

The Development of Religious Education Curriculum and Impact on Moral Values in Botswana Since 1966

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Abstract

This article examines the changes that have taken place in the teaching and the curriculum of Religious Education (RE) in Botswana from 1966 to today. It demonstrates that the teaching of the subject in the country's primary and secondary schools has contributed to the development of social values and moral standards in the learners. We also observe that the ecumenical teaching approach has influenced the learners to be tolerant to people holding divergent views. The article does not only offer background material for understanding how religion influenced the past, but also how it continues to contribute to the society today.

Introduction

This article discusses the developments that have taken place in the teaching of RE from 1966 to the present day. It argues that these developments have been influenced by a wide range of factors which are socio-economic and educational in nature. What is evident is that the teaching of the RE curriculum in Botswana's schools has contributed to the development of children's social values and moral standards. The article also shows that for Africans religion occupies a central place in the development of a balanced school-going youth. The children are taught the importance of religious tolerance. In recognition of this fundamental value that could be derived from having religion as a school subject, the 1993 Kedikilwe Commission on Education, placed religion together with science and other subjects classified as a scarce skill in Category 1 (Republic of Botswana 1993). Theoretically, this was an important development in as far as training and the status of RE in schools was concerned. The decision was reached by the commission after a series of consultations with teachers, parents and other stakeholders. The report shows that the majority of the population increasingly believed that the societal challenges facing the young people could be addressed by the teaching of religion in schools. The high rates of moral decay, HIV and AIDS infection, and alcohol and drug abuse among young people were all causing much concern (Nkomazana 2007).

The article, therefore, provides some historical development before independence. It does this by examining the indigenous, Christian and multi-faith approaches to the teaching of the subject.

Before we discuss the historical development of RE, its different stages and impact on the Botswana society, we present the religious landscape of Botswana to help the reader appreciate the factors that have contributed to the development of the different phases of the RE curriculum in Botswana. Before doing this, we briefly examine the important role that was seen to be played by the teaching of RE.

The Role of Religious Education in the Society

From the time of Independence to the present RE has played a crucial role in the life of the society. Right from the onset, the appropriateness of RE in the school curriculum was seen as resulting from the fact that it was constitutionally permissible, and educationally sound and sensitive to the beliefs of the students and parents. Over the years the curriculum has grown significantly to emphasize the importance of tolerance, respect and accommodation of other people's views and faiths (Republic of Botswana 1994).

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Another very important factor in the development of RE is closely associated with the Report of the 1993 Kedikilwe Commission on Education already mentioned above, which led to the introduction of a multi-faith-based curriculum. The report held the view that the children's education is not complete without a comparative study of religion, as well as the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. The RE curriculum introduced as part of the implementation of the report certainly shows that religion is worthy of study for its uniting, ethical, moral and historic qualities. It does this by including the teaching of the beliefs and practices of different religions, which have contributed to helping young people appreciate the role of religion in the past and contemporary society. The religious themes within such subjects as music, art and literature, show how interested and closely related the purpose of religion is to the needs of the society. It shows the extent to which religion is propelled into a position of public responsibility even by other subjects.

This also shows that Botswana society is very much interested in the functions of religion. As such Botswana will always turn to religion in matters such as death and witchcraft among others, and see religion as playing an important role in the society. Describing religion as 'The Soul of the Bantu', William Charles Willoughby, who was an agent of the London Missionary Society (LMS), has for instance, observed that 'Bantu life is basically religious... Religion so pervades the life of the people that it regulates their doing and governs their leisure to an extent that it is hard for Europeans to imagine' (Willoughby 1928:1). According to Willoughby, religion is always with people at every stage of life. The entire life cycle revolved around the religious aspect. This view is further supported by Bolaji Idowu, who observed that 'Religion has always served a purpose – a purpose which belongs to the very fabric of life itself – and this is a fact of history as of experience' (Idowu 1973:1). Religion was, therefore, central to every sphere of human activity from time immemorial (Gelfand 1954 and Mackenzie 1871). A genuine educational curriculum for the school could, therefore, be incomplete without religion as a subject. This is so because religion possesses a wealth of beliefs and practices, which were closely associated with ancestors of the Botswana and with Africans generally. In this context Idowu (1973:3) has further pointed out that:

Religion always served a societal purpose.

