment skills and may not have any knowledge how alternatives are supposed to be. At times it is because the examiner will have just used a past examination question paper without studying it first.

**In your view, how can teachers improve their assessment skills?**

We need workshops on assessment. We have problems in the way we ask questions. Due to poor assessment skills, at times teachers decide to give a free mark for a vague question.

**Since you point out that teachers' skills in assessment are inadequate, don't you think that this could contribute to students' poor performance?**

Yes. In addition, I would suggest that subject teachers should mount school-based workshops, for about 3-4 people who teach a subject. These people could be joined, if possible, by teachers of a related subject. With us in RE, we could be joined by ME (Moral Education). We could then exchange ideas on assessment. Some teachers here have skills since they participate in national examinations marking. These are able teachers here, who could help. (Interview with Mrs Laban, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2007)

Mrs. Laban acknowledged that part of the problem in teaching RE was lack of good assessment skills by teachers and the teachers' limited content knowledge. She suggested that the solution to the problem was to mount assessment workshops for teachers.

There was an incident where Mrs. Laban's students complained that they gave an example of a religion of their choice but were penalised for having chosen a religion with a few points. I asked her why that was the case, and she said:

It is the marks allocated per question that should guide students as to what choice they should make regarding a religion. Several religions will have been dealt with, but the student should choose one with more points in order to score more.  
(Interview with Mrs Laban, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2007)

Even though she had expectations that students should be guided by the marks allocated, there was nothing in the question to suggest to students how they could choose questions. Similarly, there was no prior information that was given to the students about how they were to make a choice of religions when answering questions. When I suggested to her that it would be unfair since a question will not have been clear regarding what it needed, she indicated to me that there was need to evaluate the RE curriculum because it was the cause of the problem.

Mrs. Laban blamed the RE curriculum that it was long overdue for revision and hoped that its revision would include the input from teachers. She also suggested that if it were to be revised, certain topics could be discarded such as *Freedom* and *Human Rights*, while others could be added or retained. She said:

The syllabus is long overdue for revision. It is now ten years old. I think the root of all the problems is the curriculum itself, though assessment might be another one. I also think and hope that the revised version will take the input of teachers on board. I also think that there are topics that can be discarded such as Freedom and Human Rights. (Interview with Mrs Laban, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

Mrs. Koloni indicated that the reason why students fail is that teachers may not have a good grasp of certain RE concepts. She indicated that teachers could be lacking in their content and pedagogical knowledge. She also suggested that part of the solution to the problem of assessment at national level, was to give chance to newer teachers, so that they too could gain insight regarding what is happening during national examination

marking. Regarding the allocation of marks in class exercises and quizzes, she said that it depended mainly on the teachers' discretion than on a particular established frame.

Mrs. Koloni was unhappy that there were many religions that they were expected to teach, hence, according to her, that makes assessment difficult. She also indicated that some topics in the syllabus were very long, and as a result they took a long time to cover them. She suggested that fewer religions should be specified and taught when she said:

A colleague of mine who teaches RE at Seagull Junior Secondary School once suggested to me to cut on the religions we use, at least to two or three. I think that is why their students perform better than ours. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

At times, teachers were not sure if some objectives were in the syllabus or not. Most of the time teachers used questions that were obtained directly from the textbooks and did not verify if questions were in line with what was in the syllabus document and with what they taught in class.

When I asked for his view on the way in which the multi-faith RE was assessed Mr. Tiro said:

RE is examination oriented and I am mostly concerned about my students passing. The way RE is assessed is clear since a teacher may choose to teach one religion and emphasise it and students will pass. Most questions are about choosing one religion of the students' choice. One can teach just up to two religions to take care of the "compare" and "contrast" questions. I am unhappy with the lot of information that students are given when in fact one religion will be asked for. Students fill up their note books yet the examination will be on one religion or at most two. It is a waste of both the teachers' and students' precious time. Religions should be specified so that there are specific questions on specific religions. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2006)

In order for their students to succeed, some teachers interpreted the curriculum in a way that best suited them like when they decided to choose religions that they emphasised when teaching. Teachers did that because of the nature of RE that is examination-oriented as shown in my interview above with Mr Tiro.

There was a problem with awarding of marks in assessment as shown in the classwork that Mr Tiro gave to his students.

1. Briefly explain how authority in your school positively affects your daily routine (3).
2. Give and explain any 2 types of leadership (2)  
(Fieldnotes from Mr Tiro's class, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2007)

In the first question it is not clear what “briefly explain” means that would warrant three marks, and in the second question the marks allocated to the question seem too little in relation to what the question demanded. For example, mentioning two types of leadership would warrant 2 marks, and explaining how those two types of leadership function would be worth much more than the two marks awarded by the teacher. The questions were obtained directly from the students' textbook and the teacher had not scrutinised them first. Below are quiz questions that Mr. Tiro gave to his students, and the questions did not carry any marks.

1. Account for the fact that morality in one religion may not be morality in another religion, giving five examples from different religions.
2. State and explain five aspects that show how loyalty is important in society.
3. Compare and contrast myths of creation from any two religions you have studied.
4. Discuss marriage in any religion of your choice clearly showing five rituals performed to solemnise it.  
(Fieldnotes from Mr Tiro's class, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2007)

The verbs account, state, explain, compare and discuss demanded different levels of input from the students. Below is part of my field notes of what transpired during one of Mr. Tiro's lessons when he gave back to students their scripts of the above quiz.

**Mr Tiro:** How would you answer this question? *Account for the fact that morality in one religion may not be morality in another religion giving five examples from different religions.*

**Student A:** Something that is good in one religion may not be good in another religion.

**Mr Tiro:** Give an example.

**Student A:** For example, that polygamy was accepted in ATR and not in Christianity.

**Mr Tiro (making an addition):** a cow is a sacred animal in Hinduism and not in Christianity since it could be killed in weddings and funerals.

**Student B:** In Shintoism twins are killed because they are believed to bring bad luck, whilst in Christianity it is believed twins are a blessing from God.

[The teacher did not make any comment regarding the contribution of Student B about Shintoism].

**Mr Tiro:** In Islam women have to wear clothes that cover their whole body while that is not a requirement in Christianity.

In **Question 2**, most of the examples for questions 2-4 were provided by the teacher. Regarding **Question 3**: *Compare and contrast myths of creation from any two religions you have studied*. The comparison was between Christianity and Islam which are both Judeo-Christian religions and their creation myths are similar and they have the same context.

(Fieldnotes from Mr Tiro's class, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2007)

The reports from the ERTD (Botswana Government, 2005, 2004b, 2003) confirmed the poor results because between 2003 and 2005 all schools in Botswana attained less than 2% in grade A in RE and the majority of students were concentrated in grade D which is a fail category. Regarding questions that involved choosing a religion of one's choice, students chose Christianity and African Traditional Religion, hence leading them not to be diverse in their responses.

## 5.2 Access to official documents

In order to be informed on how teachers understand and implement a multi-faith RE curriculum, I referred to documents such as the RNPE, RE syllabus document, RE examination papers and reports, schemes of work and lesson plans. It is important to note that the general understanding of the RE curriculum and particularly the pedagogical skills can be enhanced if teachers have access to government documents such as circulars especially in relation to their area of specialisation as well as their general professional requirements.

I found that within school and outside school, teachers prepared schemes of work mainly for administrative purposes and not necessarily to help them in their classroom instruction. There has been little emphasis on schemes of work and lesson plans at secondary school level in the Botswana education system. They were not part of the secondary school teachers' culture. It is only recently that the inspectorate required teachers to operate with updated schemes of work and lesson plans. Schemes of work and lesson plans are tools that are meant to make teachers' work lighter by providing guidance. I also found that at times teachers did not have easy access to some important government and other official documents especially circulars and reports. For example, teachers did not have easy access to the RE examination reports from ERTD. Teachers

also indicated that examinations reports from ERTD reached their schools almost half way into the following year. Mrs. Laban said:

These reports rarely reach us. If they do, it is when we had forgotten about them. (Interview with Mrs Laban, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

Teachers indicated that examination reports rarely reached them on time. If they did, in most cases they ended in the file of the Head of Department or in the principal's office. However, teachers also said that they never bothered to enquire about them even though they knew about those annual reports. The official reports could help them in their classroom instruction. However, even after reaching schools, teachers hardly treated them as important. For example, they seldom included them in their departmental meeting agendas. The newer teachers in both schools indicated that they had never laid their hands on the ERTD reports since they joined teaching, but that they heard that such reports were there in their schools. For example, Mrs. Koloni told me that she depended on what RE senior teachers in her school told her about the reports. Furthermore, even though Mrs. Koloni was coordinating the RE Department she did not have a copy of the report. She said that one of the senior RE teachers had shown her the report, but did not give her a copy. She also said that she was not aware if the report of the previous year was in her school or not. As a way of knowing what the RE report entailed, I tried to get the latest copy of the report for the previous year from the teachers and after several attempts I managed to get one from Mrs. Laban who got it from the office of the principal. Teachers knew of the report but they did not know its contents since they did not have it in their possession. After she gave me the report, I made copies for all my four participants including her so that I could discuss assessment issues with the teachers with ease of reference in relation to the report. There were no ethical implications in distributing it to the teachers since they are supposed to be in possession of the document. It also emerged that teachers were not interested in reading some government documents even those that were made available to them.

A few days after I had given copies to the participants, I asked Mrs. Koloni if there was something in it that she felt worth sharing with me. She admitted that some of the information she had given to me earlier was not correct because for example, she now indicated that grammar was important even in RE. She indicated that she realised that, for example, students have to use the right conjunctions when answering questions that require them to compare and contrast.

This is what she said:

It is a good report. For example it explains certain things such as “making the difference between “*general ethics*” and “*religious ethics*.” Students do not know how to contrast and to compare, they use the conjunction “but” when comparing, instead of using “and”. For example, when contrasting an extended family and a nuclear family they would use “and” instead of using “but”. I think these are the things that we have to stress as we teach. I now realise that these minor things can cost students some marks. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2007)

She told me that all along she had been depending on what her RE colleagues told her instead of referring to the relevant documents. This time around, when, I asked her if language mattered she said:

Yes, language matters. We have to be conscious about language as we mark our students’ work. I was made to believe that language is not an issue. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2007)

She also went on to relate a content issue that was raised in the report.

Also, there is this question on inter-marriage in religions. Now I’m not sure if it is there in the syllabus. I once had difficulty teaching it because there was no information on it. I then asked one of my colleagues how to go about teaching it. The colleague advised me to indicate that all religions are against inter-marriage. But now you can see what the report is saying. Most students would say religions are against inter-marriage, but the question demanded students to go further. You can see that teachers may also contribute to the failing of the students. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2007)

The report enabled Mrs Koloni to critically review the information that she got from her colleagues. After reading the ERTD report, Mrs Koloni was able to reflect on her own teaching practices as shown by her comments above. The RE report highlighted the pedagogical as well as content knowledge issues.