Religion belonged to the fabric of the people's life.

No aspect of African life escaped the influence of religion.

Religion compelled every member of the community to conform to its ideals.

Religion held the whole society together, so that life was considered to be one invisible whole, with no divisions between the sacred and the secular.

Religion was also pivotal to all traditional governmental structures (Moffat 1842; Livingstone 1857 and Mackenzie 1871). Moffat, Livingstone and Mackenzie were LMS missionaries working among the Botswana in the nineteenth century. All the factors mentioned by these missionaries and Idowu point to the importance of religion and to the reasons why it must be incorporated into Botswana's school system. It is critical that from a tender age learners are exposed or introduced to religious issues as they are, for instance, to mathematics and history. In fact, RE has been an important component of the history of the Botswana's education system from the pre-Independence period to today.

The curriculum developers in Botswana saw the teaching of RE to be important for the society and its children. This article, therefore, argues that in the face of deteriorating national values and rapid social change, both the government of Botswana the population in general saw RE as a stabilising factor that needed to be a part of the school curriculum (Republic of Botswana 1994). The RE programme in Botswana schools was seen as possessing the potential to cultivate and preserve the moral and cultural values that kept Botswana communities proud, united and healthy in the past. Furthermore, the programme

has the potential to reinforce the Botswana's collective identity based on shared values and a respect for cultural differences, differing views and religious beliefs as stated in the country's long-term 'Vision 2016' document (Republic of Botswana 1997).

Religion and Population Demography

This section is important because it shows how the indigenous religions of Botswana, which were practiced by the majority of the people before Independence, have greatly declined. We demonstrate how the indigenous religions, due to their accommodating nature, always welcomed other religions that afterwards worked hard to eliminate the former. We also show how Christianity, which has grown to be the leading form of religion, has also interacted and co-existed with different religions over the last 50 years. The available statistics (Amanze 1994) indicate that Botswana is a pluralistic community, hence the curriculum developers saw the need for the teaching of a multi-faith RE curriculum. Despite Christianity being the most dominant religion, characterized by various denominations of mainline, Pentecostal and African Independent Churches (AICs) the indigenous religion is still the most common and populous (Nkomazana 2001). However, in recent years there has been a decline in the number of traditional religious adherents, due to the growth of Christianity, other world religions and the impact of modernity.

Botswana has a total population of approximately two million people (Statistics Botswana 2014). 79.1% of the country's citizens identify themselves as Christians while about 20% of the other citizens adhere to traditional indigenous religions or other religions or no religion (Statistics Botswana 2014). As Lovemore Togarasei observes elsewhere in this collection, in recent years a number of churches from other parts of Africa with a Pentecostal-charismatic blend of Christianity and traditional indigenous religions were formed and draw good crowds. Indigenous religions are estimated at 4.1% while other religions (Bahai Faith, Hindu, Islam and Rastafarian) constitute approximately 1.4 % (Statistics Botswana 2014). Statistics from other sources also show that from the time of Independence in 1966 there has been a decline in the number of adherents of Traditional Religion due to the growth of Christianity and the other world religions as well as the impact of modernity. Christianity in its various forms has at different levels interacted with these various religions and ideologies for many years now. The indigenous religions of Botswana have always welcomed other religions and it has, in fact, always appreciated different styles of worship (Amanze 2000). Another observation to make is that after 50 years the majority of people in the rural areas are still predominately indigenous in their beliefs or characterized by an indigenous type of Christianity while urban areas tend to be largely Christian.

Religion and the Botswana's Constitution

One of the important factors that supported the idea of the teaching of RE was the new Constitution of Botswana adopted at Independence in 1966. The constitution encouraged dialogue between the different religions. It specifically protected the rights of all citizens to have a religion of their choice as it states that:

Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of conscience, and for the purposes of this section the said freedom includes freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance' (Republic of Botswana 1966).

Botswana's policy on religious freedom can, therefore, be better understood in the context of the country's history, culture and tradition. Although the Botswana's Traditional Religion dominated the life of their communities for centuries, it always accommodated and accepted new faiths that offered challeng-

es in both cultural and theological terms. This was even to the extent of having the people's culture and tradition destroyed by the new religions. The indigenous religious authorities did very little to protect what was regarded as religious public safety, order and morals in the interest of fundamental rights and freedom of other people (Amanze 2002).

It must be pointed out that the development of the inter-faith curriculum in Botswana schools was another significant example of religious tolerance and dialogue influenced by the spirit of the Constitution that promotes freedom of worship and association. We have already pointed out that the Kedikilwe Commission of 1993 recommended a strong element of tolerance through RE which took into consideration a multi-cultural approach. The taskforce that developed the National Junior Certificate Syllabus was made up of members from the Catholic Church, Pentecostal churches, AICs, African Traditional Religions (ATRs), the Bahai Faith, the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) and the Botswana Muslim Association (BMA). The multi-faith curriculum was designed in such a way that it is constitutionally permissible, educationally sound and sensitive to the beliefs of students and parents coming from different religions (Thompson and Nkomazana 1997; Nkomazana 1999; Nkomazana 2005; and Nkomazana and Thompson 2008). The curriculum stresses the importance of tolerance, respect and accommodation of other people's views and faiths. While some churches were outspoken and against such a curriculum, once it became part of the school learning materials, they allowed their children to use the materials (Amanze 1994 and 2000). Although the Muslims built their own Muslim school, AL Nur, to cater for their religious needs and where they could teach a slightly different RE syllabus, other Muslim parents decided to keep their children in the government schools. The Bahai Faith, which has been central to these developments, insisted on the need to be sensitive to the requirements of the different faith groups. Their teachings expressed the crucial concepts of peace and unity (Amanze 1994).

The RE syllabus for senior secondary schools has taken a very long time to be completed because the Catholic Church and the UCCSA have objected to the heavy content of other religious faiths in this syllabus. They appealed to the then Minister of Education and consequently came up with their own version of the syllabus. Efforts are being made to reconcile the two and present something acceptable to all parties. Despite all the challenges, the multi-faith curriculum has so far contributed towards high religious tolerance. In fact, it could be argued that there is no other subject in the school curriculum that has promoted religious tolerance as the RE Curriculum has done. RE has made deliberate decisions and efforts to accommodate all the religions in Botswana (Interview with Reverend Obed Kealotswe 7 July 2010).

To further understand the religious developments that have taken place in the last 50 years, this article will also examine the rise of ecumenical bodies in Botswana and the role they play in uniting the society.

Developments of Ecumenical Bodies

The role played by ecumenism –an effort aimed at uniting Christians throughout the country– was another important factor to the development of RE in Botswana. The most important aspects of the inter-and-intra religious relations that took place during the period after Independence were the establishments of ecumenical movements and umbrella organisations, that have played a leading role in creating forums of understanding, mutual respect and tolerance (Nkomazana and Lanner 2007). The post-Independence period began to be characterized by the consciousness among Christians that the best way to solve the problems faced by churches in the contemporary Botswana, was by working together (Amanze 2002). This involved consultations and co-operation with one another in missions. This awareness has been the driving force towards the formation of these organisations, with the primary objective of enhancing the spirit of ecumenism among different churches in Botswana (Nkomazana 2007). These organisations adopted a common mission to promote unity among the different churches in the country. They also aimed at bringing

co-operation and unity in addressing issues of national interest in the context of religion, politics and social issues. In the past, doctrinal differences had contributed towards divisions and polarisation of churches. The emergence of Pentecostal and AICs in the 1960s was characterized by persecution by mission churches. This compelled the AICs and Pentecostal churches to co-operate in order to survive (Nkomazana and Lanner 2007).

Therefore, the period from 1966 onwards led to the origin and the formation of the ecumenical movement, which resulted in different denominations working together in great unity and cooperation. This gave rise to the emergence of several ecumenical bodies such as the Botswana Council of Churches (BCC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Botswana (EFB), the Organisation of African Independent Churches (OAIC) and the Ministers Fraternal (MF). The development of these ecumenical bodies has also contributed to the effort of presenting the church as a united force in addressing national issues (Amanze 1994; Amanze 1997 and Parsons 1999). This shaped the environment for the teaching of RE that is accommodating and tolerant. The ecumenical leaders contributed through their participation in the development of the curriculum.