However, there were certain issues that were not correct in the report. For example, the report indicated that a question such as “*Give one religion and state its view ...*” was a high order question. When I asked Mrs Koloni, if she agreed with the report on that matter, she answered in the positive. However, as our interview progressed, she said that it was not a high order question because in stating a view one was just making mention of something. She concluded by saying that the chief examiner can make mistakes too. She also admitted that there were questions on “*comparing*” and “*contrasting*” as shown in the past examination paper, something that she had disputed before seeing the report.

When I asked her to make any general comments about the RE report Mrs Koloni said:

If teachers can read the report, they are likely to lead students properly. You see, we teach and mark some of these things correct when they are wrong. It would be better if RE teachers were to meet and talk about the report then go through it, respond to it and make their own suggestions which would then be sent to ERTD. We need to let them (ERTD) know what we think. Unfortunately, it is a one way business. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2007)

Her view about teaching and assessment were changed by the report which she had read of late. She also complained that there was too much red tape in her school and that was why some communication never reached teachers especially from ERTD. Furthermore, when I asked the teachers why they did not read the report of the previous year they indicated that they were aware of the existence of such a report but there was no particular reason.

Mr. Mathias, an Education Officer, in the Southern Region Inspectorate area had a different view from that of teachers. He said that teachers rarely read government documents. He gave an example, when some teachers were called for interviews most of them did not do well because they were unable to support their applications with general knowledge of the Botswana Education System. This is what Mr Mathias said:

Some teachers don't read at all. Their reading does not go beyond textbooks. For example, teachers who came for interviews for senior Teacher Grade 1 posts were blank when they were asked about Botswana's Vision 2016. They also did not know anything about the emerging issues, because they mentioned "double shift" when they were asked about those issues. He complained that such an attitude was disturbing for intellectual workers such as teachers. (Interview with Mathias, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

Even though teachers had access to computers, it emerged that all the four teachers were reluctant to type their tests but preferred the school secretary to do it, hence leading to several errors in their tests and school-based examinations.

### **5.3 Resources in the two schools**

#### **5.3.1 Commercially produced curriculum materials and other resources**

Out of the numerous resources that teachers have at their disposal, textbooks are very important, because of their role in learning and teaching. A textbook is a comprehensive learning resource which is bound and in print or electronic form. Its contents are properly organised and are intended for use with a given curriculum. Every curriculum is usually accompanied by curriculum materials, especially in the form of textbooks. Textbooks can also be a source for most of the classroom instructional activities. Although a textbook cannot adequately cover all aspects of a curriculum, it can provide sufficient guidance to a particular topic, area of study or theme in a curriculum. For example, it can provide basic information which includes activities that can be helpful to the teachers and their students.

Textbooks can simplify the subject matter to its simplest form, hence facilitating ease of understanding. For example, textbooks can appropriate subject content and help explain it. As a result, textbooks empower the teachers by enabling and enhancing their teaching, letting them see what to teach and what matters most, helping them teach content in more depth, guiding their assessment of learning (Newman & Newman, 2006). It is perceived that textbooks support learning and make school work easier to understand for students and teachers. They are used as a basis for classroom activities.

Even though there are several commercially produced curriculum materials, textbooks are the commonest teaching and learning resources that the RE teachers use. However, textbooks have disadvantages such as tending to cover breadth at the expense of depth. Many textbooks are concerned primarily with content, and contain more information than is practical for students to learn in the time available. At times topics may not receive in-depth treatment, hence would not allow students to develop meaningful and lasting understanding. They may omit or de-emphasise key concepts, especially if they are controversial; and they may fail to differentiate between more important issues from ancillary concepts. They may lack key curricular components such as inquiry activities, assessment activities, and connections with other subjects. A textbook is a tool that can contribute to learning a variety of ways, especially if used in conjunction with other teaching and learning aids. Textbooks need to have the potential to help teachers to foster reason-based understanding which was not the case with the four RE teachers.

Textbooks are important artefacts in the cultural socialisation of children because they can present official versions of publicly sanctioned knowledge. In this context, they can serve to transmit and reinforce the dominant cultural hegemony of a nation as was the case with RE textbooks that emphasised Christianity. Textbooks can act as important instruments in the process of constructing legitimated ideologies and beliefs, since they act as a reflection of the history, knowledge and values that are considered important by the powerful groups of society. For example, textbooks may be used to promote certain ideologies and sets of political ideas because they are social constructions.

There was a clear over-dependence on textbooks by the four RE teachers and they were the teachers' single most widely used teaching and learning resource. Throughout my stay at the two schools there was little that suggested that teachers learnt and researched more than what the textbooks provided, as shown by Miss Rabin's comment below.

We always encourage them (students) to stick to what is in their books and not what happens at home. (Interview with Miss Rabin, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

This shows that students were advised to study their textbooks only, and any other sources of information were not promoted. This over-dependence on books limited the students' contributions in terms of their knowledge and experiences. The over-dependence on books is also shown in Miss Rabin's response on why she gave students incorrect information when she said in Botswana and elsewhere armed robbery was one of the crimes punishable by death, and when I asked her about the correctness of that piece of information she said:

No, it is not correct. But it is what is in the book. We go with what the textbook says. It is because that is written down. I may know what is correct but I must make sure that my students pass. (Interview with Miss Rabin, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2007)

There were times when students who were presenting to the class after a group discussion, could not answer questions because there were no answers provided in the textbooks. For example, in one of Miss Rabin's classes a group was presenting on "*The Importance of Authority*" and when they were asked by their classmates to provide examples from the information that they gave, they could not provide any largely because

the examples were not in the textbook. Teachers emphasised Christianity because textbooks covered it extensively.

When Mrs. Koloni gave students notes on the topic “*Views of different religions on capital punishment*” she referred to Christianity, Islam and Buddhism largely because the textbook she was using was elaborate on these three religions in relation to the topic. Furthermore, in almost all the cases where examples of religion were demanded, Christianity was usually one of the religions since the textbooks, namely, *Junior Secondary Religious Education for Botswana* and *Religion for all* were elaborate on it. Furthermore, Mrs Koloni also said:

I want them (students) to get more information from the text books.  
(Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

Mrs. Koloni indicated that other than the students’ textbooks she never used any other teaching aid. In terms of choosing the religions that she had to refer to, she said:

I look at the information that is available – the information that can help the students answer a question. The information in the students’ textbooks has been presented in a way that students easily understand because it has been broken down. In the end a teacher, has nothing to add. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

She indicated that her dependence on textbooks was for practical reasons because they are a source where students can easily tap information and understand it without difficulty. When I asked her why she did not use some of her university books, Mrs Koloni said that those books were of a higher standard.

The authors of the junior secondary schools textbooks were catering for JC (Junior Certificate) students. With the UB (University of Botswana) books, I have to break down the information when I present information on some religions. For example, you know how complex Hinduism is. I never touch that religion! (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

When I asked Mrs Koloni why she did not use the information that she got elsewhere outside the students’ textbooks, she said:

The problem is with the examiners. They may decide to reject a certain piece of information. That is why we try to stick to these textbooks. You give students a piece of information that is not in the textbooks, and you will be shocked to learn that children are marked wrong. It could also be that at times, the examiners are not aware of new information. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

She indicated that what was most important was for her students to pass the examinations. She also indicated that if she provides information that is not in the textbooks, and which the examiners may not know of or familiar with, that might disadvantage her students because they are likely to be marked down. There was a clear over dependence on textbooks by Mrs. Koloni as shown in the interview:

**What would be your response if someone said that the first two paragraphs on capital punishment in *Religion for All* with reference to Christianity do not show that Christians support or do not support capital punishment?**

*Religion for All* says Christians hold two views – for and against. This information is in the students’ textbook. The book indicates that punishment and forgiveness can be achieved simultaneously. But like you are saying, we take it for granted that students understand what that means. Perhaps we assume a lot and do not come down to the level of the students.

**Under the same notes, that you gave to the students, would you say revenge and avenge are “Christian principles of justice” as you say it, as seen in Exodus 21:23 “... an eye for an eye”.**

Some Christian denominations.

(Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

Mrs. Koloni was able to see the danger of depending solely on textbooks, yet in her view, she had little or no alternative since examinations are based on textbooks. She admitted that there is a lot of reading between the lines that is needed when using textbooks, even though it was not clear if students were skilled to read between the lines like their teachers. In almost all the lessons that I observed, a textbook was used. For example, even though the textbook that she used indicated that there are two views on capital punishment according to Christianity, it did not clearly enumerate them. By saying that punishment and forgiveness can be achieved simultaneously in relation to capital punishment does not show the two different positions. What the textbook provided, was information about what Christians think in relation to capital punishment. In fact it is a contradiction that punishment and forgiveness can be achieved simultaneously. The textbook authors say the same thing about Islam largely because they do not want to commit themselves. It is, however, clear that the book does not enumerate the two positions for and against capital punishment in both Christianity and Islam, yet it is the book that teachers and students heavily depend on. The book should have shown the Christians’ position for and against capital punishment.

In Miss Rabin's lesson on "*Ways of administering capital punishment*," her students gave her answers that they got directly from their textbook. She complained that the books did not cover enough religions for her to draw from as per the instructional objectives in the syllabus document. For example, she said that the textbooks did not have information on some religions such as Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Jainism and Shintoism.

Even though teachers depended on students' textbooks, RE teachers in both schools, had access to internet facilities where they could access information especially on some of the religions that they said had inadequate information in the textbooks. Another observation worth noting is that teachers rarely used internet facilities. For example, Miss Rabin said that she rarely used the information from the internet because she barely visited any website.

When I asked Mrs. Koloni if she used any other teaching aid other than the textbook she answered in the negative and indicated that she had never used for example CDs or DVDs in her RE lessons. When I further asked her if she could record some of the programmes on TV to use in her teaching, she said that she did not have the recording devices to do it.

The eight in-service RE teachers also indicated that they depended on students' textbooks. They said that lack of resources and information on some of the religions such as Bahai Faith at times made it difficult for them to teach those religions effectively.

The RE Curriculum Officer suggested that posters and videos need to be brought in as additional teaching and learning resources. The Curriculum Officer together with the Textbook Prescription Committee, determine what main resources are supposed to be used in schools. The Examination Officer at ERTD, Miss Ray expressed her unhappiness about the quality of the textbooks, especially since according to her, several of them were full of errors and she said:

The level of the textbooks is poor because at times an author writes just to answer a syllabus objective and would not expand it. Authors should be authors for all times and not for a particular syllabus. What would happen if a syllabus is phased out? This is a deficiency on the part of the writers. .  
(Interview with Miss Ray, 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2006)

Mr. Mathias, an Education Officer, indicated that RE teachers are not innovative enough to think and design good teaching aids and that is why they depended on textbooks. Another Education Officer, Mr. Moks, also indicated that teachers mainly use textbooks. He suggested that other teaching and learning aids such as posters and videos could equally be helpful. However, he indicated that teachers are unaware of the usefulness of some of these aids because teachers never think of any other teaching and learning aids besides the students' textbooks. He said that the idea of prescribing textbooks for teachers was not helpful because that led to teachers not researching. Miss Timon an Education Officer in the northern region inspectorate area concurred with her colleagues that teachers solely depended on students' textbooks and do not research beyond students' textbooks. She said that teachers emphasise Christianity since they have easy access to its information, and as a result other religions are ignored. She was also unhappy that teachers do not go out and research, for example, visiting a mosque, or temple to get information.

In addition to textbooks that were used in the two schools, reprographic machines such as photocopiers and scanners were inadequate. Mr. Tiro told me that in the past, the end of term examinations papers were printed at the Ministry of Education Regional Offices because the school did not have the resources. He indicated that at times they duplicated their work in the nearby schools if the machines there were working. Due to this problem, he wrote a test on the blackboard and students had to copy the questions first into their answer sheets before they could answer them. This is what he said regarding shortage of resources.

Since we do not have photocopiers one has no choice but to write a test on the board. But if they write their end of month test we are forced to run around. At times we even get our papers photocopied at Bruberg Police Station. But if it is just a quiz we cannot go there because that will be asking too much from them. (Interview with Mr Tiro, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

Mrs. Laban indicated that there were enough computers in her school to use but she complained that teachers including her were too lazy to use them. She said that at her home there were two computers and a laptop yet even when she had to type something she had to ask either her husband or one of her children to do it for her. She further indicated that even though the school library had a lot of teaching and learning aids in the form of videos and DVDs she acknowledged that RE teachers barely used those resources.

The library has videos, some of which are relevant to some of our topics. Unfortunately, we rarely use the resources and the opportunity. We are just lazy. For example, I rarely watch TV, except when there is a special programme.  
(Interview with Miss Laban, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

I observed that teachers did not use the computers in their schools to type their quizzes, tests and examinations even though they had access to the school computer laboratories but would instead give the school secretary their papers to type. This did not work well since the secretary had piles of work especially from the principal. At Makala Junior Secondary School teachers had access to computers in their school. Mr Tiro indicated that there were adequate computers in the school which all teachers had access to even though he rarely used this resource because of his limited computer skills. When I asked why he wrote notes on the chalk board instead of using a computer where he could store them and later adjust them at will without re-writing everything again he indicated that he would try that in future.

Even though teachers were dependent on students' books, Mrs. Laban complained that one major problem was that the existing textbooks did not cover some topics as she would have expected. She pointed out that it could be one major factor why students did not pass RE. To some extent, she could have been right in her assertion because RE is largely test-based hence the need to have resources readily available to respond to its demands.

Similarly, students too, indicated that they depended on textbooks even though some of the information they got from textbooks was inadequate and at times inaccurate. They further said that their learning would be enhanced if, for example, some religious practitioners could be brought in as resource persons or the students could visit them. One of the students, Kabo at Togonal Junior Secondary School said:

Time should be shared between being taught normally and watching videos and DVDs. The learning should be varied, because we learn better when we watch a video or DVD. We just never go anywhere.  
(Interview with students at Togonal Junior Secondary School, 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

Peter, a student at Togonal Junior Secondary School said:

Since teachers may not know certain information, they at times feel that whatever information we bring is obviously wrong. They want us to only write what is in the textbook and not what we know, even though it might be correct. They do not want us to write what we know about our traditions except to stick to what is in the textbook. For example they accept Christianity because it is in the textbooks, and the textbooks emphasise the Roman Catholic Church. When we did the topic “contraception” all the examples were from the Roman Catholic Church. Most of the examples in the textbooks are from Botswana and not from other parts of Africa. (Interview with students at Togonal Junior Secondary School, 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

At Makala Junior Secondary School students complained that they never had access to any other resource except the students’ textbooks. They indicated that even in the examples of religions that are given, almost all of them are from the textbooks hence leading them to concentrate on those that they think are easy, such as Christianity and African Traditional Religion. They further, indicated that at times textbooks are not very informative like in a topic such as “*The scientific theory of evolution*”, which they said their textbooks were not helpful because at times they provided misleading information. They complained that in such situations, teachers too tend not to be helpful in clarifying issues. Rachel, a student at Togonal Junior Secondary School said:

We are always allowed to say our views but we are not allowed to stick to them especially in tests and examinations. Most of the material that we use which is accepted is the one that is from the textbooks, yet these books have errors. (Interview with students at Togonal Junior Secondary School, 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

The students at Togonal Junior Secondary School complained that when they used their experiences and knowledge they were usually marked down by the teachers. They said that the likely reason why their teachers never take them out on trips is because they wanted them to use the textbooks only. This is what one student, Tefo, said:

The problem is even worse when we go out to research because teachers just look only at what is in the textbook and mark you down on something you bring up that is not in the textbook. (Interview with students at Togonal Junior Secondary School, 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

From their comments students were calling for a variety of resources. The students further indicated that they never watch any videos in RE classes and also that they never took any educational trips.

### 5.3.2 Physical resources in schools

In both schools there was a shortage of chairs and tables for students. The classrooms were also inadequate in both schools, since they resorted to using outdoor teaching areas. For example, at Makala Junior Secondary School it was a school policy that first year RE students were to use outdoor teaching areas. The reason for doing this according to Miss Rabin was because RE was an option and did not have what she referred to as “practical activities” like other optional subjects such as Home Economics, where for example, the students would be knitting and cooking. She, however, indicated that it was a problem since the lessons did not go well if it was raining, cold or windy. Another problem that she observed was the noise that came from different directions if students used an outdoor teaching area. For example, at Makala Junior Secondary School, almost all of Mr Tiro’s classes, including the one that I observed were held in an outdoor area and there was a lot of distraction because of the noise and movements as shown in my notes below:

Surrounding the outdoor teaching area where the class was, there was litter all over and there was movement of students who were going towards the garden where there was a standpipe to drink water. Also, there were some goats that were grazing a few metres away from where the class was, there was a strong smell of the he-goat. I wondered if students were also sensitive to its smell or they had just given up to it. About five metres from the outdoor class there was an incinerator and the smoke coming from its chimney had engulfed the area.  
(Fieldnotes from Mr Tiro’s class, 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2007)

Both schools had white boards but instead teachers used the blackboards and when I asked them why they did not use the whiteboards, they said that they were never supplied with whiteboard markers. In most instances a few minutes had to be spent waiting for a student who would have gone to another class to ask for a blackboard duster. On the whole, the resources such as classrooms, chairs and other resources were inadequate at both schools. For example, there were times when teachers worked from their houses because there were inadequate chairs in the staff room.

### 5.3.3 Educational visits and resource persons

Visiting and inviting speakers can be an integral part in the teaching of RE since it could help develop various thought capacities in children. Educational tours can be an important part of the RE curriculum and can enrich teaching since students can learn from religion and learn about religion. Furthermore, if students engage in educational trips they can experience awe, wonder, relationships and the search for meaning and purpose of life as they observe the practitioners. Education tours can help students to understand better and to appreciate the lived world of religion.

The four RE teachers did not give students first hand experience such as visiting nearby places of worship. In both schools, students indicated that they were never taken out on educational trips, even though they expressed that it could enhance their learning. They also wondered why they did not engage in educational trips, even though most of the religious sites were within reach. The students suggested that they could learn a lot if students from other schools who are practicing other religions could be invited to come and talk to them about their religions because it would be easier to interact with them because they are their peers. In the eight months I was in the two schools, no teacher took their students on an educational trip. The teachers indicated that students had to be fed if they were taken out on educational tours. However, some of the religious sites and resource persons were within a walking distance, and did not need students to be fed.

Furthermore, RE teachers did not invite resource persons from within and outside their schools to their classes. Mrs. Laban had initially told me that RE teachers in her school do invite resource persons to their classes, but that did not happen during the time I spent in her school. There was no one who was invited to her class or that of her colleagues from within or outside her school. As a result, teachers did not help students to understand and appreciate the outside world in relation to religion. Students at Togat Junior Secondary School suggested that they need to be given a chance to see things in their natural environment in order to remember them even more than just reading about them in their textbooks. They also suggested that they should be allowed to visit RE fairs because they could learn a lot since there are several activities that take place there such as quizzes, debates and public speaking. Students were unhappy that only a few students are allowed to attend the RE fairs leaving out the majority of them. They suggested that if a fair was held in a place that they had access to, they should be allowed to participate,

and an exception could only be when distant travelling was involved. Teachers indicated that they did not have problems with transport, but the difficulty was in feeding students if they were to engage in an educational trip.

It is important to note that at Makala Junior Secondary School, there were three religious sites which were about two hundred metres from the school. These religious sites were two church buildings and a Hindu Temple. Similarly, close to Togala Secondary School, there was a Bahai Centre and a church which were about three hundred metres and two hundred metres away respectively from the school. All the sites were within walking distance and would not need any transport to reach them. Furthermore, the teachers indicated that they were aware of these religious centres but that they never invited anyone from these places.

#### **5.4 Teaching RE in a diverse classroom environment**

For classrooms to have meaning, teachers need to have some knowledge of their students' personal, social, emotional as well as their academic knowledge (Airasian, 1995). A teacher's classroom then becomes a social as well as an academic site where different individuals meet. Teachers need to know and understand the diversity of their students, in terms of language, ethnicity and economic status especially if they do not come from the same cultural background (Ladson-Billings, 2005). This point is further stressed by Stodsky & Grossman (2000:127) when they say that "teachers need to genuinely respect students from different backgrounds and be receptive to the funds of knowledge" that children bring to the learning environment. Moreover, RE teachers need to be aware of how RE teaching affects the way in which they understand reality, in terms of, for example, of answering questions they did not anticipate from different students. The teachers have to avoid hate language and hurtful comments especially about religions or perspectives that students or their parents may hold dear. Some forms of disrespectful speech, have to be avoided even when used jokingly, in case they hurt some students.

The RE teachers admitted that they did not know their students' social and cultural backgrounds. The teachers' lack of knowledge of their students' background could affect their teaching since they could not easily tap into the knowledge that their students bring along. Lack of knowledge of students' background could be a major reason why teachers did not want to accept their students' knowledge and experiences in tests, quizzes and examinations. Of significance, is that the students' knowledge and experiences are rich resources that the teachers can utilise. For example, when I asked Mrs. Koloni if she knew where her students came from she said:

No. I only meet parents when they come to collect their children's reports.  
(Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

She also indicated that she did not know much about the community from which her students came from. She admitted that if she knew their backgrounds she would be able to understand them better. She indicated that in rural areas, teachers tend to know the community from which their students come from unlike in towns. When I further asked her if knowing where her students came from could enhance learning and teaching, Mrs. Koloni said:

Yes. It could help because one would know the child's background. For example, one would know the challenges a child faces outside school. Unfortunately, we teachers in Gaborone do not have time for that unlike teachers in rural areas. They are better off. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

With regard to dealing with a diverse classroom environment, as well as her personal values when teaching RE, Mrs Koloni said:

You see, one is a teacher and also a human being. One cannot avoid being affected by all these. For example, one needs patience. Teachers need to appreciate that they are dealing with many different types of students in their classrooms. At times, teachers have their personal problems hence they need to exercise a lot of restraint.  
(Interview with Koloni, 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2007)

Mr Tiro at Makala Junior Secondary School also said that he had little knowledge of students' background and that he only meets parents once at the end of the school term when they come to collect their children's progress reports. He also indicated that he accepted the different students' experiences. However, his students said that their knowledge and experiences were only acceptable during class discussions and not in tests, quizzes and examinations.