Vision 2016

Another important national project that came to the fore and promoted unity of the religious groups was the national 'Vision 2016', which is a long-term project of the government of Botswana which was launched by President Quett Masire in 1997. It aimed among other things to assist reinforce a national collective identity based upon shared values and respect for ethnic or cultural differences, differing views and religious beliefs. Religious groups have been given the responsibility to work on a pillar called 'Building a Moral and Tolerant Nation' (Republic of Botswana 1997), with the task force drawn from different ecumenical bodies and religious groupings, and from other walks of life.

The workshops and conferences contributed to the promotion of morality and tolerance and also continued to strengthen the idea of developing a curriculum that is accommodating to all members of the society. Members of the taskforce were drawn from the Pentecostals, who are represented by the EFB, the Bahai Faith, ATRs, BCC and other ecumenical organisations that are members; and the OAIC. The workshops and conferences contributed to the promotion of morality and tolerance. This also re-kindled the spirit of religious dialogue and multi-faith education in the country (Kealotswe 2007).

Historical Development of the Teaching of RE in Schools

The development of the teaching of RE in schools among Botswana took place in three major stages namely the pre-colonial stage, the missionary stage and the present day stage, which came with the concept of a multi-religious approach curriculum in schools. These stages are discussed in this section with the missionary and post-Independence stage combined.

The pre-colonial or traditional education stage

The teaching of RE to Botswana children dates back to the pre-colonial period. It was through informal and formal education that young people were taught by their parents and elders in the community. The first formal and informal instructions presented to children were to do with proper behaviour, respect and submission to authority in general. These values were not only an expectation, but obligatory for all young people. The broad terminology underlying these fundamental values and moral standards can be summarized by the word *botho* (Mgadla 1998).

It was upon the concept of *botho* that the life and aspirations of the community rested. It is on the premises of this understanding that 'Vision 2016' challenged the nation to revive the concept of *botho* and

incorporate it into the education system, the economic and social systems as well as other development projects and programmes. Discussing the pillar with the heading 'Building A Moral and Tolerant Society' Vision 2016 states that 'We must build *botho* into a national principle. *Botho* must be central to education, to home and community life, to the workplace, and to national policy. Religious organizations must be assisted to play a full part in imparting a sound moral and human rights education in schools, and in the community' (Republic of Botswana 1997:20).

Botho remained the central theme of the traditional *bogwera* and *bojale* curriculum with religion functioning as a school subject based upon oral instruction. RE is today expected to achieve the same goals (Nkomazana 2006). It must be noted, therefore, that the pre-colonial education largely aimed at strengthening the norms and values of the society, which were principally religious in nature and practice. This type of education made specific emphasis on character formation.

Missionary period to the early 1980s

The pre-colonial education was in the mid-1950s weakened and/or in some cases replaced by the missionary form of education (Mgadla 1989 and Mgadla 2004). The aim of the missionary education was closely associated with the missionary objectives, which basically aimed at propagating Christianity in order to convert Batswana to the faith. Right from the onset missionaries from 1841 onwards held biased attitudes and values towards the local people, especially those who did not embrace their religion (Moffat 1841). They considered their own European cultural values to be superior to those of the indigenous people (Moffat 1842 and Mackenzie 1871). It was for this reason that they regarded the educational systems of the Batswana as heathenic, barbaric and backward. Quoting the historian AJ Dachs, a historian of Botswana, Part Mgadla observes that:

In Christian Faith Mackenzie saw a means to God so that his entire life was transformed. The heathen was to be converted in his beliefs and customs, industry was to be encouraged, education fostered, and a new society created and western civilization established. Change was to be profound, but it was also to be peaceful and beneficial to the eyes of the Victorian Englishmen confident in their industrial and commercial wealth and their technological supremacy (Mgadla 1989:80).