Mrs. Laban indicated that she always made use of students' knowledge and experiences. This is what she said about accepting students' knowledge.

We use the students' knowledge and we accept it. At times they (students) share their knowledge and experience with us. We accept what they tell us because sometimes they know certain things that we do not know.  
(Interview with Mrs Laban, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

Similarly, Miss Rabin did not know much about the background of her students. She even encouraged them to concentrate on what was in the textbooks and "forget about their denominations" which was partly their background and a source of their knowledge and experiences. She further indicated that she emphasised the form of Christianity which was mainly from the commonly called Established Churches. She was biased against some Christian denominations which some students could have belonged to. For example, she said that she would not accept any example that students brought, such as from African Independent Churches because those Christian denominations emphasised healing.

When the eight in-service teachers were asked how they dealt with and accommodated cultural differences, Pasco, a teacher from a school in a rural area said:

Normally what I do is to find out more about the culture of the students and those people around me. I do this in order to start with the students' culture. It is not right for me as a teacher to come up with examples that are foreign to the world of the students. (Interview with a group of RE teachers, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2006)

Another in-service teacher, Beatrice, also from a school in a rural area added:

Normally, I tell them about my culture and then I ask them to share theirs with the rest of the class. In the event I actually learn a lot. (Interview with a group of RE teachers, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2006)

It is interesting to note that some RE teachers appreciated the diversity of their classes whilst others barely did.

## 5.5 Mentoring and collaboration in RE

### 5.5.1 Mentoring new RE teachers

The quality of teaching can be improved through teacher collaboration, since there will be a relational trust that is built within a school. “Teachers who get help from colleagues who are more expert than they are may also gain important new information from those interactions that extend what they learn from formal professional development” (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher, 2007:930).

The four teachers in my study reported that they were not being mentored in RE. For example, Mrs. Rabin indicated that in her first two years in the field she was on her own because she was the only RE teacher when the multi-faith RE was introduced and that she did not receive any support from any senior teacher of a related subject. The four RE teachers said that the older and more experienced teachers do not have time to mentor new members, and also that there is no arrangement in the schools for such an exercise. One of the newer teachers Mr Tiro indicated that he felt that his senior teacher would like to help him but she could not because she was overwhelmed by her work which involved administrative work and classroom teaching.

Another newer teacher Mrs. Koloni who had been teaching for five years admitted that she was never given any form of orientation in her school and that she was never observed teaching in a class, not even once.

I find a relaxed scenario here where I teach. If you are observed like fortnightly, by a supervisor, you are likely to be helped, because he or she will be able to identify your mistakes. But if you have never been observed like me, you may keep on doing what may not be correct. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

She indicated that most of the time she was on her own. She suggested that teachers need to be observed teaching in class in order to help the supervisor identify their teachers’ strengths and weaknesses. She argued that inexperienced teachers, may repeat wrong practices if they are not corrected, and that, since she started teaching no one ever told her about her strengths or weaknesses.

### 5.5.2. Collaboration amongst RE teachers

Collaboration has become one of the catch-words in curriculum reform all over the world, where teachers are expected to be more collegially active. Klette (2002) says that there are new demands on teachers, including collaborative decision making such as the need to work together as colleagues. On the whole the role of the teacher tends to have immensely changed. It therefore becomes difficult to tell the extent to which teachers have control and influence over their work in terms of the content of what they teach, methods and even how they pace their lessons.

As a way of enhancing their professional lives, it is in the best interest of a teacher to relate with fellow teachers since they need each others' support and care in order to better understand and implement the technical aspect of teaching (McLaughlin, 1997). In his study on teacher collegiality, Clandinin (1986) observed that 75% of his participants who were teachers stated that they would like to observe another teacher teaching in order to learn from colleagues, teachers indicated that they did not have the opportunity to do so. However, in the same study, an even larger number indicated that they never observed other teachers teach, though they would have wanted to. The main reason why they never observed their colleagues was that there was little contact among teachers outside the classroom. Furthermore, Fullan (1991:119) observes that teachers also struggle with their "problems and anxieties privately, spending most of their time physically apart from their colleagues". MacLaughlin (1988:77) contends that if teachers can work together, they may accomplish a proposed change, even though she found that teachers generally experience "professional isolation and a lack of shared sense of practice."

It emerged that there is very little collaboration, generally among RE teachers within and across subjects and schools and many multi-faith RE teachers are on their own most of the time. For example, older teachers indicated that there used to be collaboration when RE "clusters" were still functional. Clusters are groups of teachers from adjacent schools within a geographical locality who come together to discuss ways of improving their RE teaching practices. The older teachers indicated that clusters used to prepare end of term examinations in a particular inspectorate area and that was no longer the case.

Collaboration among RE teachers was inadequate because, for example, they did not prepare a common scheme of work, and setting of tests and examinations. The RE teachers told me that if there was adequate collaboration, they could set common tests and school based end of term examinations, and that each teacher could be assigned a paper to set and then present it to others. Mr Tiro said that in his school, a teacher is assigned an examination paper, and is expected to provide a marking guide as well for the paper. He said that even though teachers set examination papers, they never provided a marking guide. This led Mr Tiro to complain when he said that:

There has always been no marking key since I joined the school last year, though I always suggest one. I personally need a marking key especially for **Paper 1 (Multiple Choice Questions)** because there is likely to be some differences in identifying the “most correct” answer or the key. I don’t have any problems with **Paper 2 (Structured and Essay Questions)**, since I can easily tackle it. It is a cause for concern that we never meet as RE teachers to discuss end of month tests and end of term examinations.

(Interview with Mr Tiro, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2006)

Even though Mr Tiro had earlier on indicated that there was some level of working together, he later suggested that poor junior certificate results could be a result of lack of collaboration by RE teachers in his school. He gave an example when they were asked by the principal in his school, as RE teachers to account for the poor RE results and did not have a common position, but instead each one of them gave their own interpretations about the poor results. This, according to him, was a sign of lack of collaboration.

In my interview with Mrs. Koloni, she told me that there was no collaboration amongst RE members because she had never taught a topic for a colleague or vice-versa. When I asked her how often they met as RE teachers, she told me that it was rare because most of the issues were discussed informally. She said: “Our meetings are rarely formal” and pointed out that there is less coordination in the RE Department. However, during the time I spent at her school, they never held a single departmental meeting. The information about tests, quizzes and examinations and other RE related issues was mainly communicated informally. On collaborating with teachers of other subjects Mrs. Koloni said:

No we don’t. We tried but it does not work. Yes, informally we do. There are topics where I get help from Social Studies teachers, on a topic such as “Evolution.” (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2007)

RE teachers in the two schools did not have the chance to watch each other teach as a result they lost an opportunity to discuss their practices with their colleagues. Teachers indicated that they could benefit a lot if there was collaboration between schools and between teachers within the same school. Miss Rabin indicated that there was little collaboration even at inter-school level when she said:

Since I came here in February, 2006 we never had a common cluster examination paper. However, I am told that before I came here, a cluster would have a common mock examination paper. I am not sure if this term we are going to have one. We haven't met and I haven't heard anything from the cluster chairperson.  
(Interview with Miss Rabin, 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2006)

Miss Rabin indicated that as a cluster or a group of schools they never met to set a common examination paper. She also observed that there was lack of collaboration within schools because teachers across subjects did not work together. She further indicated that collaboration across subjects could be of help since teachers could learn from one another especially since most subjects were related in one way or the other. For example, RE, Moral Education and Social Studies could benefit from each other because they are related subjects. According to her, the advantage of collaboration is that there are issues that may be discussed extensively in another subject than in a teacher's own subject. She gave an example, of the topic "Evolution" which is found in both RE and Social Studies but is covered extensively in Social Studies. So teachers of Social studies could be invited to present a lesson on evolution.

Mr Tiro indicated that inviting other teachers could also motivate students, since it would be someone different from the teacher that they are used to. However, during my field observation in the two schools, there were no colleagues who were invited to RE classes even though there were topics that were found across several subjects such as "human rights" and "freedom." These topics were found in Social Studies, Moral Education and RE.

Lack of collaboration on another level was confirmed by Mr Mathias, an Education Officer, who said that there was no collaboration even between officers in the Ministry of Education, when he said this about his fellow officers:

There is no time when we can all come together and discuss how we can help our teachers. For example, I do not even know the officer responsible for RE at TT&D (Teacher Training and Development Department). There is totally no collaboration among the Ministry of Education Officers. (Interview with Mr Mathias, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2006)

Another Education Officer, Mr Moks concurred with Mr Mathias that there was no collaboration among RE officers even in the same department. He said that each officer wanted to do his or her own thing without involving other officers yet the work of one impacted on the work of the other. While there is lack of collaboration and cooperation, amongst officers, teachers tended to be pawns and were held at ransom because they were caught in *“the officers’ cross-fire”* (emphasis mine). Another Education Officer, Miss Timon, concurred with the other officers that there was no collaboration and cooperation among officers and said that is why the problem has never been attended to collectively. She admitted that she rarely attended meetings called by sister departments in the Ministry of Education such as the Department of Curriculum Development and ERTD. She said:

We RE officers have never met to look at the curriculum and other issues related to it such as the welfare of teachers. Furthermore we do not have a forum where we can meet as officers to articulate our concerns and other issues.  
(Interview with Miss Timon, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2006)

Miss Timon said that there was need for all RE officers in the Ministry of Education to work together, by exchanging views and ideas on the RE curriculum, especially with regard to assessment which tended to be a problem area for many. Just like other officers, Miss Ray, from ERTD indicated that there was little collaboration between RE officers in the different departments of the Ministry of Education. She further observed that few teachers were aware of the recurring problems in the assessment of RE because a handful of teachers were invited for marking where most of these issues were discussed. Furthermore, no officer was obliged to relay to teachers whatever transpired during marking sessions. She observed that there was no one who took the responsibility of informing teachers about new developments in RE hence there seemed to be no coordination in information dissemination.

## 5.6 RE teachers collaborating with the community

Another form of collaboration that is desirable is between teachers and the community. Teachers need to know the communities that students come from and also tap on the diverse resources and traditions of these communities. According to Giroux and McLaren (1986) teachers need to familiarise themselves with the culture, economy and historical traditions of the surrounding community so that they “understand the relationships and forces that influence their students outside of the immediate context of the classroom” (Giroux & McLaren, 1986:236). They further advise that teachers should do that because in most cases forms of knowledge from the community are often ignored within the dominant school culture. They note that “it is unfortunate that when communities are ignored by teachers, students often find themselves trapped in institutions that not only deny them a voice but also deprive them of a relational or contextual understanding of how the knowledge they acquire in the classroom can be used to influence and transform public sphere” (Giroux & McLaren, 1986:237).

The four RE teachers said that they had little contact with parents, politicians, employers and their supervisors. They similarly observed that there was little involvement of the parents and community leaders in school related activities. For example, parents only visited the school to collect reports or when their child was having disciplinary problems.

This is what Mrs. Koloni said about her relationship with parents and other community leaders as shown in my interview with her.

**How much support do you get from the parents?**

None. We only see parents during report collection.

**How helpful is your meeting with them?**

Not that helpful, because you may find that a student’s performance does not improve even after talking to the parents.

**Are there times when parents volunteer to help their children?**

Yes, I think they do. But you can only be certain that they do something if the performance of the child improves. It might be that parents only pay lip service, but do little to help their children.

**Under which constituency does your school fall under?**

I don’t know. Gaborone North or West!

**Do you know your councilor?**

Yes, but I don’t know his name.

**How much support do you get from your councilor?**

I don't know the extent to which he is involved in the school activities.

**In your view, do you think he should be involved in the school activities as a politician?**

Maybe he could help with issues such as discipline and drug abuse.

**What about your area MP?**

By the way who is our MP?

**How much support do you get from Teaching Service Management (TSM- the department that recruits teachers)?**

Are they not the ones who provide schools with books?

*(Researcher provides an explanation on what TSM is)*

*(Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)*

What also emerged is that teachers do not collaborate with tertiary institutions such as colleges of education or the universities. For example RE teachers do not have a forum where they can exchange ideas with lecturers from teacher training institutions. Similarly, the teacher training institutions do not track their graduates.

## **5.7 In-service professional development**

Professionalism is not an absolute word but a socially constructed and a contested concept, and the context determines how it is used and understood. The concept is not static but it keeps on changing depending on the context and it is constantly being refined and in different ways and at different times to serve different interests. For example, Evan (2008:23) says that "teacher professionalism incorporates a focus on teachers taking a greater responsibility for defining the nature and content of their work." Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi and Gallagher (2007) observe that in most cases professional development activities meant to help teachers on an occasion of reform are short and usually inadequate and have no follow-ups at all. They further indicate that curricular reforms are demanding on teachers, so much that if there are no comprehensive professional development activity follow-ups, teachers "either assimilate teaching strategies into their current repertoire with little substantive change or they reject those suggested changes altogether" (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi and Gallagher, 2007:929). They suggest that professional development should take a longer duration and time span relevant to the

kind of learning opportunities needed by teachers to integrate new knowledge into their classroom practice. Professional development is fundamentally required for supporting implementation on an occasion of curriculum reform. According to Glatthorn (1995), teacher development involves the growth in teachers' knowledge, skills and professional judgement, and in the contributions teachers make to the professional community.

The four RE teachers, in my study, reported that there were no easily available grants for them to further their professional training. They indicated that while they had to line up in a long queue to be sponsored for further studies, to their disappointment there would be a backlog of teachers due for further training. Another problem is that the teacher training institutions in Botswana do not offer part time degrees in education especially at undergraduate level. Furthermore, Mrs. Laban complained that performing teachers were never rewarded accordingly. She suggested that instead of only being complimented by the school principal for good results, the teachers' efforts needed to be appreciated by being sent for further studies in order for them to develop professionally. This is what she said concerning rewarding teachers.

There are teachers who produce good results, but when opportunities such as going for further studies come, these teachers are rarely considered but are side-lined. On the contrary, there will be one teacher who is not serious with his or her core business of teaching, who does not produce good results, whom you would find being considered for further studies or even promotion. (Interview with Mrs Laban, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

Mrs. Koloni said that she has never been exposed to any form of professional training, for example, in relation to classroom management, curriculum development and assessment in RE since she joined teaching. She also indicated that there were no school based-workshops on professional development and argued that school based workshops were possible since there are fellow teachers who may possess some skills that may benefit their colleagues. When I asked Mrs Koloni what she would ask the staff development department in her school to conduct workshops on, she said:

I want a workshop on this RE syllabus. Just to discuss it. It has to be looked into so that we also come with our own contributions. I also take it that there are topics that can be deleted and others added. There has to be workshops on assessment that will encourage our school-based supervisors to constantly assess us. (Interview with Mrs Koloni, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2007)

Mrs Koloni indicated that as teachers, they needed professional in-service training to further enhance their classroom teaching. She suggested that resource persons could come from her school while others could be from the Ministry of Education, especially from the Curriculum Development and Evaluation Department (CD&E). She, however, added that she did not think that teachers were experts enough to talk about assessment issues. All the four teachers indicated that they needed in-service training in terms of workshops.

Mr Mathias, an Education Officer, indicated that teachers needed workshops, though he said that they as Education Officers in the inspectorate spend most of the time doing inspections and hardly hold any workshops for teachers. He noted that the Department of Teacher Training and Development (TT&D) has to spearhead in-service training of teachers including workshops. He further observed that even though this department is responsible for in-service training, it did not have an RE Officer. He admitted that there was little in-service training for RE teachers in his region, partly because even if he had time to conduct workshops, there would be no funds available. He complained that teachers expect him to organise workshops yet there is no vote for such activities in his department.

One of the officers Mr Moks indicated that one of his main duties was to supervise teachers. However, in the months I spent in the two schools there were no Education Officers who visited the four RE teachers in their schools. He had initially said that he was responsible for the in-service training of teachers, but in the months I was in the two schools he or his colleagues did not arrange anything for the teachers in that inspectorate area. However, he later acknowledged that he was more into school inspection than on in-service training. All the education officers indicated to me that in-service training was the responsibility of TT&D since they had their own main responsibility which was school inspection.

Another way in which RE teachers could articulate their concerns regarding their professional development was through an association, such as the Botswana Religious Education Association (BOREA). However, both teachers and education officers indicated that the association is mainly concerned with RE fairs and not with the welfare of teachers. RE fairs are RE related competitions amongst schools. The emphasis is on students' understanding and appreciation of RE as a subject. The main activities involve

general RE knowledge, debate and public speaking. The newer teachers were not even aware of the existence of this association. For example, when I asked Mrs. Koloni about the usefulness of BOREA, she said: “I don’t know anything about BOREA.” However, older RE teachers indicated that they knew about it and that it was mainly concerned with RE fairs in secondary schools. According to Mrs. Gatts, an RE Curriculum Development Officer, she said that BOREA is effective only in as far as organising RE fairs. Mr Moks an Education Officer, said this about BOREA:

This association was founded on the basis that it would improve the teaching practices of RE teachers. What is presently happening is that it is only concentrating on RE fairs. (Interview with Mr Moks, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2006)

Another Education Officer, Miss Ray, suggested that the association can be meaningful if it can move beyond RE fairs in secondary schools and involve other relevant stakeholders like colleges of education and the university.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented the data from the field on RE teachers’ views on assessing a multi-faith RE especially their emphasis that religions should be specified in order to make assessment easy. The RE teachers were reluctant to research widely because assessment was mainly based on what was in the textbooks. Similarly, teachers did not encourage their students to use other forms of resources in order to access information except the textbooks. I indicated that it is not easy to assess this curriculum mainly because of two possible reasons; firstly because of the teachers’ inadequate grasp of a multi-faith RE curriculum and secondly because of teachers’ lack of assessment skills. It was revealed that teachers do little research and mainly depend on students’ textbooks. Inadequate resources are a factor that could contribute to students’ poor performance in examinations. The analysis also revealed that teachers rarely used students’ knowledge and experience in tests, quizzes and examinations. In addition, teachers do not know the backgrounds of their students, and that could have an impact in relation to how they relate to their students. Teachers have little contact with parents and other important community members such as councilors and area Members of Parliament. Lastly, the analysis revealed that teachers are rarely exposed to in-service professional training, because workshops are rarely mounted that make them aware of any changes in

education and in RE curriculum in particular. It emerged that teachers at times do not have access to government documents that might help them in their teaching. Lack of collaboration amongst teachers was raised as a factor that negatively affected the RE teachers' classroom practices.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Discussions, recommendations, implications for educational practice and research**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I report that when the curriculum was initiated, teachers received little guidance on how to teach it and were left to their own devices when they prepared for lessons. While a multi-faith curriculum does not require that there should be certain religions that should be enumerated and learnt, teachers in their struggle in interpreting the multi-faith RE curriculum chose some religions and concentrated on them. They adopted this practice as a way of helping their students to pass their final Junior Certificate RE examinations, since the Botswana Education System is test-oriented. While the teachers' concentration is on testing, the study revealed that they have inadequate assessment skills. I indicate that even though there are several teaching techniques, RE teachers concentrated on group work. In a similar vein, while there are several resources, the teachers concentrated on textbooks. Furthermore, the RE teachers rarely made use of the students' knowledge and experiences that they brought along with them to the learning environment. Similarly, teachers did not see the relevance of community members especially parents, largely because they under-rated their students' knowledge and experiences. In trying to interpret the multi-faith curriculum, teachers rarely collaborated, within their schools and across schools. The study shows that teachers are blamed by Education Officers, principals and even fellow RE teachers for poor classroom skills when they teach RE.

#### **6.1 The Philosophy of the multi-faith RE curriculum**

The findings in the study indicate that teachers were not informed about the broader reform, that is, the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE), that informed the development and eventually the implementation of the multi-faith RE curriculum. Teachers were not made aware of the relationship between the multi-faith RE curriculum and the policy whence the multi-faith RE curriculum originated. The participants indicated that the multi-faith RE curriculum is educational and is capable of bringing about openness, tolerance and awareness of the differences that exist amongst different

people. However, the participants were not eloquent on how that awareness can positively change the behaviour or attitude of the students. Furthermore, the participants indicated that it was not easy for them to locate the rationale of RE within the wider cultural, technological, moral and historical contexts, in order to create students who are rounded people. This is largely the case because new initiatives of teaching are usually presented to teachers without making clear the rationale on which the initiatives are based.

The multi-faith RE curriculum is not meant to judge religions, especially by comparing and contrasting them. Even though this is a basic principle in a multi-faith RE curriculum, some teachers did not see any flaws in the syllabus document where there were instructional objectives that compared religions. However, this view is out of step because by comparing and contrasting religions, this calls for what is good and what is bad in religions. If this becomes the position of the curriculum, then students will be expected to judge religions from a moral standpoint, in terms of right and wrong, good and bad, as well as the truth and falsity of religions.

It is also important to note that RE teachers have a general idea of what the multi-faith RE curriculum entails, yet they lack detail and precision with regard to its philosophy. The teachers emphasised religions of their own choice hence disregarding the nature of the multi-faith RE curriculum that does not require enumerating of religions that are to be learnt. For example, teachers' chose to emphasise Christianity, because they had easy access of information to this religion. The danger of such an approach is that it can lead to indoctrination. However, there could be three reasons why teachers adopted this approach in their teaching, the first being that, Christianity is extensively covered by the authors of the RE textbooks, which both the teachers and their students largely depended on. The second one is that the phenomenological approach upon which the seven dimensional model description of religion espoused by Smart, is based on Christianity, hence teachers readily linked Christianity with whatever they taught. Thirdly, it is because Christianity is said to be the commonest religion in Botswana.

Furthermore, there are indications that some of those in positions of leadership in government within the Ministry of Education may not have accepted the multi-faith RE curriculum on the basis that Botswana is a Christian country. This lack of acceptance of this curriculum exerts constant pressure on teachers and curriculum officers in justifying its existence. There are two reasons for lack of acceptance, first, it could be that when the curriculum was initiated, it did not dawn on to some senior government officials what multi-faith RE entailed. Secondly, it could also be that politicians were under pressure to be seen to uphold principles of tolerance and openness in Botswana as it would naturally be expected in a liberal democracy hence reluctantly adopted this curriculum.

Introducing the multi-faith RE curriculum into Botswana junior secondary schools implied innovation and change, yet the teachers' understanding and classroom practices remains essentially unchanged. Even though the multi-faith RE curriculum is relatively new in Botswana classrooms, the cultures of teachers in terms of understanding and practice remain the same. When introducing the RE curriculum there was a potential for improvement, yet it can now be said that in this particular curriculum innovation, it did not necessarily lead to a better teachers' understanding and teaching of RE. For example, when some of the teachers were attempting to establish religious truth claims which is not the focus of the curriculum. RE teachers emphasised areas that they were comfortable with because they had more knowledge in them, for example, when they emphasised Christianity and not other religions because the different textbooks, provided extensive information on this particular religion, hence legitimated it as the true religion. The other reason, as indicated earlier, is that teachers emphasised Christianity because in their initial teacher training programme, it was the religion that was stressed in their training programme. Furthermore, teachers showed that they did not provide any knowledge but reproduced what was expected of them by external forces such as educational officials, parents and the community. That is why they did everything possible that could enable their students to pass the examinations.

It is also interesting to note that the schools allowed the Christian faith to infiltrate the school system and hence became part of the school tradition. Presently, several events are sanctioned under the Christian auspices and it has become normal, according to the participants, for schools to invite Christian leaders to schools to conduct sermons especially in the morning assemblies, even though schools are public institutions that are not supposed to support and promote any particular religion. On the one hand, the RE

teachers have an uphill task to fight against the ethos and traditions of schools that have their systems deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, whilst on the other hand, they have become part of the tradition. This is a complex and contradictory scenario whereby teachers are unable to detach themselves from this web especially since the presence of the Christian practices in schools is supported by the Education Act. Assemblies in Botswana schools are used as occasions for religious observances of the Christian religion, and by so doing, turning students into captive converts which is tantamount to imposing religious uniformity among students. Assemblies in Botswana schools are conducted in Christian prayers and various staff meetings in many schools are started and ended with a Christian prayer. Similarly, there are some schools that have made arrangements with some pastors to preach to students on certain days, even though it is uncommon that a similar invitation could be extended to members of other religions. In order to level the ground, it would be in order if school assemblies could be used for celebrating diversity along the values of the Botswana Constitution which is secular in nature whereby teachers are expected to teach and students to learn religions in a non-confessional manner and where religions under study are treated equally.

Regarding how RE could be popularised, some Education Officers suggested that RE teachers have to market the subject while others argued that the subject should not be viewed in terms of career opportunities but with regard to how it can build a person. However, some RE teachers suggested that the multi-faith RE could be introduced at primary school level, and in my view, this suggestion may not be tenable because pupils at this level may not be cognitively mature to deal with it. The RE students suggested that the subject can be marketed by teaching and learning it in a more lively manner than it is done at present. Students suggested that RE could be made popular to students by watching religious and religious related films, visiting religious sites, listening to talks by religious practitioners especially religious leaders.

In suggesting a way forward with regard to RE, some teachers were suggesting that there has to be core religions as it is done in England and Wales. If that suggestion can be entertained, it will naturally defeat the idea of a multi-faith RE curriculum which is not premised on “core religions.” If that becomes the case, several questions will be raised including the basic ones which are: Which religions are core? What makes them core? The issue of power is also raised leading to the question: Whose ideology and interests are being promoted? The other reason why such an approach will be deficient is that its

emphasis will be on the cognitive and not the affective which the multi-faith RE curriculum is premised and will naturally emphasise testing more than understanding.

It also emerged in the study that RE teachers have little understanding of the multi-faith RE curriculum in terms of translating the instructional objectives into classroom practices partly due to lack of in-service professional training. For example, the teachers had constraints in terms of lack of subject content knowledge and pedagogical content skills such as the choice of effective teaching techniques and strategies. However, Education Officers who are expected to assist teachers in interpreting the curriculum, for example, in terms of in-service training, were unable to help teachers because there was no forum in place to afford them that opportunity.

## **6.2 RE pedagogy**

When the multi-faith RE curriculum was introduced, RE teachers received inadequate guidance regarding how to teach it. When the RE task force drew up the RE curriculum, it did not guide teachers on how it was to be translated into classroom practice. The curriculum had a teaching syllabus that had specified topics as well as instructional objectives. Even though a curriculum is a guiding framework, RE teachers were not helped on how to teach it, for example, in terms of what they were to stress and how deep they were to go in teaching the various topics. There was pressure to teach the new curriculum yet the guidance and support they got was limited because even Education Officers in the inspectorate did not suggest to teachers what a good lesson in a multi-faith RE curriculum is expected to be like.

Furthermore, the training institutions where the multi-faith RE teachers were trained, emphasised instructional objectives at the exclusion of their relationship with the RNPE. This situation has not changed over the years despite complaints by teachers that they do not receive adequate guidance regarding the pedagogical aspects of the curriculum. From an administrative viewpoint, it was urgent that teachers had to teach the new curriculum yet they were not provided with the necessary support which they needed. Similarly, even teachers who initially taught the single faith RE were not re-trained for a multi-faith RE curriculum. The best that was done for those teachers was to mount a few workshops that informed them about the philosophy of the new RE curriculum whose content was a variety of religions. It is likely that it is against this background that even though RE

teachers understood the new curriculum to be their core business, and their responsibility, they could not effectively teach it.

Though there are several student-centred techniques, RE teachers concentrated on one which is group work and also viewed students working in groups as not in need of any particular skill in order to carry out their tasks effectively. RE teachers equally viewed students as self-taught in as far as group work was concerned by assuming that the students would know what to do as long as they were in their groups. This meant that those students who did not fit in the group work technique were left out because teachers assumed that it was adequate to group the students and then ask them to attend to a task. The RE teachers did not have any clearly laid down strategies to deal with such a situation where the able ones could share difficult tasks with the “weak” ones. Students were not guided on how they could help each other especially the weak ones during group discussions. The teachers rarely moved around to check on how the groups arrived at conclusions. The RE teachers took for granted that since they would have asked students to work in groups, students would naturally know how to get information, process it and finally present their findings to the rest of the class. Group work was followed by presentation to the whole class, and teachers rarely made additions to what the students presented and if ever they did, it was brief. It is also important to note that some teachers did not establish ground rules and expectations for group work, hence leading students not to live up to the expectations of the teachers. For example, RE teachers expected the students to be fully involved in terms of how they searched, selected and finally presented the information to the class.

Teachers did not make use of a variety of learning activities such as drama, artwork, and videos in order to enrich their lessons as well as to tap into the students’ sense of imagination and awe. When it came to classroom teaching and learning, teachers did not show skills that could encourage students to be open and tolerant, while teachers themselves were not tolerant and open in their treatment of the various religions. Their lack of tolerance is seen in the way in which they stressed some religions at the expense of others. The RE teachers did not create a situation where those students who were not Christians and those who did not belong to especially, the Christian mainline churches could be listened to. By denying students to refer to their religions or Christian denominations, which was their way of life, they were denying them their sense of identity hence the RE teachers were inadvertently denying students to bring to class their

knowledge and experiences. This suggested that there were denominations that were right and true whilst others were not hence RE was not producing democratic citizens who are free and self-reflective. Even though this was the practice, multi-faith RE classrooms are places of freedom of thought and expression, and should create a multi-cultural climate. To discourage students from bringing to class their experiences is a practice that runs in opposition to the spirit of a multi-faith RE curriculum and is contrary to a student-centred pedagogy which the RNPE emphasises. At times, teachers did not engage their students in a manner that brought about open enquiry and debate especially on sensitive and controversial issues. While teachers indicated in the initial interviews that their classes were student-centred, in their classrooms, they hardly accepted the views and experiences of the students. When they did, it was only in as far as brainstorming was concerned especially when introducing a new topic.

There was also the practice of calling out of marks by Mr Tiro and Miss Rabin which they said led to an improvement in students' performance, a practice they could have adopted from their former primary or secondary school teachers. At worst, this practice could have been a form of student harassment and ridicule. Even though they said that this practice led to improvement of performance, that too, could not be established whether it was the calling out of names or some other factors like teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge that brought about the change.

To some extent at least Mr Tiro, Mrs Laban and Miss Rabin embraced the RE curriculum, since they viewed it positively, while Miss Koloni did not. Irrespective of their views in terms of the curriculum, the four RE teachers used whatever time and space provided by the situation to create practices of coping with the curriculum reform effort. The four teachers interpreted the curriculum differently. For example, Mr Tiro was excited about it partly because of his teaching techniques, whereby he mainly involved students and was free to express his own views even when his students did not agree with him. For example, when dealing with the topic: "Authority" he said that he supported the president of Zimbabwe Mr Robert Mugabe on his land reform policy. Even though his students did not agree with him, he nevertheless expressed his views on this particular issue. However, there are two ways of looking at the statement. The first one could be that he wanted to challenge his students so that they could think beyond what they read, in their textbooks, other print media and television. The other could be that it was his position and invited his students to challenge it if they wanted to. Whichever position he

could have adopted, enabled his students to emulate him by being able to express their own views.

However, teachers complained that programmes at colleges of education and the University of Botswana did not adequately equip them with skills to face classroom challenges because teachers need some form of empowerment in order to respond to new challenges with confidence and resolve.

The four RE teachers, who are the main participants in this study, individually attempted to implement the curriculum in the best way that they deemed fit. They attempted to “adjust” the curriculum so that it suited their own understanding of and made the curriculum understandable to themselves and engaged in practices that were consonant with their own ideas. For example, while the curriculum expected teachers to use a variety of religions when addressing an issue, teachers decided to use particular religions especially those that they had easy access of information to. The information they used was the one found, especially in the students’ textbooks. The RE teachers were responding to the reform efforts in different ways including the emotional aspect. They interpreted the RE curriculum differently, in terms of first, if they embraced or rejected it, and secondly how they implemented it, depending on whether they accepted or rejected it given the circumstances. In their interpretation and implementation of the curriculum, teachers brought to the reform efforts certain commitments and particular emotional responses that either supported or undermined the implementation of the curriculum.

Communication was a problem between teachers, schools and the relevant departments of the Ministry of Education. Education Officers too, did not help create an enabling environment so that RE teachers could be aware of the importance of government and other official documents, by making sure that these documents reached the teachers on time. The RE teachers did not readily accustom themselves with official communication that was in the files, partly because at times accessing a file was difficult hence that discouraged them to ask for files. It also emerged that government documents that can help teachers in their classroom teaching were at times not made easily available to them. For example, the RE examination reports did not readily reach schools and if they did, they rarely reached, especially junior teachers.

The study revealed that information meant for teachers at times did not reach them mainly due to red tape – at department level within the school, at school level within the school administration, and at regional level with Education Officers. The study further revealed that lack of information and knowledge regarding new developments in education leads to teachers’ being lethargic, burnt-out, frustrated and uninterested in work due to their apparent powerlessness caused by the inadequate access to information. Furthermore, during my fieldwork in the two schools, there was no time when RE teachers had a special meeting to discuss their RE results as shown in the league table. The RE teachers did not discuss as a department the RE examinations, for example, on how questions were attempted by students. As a result, the teachers’ work was not largely informed by official documents. It also emerged that teachers do not have a culture of reading since they never bothered to read the report even though they knew about it. For example, teachers rarely read government circulars even when they have access to them, hence they do not follow the latest developments and trends in education in general, including what is happening in the Botswana education system.

Code switching was common among the three RE teachers except for Mr Tiro. Though teachers said that the practice was meant to help the intellectually challenged students, there was no incident where it could have been said that it was done for what they referred to as “slow learners”. In my view, code switching did not add value to the lesson because it was not used particularly to explain new concepts especially in vernacular that were introduced.

### **6.3 Assessment**

The study showed that teachers focused on students passing tests and examinations at the expense of developing understanding and enjoyment of the RE subject matter. The RE teachers were expected to be accountable for the RE results hence teachers taught to test, and that prevented them from delivering high quality instruction that is focused on students. This is contrary to what government expected of teachers in a student-centred environment. As a result, the teaching techniques and strategies of teachers were restricted, narrow, compromised and routinised because the focus was on preparation for examinations. The RE teachers’ greatest challenge was the success of their students in the examinations since they had to account for the results hence RE classroom practices were examination driven, because teachers were mostly concerned about their students passing

examinations. While teachers were barely involved in the initial planning of the curriculum, good examination results were expected from them. Similarly, while a lot was expected from teachers in terms of good results, policy makers did not take into consideration various factors, such as the location of the schools, availability of teaching and learning resources as well as the contradictions in terms of power struggles, and the various ways that teachers devised in order to resolve challenges.

Newer RE teachers too adjusted to the traditions of the schools whereby passing was the main objective. While in theory the curriculum has to emphasise knowledge and understanding, in practice, RE teachers modified it so that it could answer the quest of the school tradition and that of the parents and society, that is, by focusing on examinations. Passing examinations is made a priority over knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Since the curriculum is mainly examination oriented, that led teachers to teach for marks which are short term inclined, and not for long term understanding. For example, teachers studied how examinations are set and then taught their students around the expectations of the examinations. External pressures weighed heavily on the RE teachers' values and beliefs since they wanted their students to succeed. Due to the pressure exerted on them, RE teachers rarely used students' knowledge and experiences as they would have wanted to, because they wanted to satisfy the expectations of their principals and those of society at large. The pressure that RE teachers worked under, encroached on their autonomy and professional judgment. Similarly, the pressure was equally heavy on both the new teachers and those that have a wealth of experience in the field.

In assessment, teachers need to have subject, pedagogical and curricular knowledge, and it is mainly in their pedagogical content knowledge whereby assessment skills are supposed to be embedded. Though the ERTD expects teachers to possess certain assessment skills, teachers have not been made aware of such skills. Furthermore, the education system in Botswana does not encourage the moderation of examinations at school level so that teachers can also become accustomed to what happens at national level in terms of grading. At present the ERTD is not transparent in informing schools and subject Education Officers about the formula that they use in grading students especially the cut-off points. What the RE teachers and RE officers in the inspectorate know are the raw marks that they enter at the end of the year at the marking centres, but they do not know what happens to the marks beyond the marking centres.

The statistics section of the ERTD works independent of other stakeholders because it is not transparent in terms of grading students. The statistical formulae that they use are not made known to teachers and officers in the inspectorate. At least the Education Officers should have the inside information so that they are able to explain to teachers how raw marks are translated into grades. Since RE officers in the inspectorate did not know how marks are finally computed, this rendered them helpless especially when teachers needed help that was related to assessment. Furthermore, what was of concern to both the Education Officers and the RE teachers was that the computing of results was privy to the ERTD officers only, and particularly to those in the data processing section.

In a liberal democracy like Botswana, transparency has to be one of its cornerstones. However, due to lack of transparency there could be continued blames and counter-accusations regarding students' results among different stakeholders such as students, teachers, principals and Education Officers. Furthermore, due to lack of transparency, RE teachers and Education Officers suspected that ERTD manipulated the marks after they were submitted to them. Of importance is that according to the RE teachers, raw marks that they submitted to ERTD were relatively good, but they expressed concern that after those marks had been processed at ERTD they turned their texture because students would have failed. Furthermore, it emerged that there was little collaboration between the Examination Officer and the data analyst at ERTD because the former indicated that she had little information about the process of converting marks into grades.

The Examination Officer at ERTD indicated that a new form of grading was to be introduced soon, which she referred to as "judgemental grading". If judgemental grading is to be effective, teachers would need in-service training in order to carry out that task successfully. Teachers would need to be made aware of whatever statistical formula that would be used. Even though the ERTD officer had hope in the envisaged grading system, there was little hope that much would change whilst there is still a statistical formula that is set to determine the cut-off point and the pass rate of students. For example the same teachers will be teaching and marking, while the same statistics unit at ERTD will still be computing the marks and converting them into grades. However, teachers are the ones who are on the receiving end because they will always be blamed for their students' performance. Furthermore, teachers do not always have easy access to the ERTD examination reports hence they are likely to continue repeating the same content and pedagogical mistakes. In both schools, the RE teachers did not give themselves adequate

time to study the reports but mainly depended on what the coordinator or a senior teacher told them. However, at times the senior teachers did not alert junior fellow members in the department about the existence of such a report or new information. In case where the reports were posted to schools, teachers ignored them because they were posted to schools long after individual schools had done their own examination results analysis. By the time the reports were posted to schools, teachers would have lost interest in them, since they would have already debated issues revolving around examinations at the beginning of the year. The reports reached schools towards the end of the first term and at times at the beginning of the second term.

Both the teachers and Education Officers were unhappy with how ERTD handled the grading of students because they claimed that grading depended on the general performance of the students and not on the performance of individual students. For example, if fewer students passed, the cut-off point would be lowered, and by so doing, more students could pass and if on the other hand, more students scored high marks, the cut off point for passing would be raised. If the assertions by the Education Officers and RE teachers were true, then it would be unfair for students to be failed by a statistical formula when in actual fact they will have passed. Furthermore, that could put unnecessary pressure on the students and on their teachers, culminating in blames and counter-accusations. As a way of satisfying this external pressure the teachers prepared their students for final examinations by adopting certain teaching techniques and strategies. For example, the knowledge, experiences, learning and teaching resources that they accepted were mainly influenced by external factors such as expectations from parents, principals, Education Officers and the general public. Teachers were not even aware that RE examination officers merely did the administrative work of compiling raw marks and then presenting them to the statistics section of the ERTD which then used a formula to grade students. Even though passing examinations was what teachers aimed at, few RE teachers in Botswana schools have been exposed to rigorous training in the various forms of assessment. Both teachers and Education Officers largely laid blame on the RE curriculum when it came to inadequate assessment skills.

#### **6.4 Collaboration, professional development and record keeping**

The study revealed that RE teachers rarely collaborated because many of them worked on their own. In collaboration, teachers can learn from each other and can cover the weakness of one another. Teachers could share responsibility for a group of students and when doing that, and in doing so, they can no longer be everything and all things to their students. For example, in team teaching, one teacher's weakness is likely to be covered by another's strength. If RE teachers were to watch each other teach, and then give each other feedback, it would be an opportunity for them to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their practices. Furthermore, when teachers meet to share their experiences, in terms of how they use the various teaching techniques and strategies, they indirectly help one another to teach better. In collaboration, teachers may develop a sense of trust of each other as they use the opportunity to engage colleagues in giving them reliable forms of feedback.

The study further revealed that older RE teachers reported that they had benefited from regional and cluster workshops which were no longer functioning while the new RE teachers reported that they had never attended any Religious Education workshop, since they started teaching. Furthermore, there is presently no forum for teachers to research issues of effective teaching because it is through such fora that they could expand their understanding in as far as the dynamics of RE teaching practices are concerned. The study revealed that there was little teacher collegiality, because teachers rarely shared skills, ideas and teaching materials to support each other. Wherever there were collegial relations, they tended not to be coordinated, like when they spoke to each other informally about their classroom practices. Collectively, in their interactions, RE teachers rarely shared their successes, failures, and concerns about RE implementation and in both schools teachers reported that they never met formerly as a unit, hence there were no minutes in the RE department. Teachers also reported that they were not organised and coordinated enough to monitor their own professional development mainly because there is no collaboration amongst themselves within their schools and with other RE teachers in nearby schools.

RE teachers were for the most part on their own and were doing whatever they could under the given circumstances to implement the RE curriculum. That is why it was possible for teachers to keep their old ways of teaching and not devise new ways of teaching, largely because they were not adequately supported and guided especially by the senior teachers and Education Officers. The study also found that newer RE teachers lacked in subject, pedagogical and curricular knowledge hence leading to frustration caused by lack of support. Furthermore, there is no coordinated and sustainable mentoring programme in schools for new RE teachers. This situation may lead to new teachers developing their own tradition which may not be informed by expert knowledge. Furthermore, it emerged that there was no forum where teachers could communicate their problems, especially collectively, to the education officers. RE teachers further reported that they were not adequately supported by the different Ministry of Education Departments, such as the Departments of Curriculum Development & Evaluation (CD&E), Examinations Research and Testing Division (ERTD), Teacher Training & Development (TT&D) and Teaching Service Management (TSM). Education Officers blamed teachers for their lack of testing skills, yet they did not help them acquire good ones.

Collaboration, at another level, that is, between schools and tertiary institutions was lacking. For example, the teacher training institutions do not conduct tracer studies, whereby they track their graduates to find out how they perform as a way of further improving relevant training programmes in those institutions. In addition, there was no mechanism in place to check if the university or colleges of education produced competent RE teachers because once they graduated, RE teachers were not tracked by the teacher training institutions.

There was lack of collaboration and coordination among Education Officers because they indicated that there was no forum they could meet and talk about their relationship with teachers as a group. They indicated that though in principle they were expected to collaborate and cooperate, they worked independently of each other hence they could not assist teachers in a coordinated manner even though they were collectively accountable for the RE teachers' interests. They also indicated that there are times when RE teachers are not updated in a coordinated manner on educational changes. This updating is important because teachers need to know whom to approach when they need guidance on curricular, content and pedagogical issues.

It emerged from the study that the Botswana Religious Education Association (BOREA) was no longer helpful as it used to be. Older RE teachers related what this association used to do, while newer ones did not know anything about it. Education Officers too, were disillusioned by the mandate of the association because they said that the association was more into organising RE fairs than in helping equip teachers with some skills in teaching. Furthermore, RE teachers indicated that they did not collaborate with members of the community like councillors and Members of Parliament because they did not see how these members could help them or their schools.

The teachers indicated that professional development especially in terms of in-service training through workshops was non-existent. Workshops are important because they are a means of introducing an innovation or a new idea and through them, teachers can be helped to work with their peers in order to reflect systematically on their practices as well as to strengthen their knowledge base. Another important issue that emerged was on record keeping, because it is difficult to imagine how information about RE in a school is preserved for future reference if there are no records. It may not have been easy for teachers to keep records bearing in mind that they did not support the idea of schemes of work and lesson plans which are basic record keeping tools in teaching.

## **6.5 Resources**

The two schools had similar resources in terms of physical infrastructure, student enrolment and human resources. In both schools, physical facilities were relatively limited and some were old. For example, at Togat Junior Secondary School, all the desks had no lids and students had to use their laps when writing. Classrooms in both schools were not enough for the eighteen streams, hence some lessons were held outside in what they referred to as “outdoor teaching areas” which were not conducive environments since students were disturbed by movements of especially people and noise from cars.

Even though the RE teachers’ environment in both schools tended to be awash with information from several sources, teachers mainly relied on pupils’ textbooks. They did not use a range of resources to increase their own knowledge and that of their students about religions. However, a central part of the teachers’ work is to interpret curriculum materials and to decide how to use these materials in the classroom bearing in mind that a

good curriculum requires more than just a textbook. In addition, teachers rarely made use of the school library which had easily available resources especially the encyclopaedias, which had more information than the textbooks. There was little to suggest that both old and newer RE teachers looked elsewhere other than the RE students' textbooks for more information in order to confirm and strengthen what the students' textbooks presented. The RE teachers viewed textbooks as sources that could cover every religion that they wanted to teach about, and to their disappointment the textbooks did not. In addition, some of the suggested activities in the textbooks were not appropriate for the skills and knowledge described in the syllabus document.

Furthermore, the RE teachers did not explore the possibility, for example, of developing a bank of resources by downloading from the internet information that they could either directly use or modify for use in their RE classes. In both schools, RE teachers had access to resources such as internet where they could retrieve information especially on some of the religions that had inadequate information as presented in the textbooks, yet they rarely made use of this facility. Furthermore, RE teachers did not listen to CDs, watch DVDs and even record some programmes from the television as part of the resources.

The RE textbooks that were being used were elaborate in some religions and not on others. The authors may be doing this not necessarily that these religions are less complex but because writers had easy access to information on those religions that they wrote about. The RE teachers taught what was presented in the students' textbooks as the only facts and truths, while not using other sources, including the students' knowledge and experiences. The teachers did not view educational tours and inviting resource persons as resources that could help their students to pass examinations.

Lastly, there are RE teachers who sit on some committees such as the Book Review Committee, Examination Committee and the RE Panel or Task Force and are in most cases updated on many curricular issues. These teachers have specialist knowledge largely because they have access to information by virtue of them being members of these committees, hence they can be resource persons for their fellow teachers. However, this is not the case because there is no arrangement where their expertise can be tapped by being used as resource persons to disseminate information to their colleagues.

## 6.6 How teachers view the students' diverse backgrounds

The RE teachers made little attempt to acquire the knowledge of students' backgrounds, skills and interest, hence that information was missing in their planning and in their teaching. While it would be expected that in a multi-faith RE curriculum, during the learning process, students should bring along their experiences to the learning environment, that was not the case as teachers did not use the students' experiences and depended instead on what was mainly in the textbooks. Teachers did not use students' experiences as a resource, for example, in relation to their religious affiliation or lack of it. By not making use of the students' personal knowledge and experiences, teachers did not acknowledge the importance of the students' background. Furthermore, the teachers rarely asked questions in examinations, tests and quizzes that drew from students' knowledge and experiences. Teachers were not sensitive to issues of diversity because they did not entertain the belief systems of the students or even lack of them.

Students' knowledge was accepted only in as far as brainstorming in a new topic or issue was concerned. The students revealed that though they were expected and asked to use their knowledge and experiences, they were in most cases usually marked down when they brought in their knowledge and experiences, because teachers wanted them to use the material that was in the textbooks. From what I observed in the classes, students' experiences and knowledge were not readily applied in tests and examinations while diversity on religions was mainly about diversity within Christianity. Since students' experiences were not exploited in the classrooms it was not easy for a multi-faith RE curriculum to have promoted tolerance and respect for persons because teachers did not view students' as a unique and valuable teaching and learning resource. If teachers cannot acknowledge students' knowledge and experiences, that could lead to lack of enthusiasm in learning, because students may think that both their knowledge and experiences are worthless.

## 6.7 Recommendations

Religious Education teachers should be provided with more opportunities to receive professional development, and the training of teachers should be a process that has to occur over an extended period of time. The in-service professional development of teachers, need to be encouraged, by being spearheaded by the Department of Teacher Training and Development of the Ministry of Education. This department needs to have a particularly clear policy for both pre-service and in-service training of teachers regarding their professional development. This is important to note because teachers need to keep current with change since students are constantly evolving and also because pedagogical resources and even techniques can quickly become outdated. Of significance is that, RE teachers like other teachers are normally expected to do a variety of things at the same time whilst engaged in the teaching activity. For example, they need to know how to deal with different students – moving between the social and the academic daily in their classrooms.

The professional development of teachers has to connect the teachers' existing knowledge with the current one by reflecting on their beliefs, teaching practices and the relationship between their beliefs and the new curriculum. In their professional development, RE teachers should be treated as important stakeholders and not as passive consumers of pre-packaged knowledge from either the reform initiators or researchers. The RE teachers' expertise and craft knowledge has to be recognised, while Examination Officers at ERTD should be able to offer expert advice to teachers in order for the teachers to test the multi-faith RE curriculum more effectively. ERTD has to mount some in-service workshops on assessment, for both the Education Officers in the inspectorate and their teachers so that all the three parties work from a common ground regarding assessment issues as a measure against accusations between different parties.

Religious Education teachers need professional training regarding how they can use assessment in order to plan and design for future lessons. Teachers need to make students aware that as they progress in their studies they accumulate more knowledge than when they first went into a secondary school, and that whatever grades they get will tie to the knowledge they gained. In addition, RE teachers need to indicate marks against questions in tests and quizzes given to students because this would give both teachers and the students an idea about the weight of a question. Equally important is that the ERTD has

to be transparent and be able to inform both the RE teachers and the Education Officers, especially in the inspectorate in terms of how final grades are arrived at.

Collaboration is needed on an occasion of reform because it is one way teachers shape their professional development. This is important because working together may provide active learning opportunities for RE teachers so that they take responsibility of their own learning as well as their professional development through sharing teaching techniques strategies and experiences. Collaboration is one way of developing a professional community that responds to and explores common issues in teaching. Furthermore, such practice can help RE teachers to continually reflect on their practices to see to it that they are in tune with innovations as well as in deepening their knowledge. This has to be done because, there are times when teachers are so preoccupied with their students that they forget that they too need to consult other teachers as a way of learning, and if they do not collaborate, they end up tackling classroom issues alone.

There is need to develop a sustainable partnership between RE teachers and curriculum designers. It is only in partnership that the expertise of curriculum implementers has to be appreciated and where classroom RE teachers can view themselves as invaluable contributors in the education system. There is also a need for constant contact, monitoring and exchange of views between education officers and RE teachers. Furthermore, the study recommends that there be coordination, collaboration and clear channels of communication within the Ministry of Education Departments especially teacher training, secondary, curriculum and examination departments.

Even though the multi-faith RE curriculum has its basis in a liberal form of education, it can also be transformed so that it becomes more relevant by using critical pedagogy which draws heavily from various traditions especially critical theory. It is in the use of critical pedagogy that teachers will be aware of the importance and relevance of students' backgrounds in terms of their knowledge and experiences. Teachers need to know and understand the diversity of their students in terms of language, ethnicity and economy because it is through this knowledge that teachers can understand their students' realities. Teachers need to have room in their space to learn about their students' backgrounds because good teachers are of necessity good learners. It is therefore necessary that teachers should acknowledge and use the students' knowledge and experiences where

possible in their teaching. This strategy could be impressed upon teachers especially during their pre-service and in-service professional development.

It is significant that teachers should be constantly focused, hence the need for them to have lesson plans so that their classroom teaching is well coordinated. This does not mean that they have to be dogmatic in their use of the lesson plans because they can still be flexible.

RE teacher preparation curriculum should be designed to ensure that new teachers have the conceptual knowledge, skills and understanding of RE as a body of knowledge. Teachers in the field should be helped to have strong planning skills to enable them to arrange and align appropriate goals, methods and assessment in their plans. There is need to equip RE teachers with skills as to how they can best use and combine multiple sources of materials to support their students' learning, rather than relying on only one type of resource. For example, RE teachers must be able to collect, organise and use materials from a variety of sources, including community resources in the curriculum.

### **6.8 Implications on policy formulation, curriculum and further research**

Several recommendations are made that are commensurate with a multi-faith RE curriculum, and one of the suggestions is that more quantitative and qualitative studies need to be carried out in order to understand how RE teachers interpret a multi-faith RE curriculum. For example, in terms of how RE teachers can succeed in promoting the ideals of liberalism, such as instilling a sense of tolerance, unity, democracy, freedom, self-reflection and respect for people..

Understanding how RE teachers use a multi-faith RE curriculum is an issue of importance for RE educators and researchers in general. This research will be an addition to an already existing pool of data that emphasises teachers' understanding of the curriculum by elaborating the knowledge that teachers bring to bear when they interpret a curriculum. Effective interpretation of a curriculum involves the consideration of students and teachers as well as curricular materials. The extent to which multi-faith RE teachers have or have not enabled their students to stand outside their own cultural beliefs and certainties or lack of them, need to be further investigated. This involves how RE

teachers enable their students to alter their personalities so that they have new social experiences.

There is also need for research on how the RE curriculum reform emotionally affects RE teachers in terms of how they accept, modify or reject it. In addition, a new curriculum should allow teachers adequate time to communicate with each other, and also communicate with students in a meaningful way. There has to be time provided to give teachers and students opportunities to be thoughtful and reflective as they interpret the curriculum.

Further research should aim at investigating how multi-faith RE teachers should shed off their preconceived biases so that they are ready to learn and teach diverse groups of students. Research has to find out if by emphasising some religions, RE teachers are not colluding with and inadvertently promoting the interests of particular dominant groups. Research has to further find out the extent to which multi-faith RE teachers understand the role of the school in terms of knowledge and power, that is, how the school enables students to question how knowledge is produced and distributed.

Lastly, while there have been voices calling for a multi-faith curriculum at primary school level so that there is continuity, I suggest that in its present form it cannot be introduced at that level because it is premised on high order cognitive thinking which pupils at this level are likely not to have achieved.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I discussed how the multi-faith RE curriculum is interpreted by RE teachers, indicating that there is little collaboration, first among RE teachers within a school and secondly across schools. I also indicated that Education Officers do not collaborate with each other and with RE teachers. RE like most subjects on the Botswana education curriculum is examination-oriented, hence renders teachers to teach for examinations, a practice which is mainly meant for short term understanding. In addition, even though there are several resources that teachers have access to, RE teachers mainly depend on students' textbooks which do not have guides to accompany them. The RE teachers rarely use students' background in terms of the knowledge and experience.