Bible reading, evangelisation and the training of school teachers, who also happened to be evangelists, was the main purpose for educating the Batswana. Missionaries, therefore, saw religion to be the pillar for education. Extracts for reading and writing lessons, teaching on morality and other subjects were drawn from the Bible. Missionaries came with this approach in order to kill two birds with one stone (Mgadla 1989).

The purpose of both traditional and missionary education was to develop the whole life of an individual. It also equipped learners to contribute to the society. The traditional forms on education saw tolerance and compassion, which are also emphasized by the country's education policies and 'Vision 2016' as crucial components of education. The missionary education, however, was anti-religious pluralism or multi-faith approach (Moffat 1842).

In the 1970s, while the approach in the teaching of RE changed slightly, the use of the Bible remained key. The Bible knowledge programme focusing on major themes such as Jesus' life and ministry, continued to be taught in schools like Seepapitso Secondary School, Moeding College and Mater Spei, until the mid-1980s (Campbell 1986). The programme was blamed for indoctrination, because most teachers lacked training in comparative religions, philosophy and ethics. However, the programme was life-oriented and emphasized fundamental values of *botho*, such as respect, unity, co-operation, self-reliance and tolerance (Chapman 1985).

The Religious and Moral Education Curriculum

The Bible knowledge-based curriculum continued until the 1980s when it was replaced by the Religious and Moral Education Curriculum, which basically aimed at imparting desired moral values for everyday living and for the development of learners, who were to be responsible members of a plural society. The junior certificate programme was known as *Developing in Christ*, which was a life-centred and Bible-based RE programme.

The programme was built around life, using the life of young students as a starting point. The materials were designed in such a way that they enabled students to talk of their life experiences, especially significant ones, and to discover the religious meaning of these experiences. It encouraged students to realize that human and everyday experiences belonged to the content of religious education (Chapman 1985).

The *Developing in Christ* Programme contained the Religious and Moral Education Course for junior secondary schools. The course was presented in two teachers' guides and two content books accompanied by the following student life-centred workbooks:

1. Christ and my personal freedom
2. Christ and my work and relationships
3. Christ and my power to live
4. My responsibility in community
5. My search for values
6. My response to values

Having examined the various programmes, we conclude that *The Developing in Christ* Programme has been the most relevant, and contextual RE programme for the Botswana schools. It imparted into the students the necessary values that produced independent and responsible members of the community. It also introduced students to important values of tolerance of other religions and the emphasis on life experiences, such as personal freedom, relationships, power to live, responsibility in community, values and roles in society. The methodology of the *Developing in Christ* Programme followed three important stages, namely:

The centrality of Jesus Christ in the study of RE was emphasized and taken as the starting point in the learning experiences of young people.

The life experience of the student –moving from the known to the unknown was seen as a fundamental principle of educating the young. Learning started from students' own experiences, then move to the experiences of those around them, their culture and the wisdom of their forefathers. This helps them to realize that God was calling them within their own time, place and circumstances.

The country and African life situations –The life-situation with specific examples from their schools, towns and Africa is emphasized. *Developing in Christ* was offered as a school subject within the local and African contexts. Another important point is that the *Developing in Christ* Programme was designed to meet the needs of African school going children from different Christian ecumenical backgrounds –the Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals and AICs. It aimed at communicating the core Christian message, thus avoiding divisive elements. It also aimed at educating students within their denominational traditions with emphasis on issues that strengthened and united the Body of Christ (Chapman 1985:7-8.)

Christian Living Today Programme

The RE programme for senior schools was known as the Christian Living Today. It followed the same approach as the Developing in Christ Programme discussed above. The methodology was also life-centred but with topics discussed through the following cycle of five key themes:

1. Present situation
2. African tradition
3. Church history
4. The Bible
5. Synthesis/analysis

The programme introduced the learners to four important categories of African life and experience by drawing examples from the family, society, church, African tradition, church history and the Bible. Through this programme, learners were presented with the rich political, economic, religious and social experiences and values of their past and present community as well as those of first African people to convert to Christianity. The Christian Living Today was made up of the following five themes:

Man in a changing society with three major sub-topics: living, working and leisure in a changing society. The central message here is that change is inevitable and thus a way of life. Learners were encouraged not only to accept change, but also to prepare and empower themselves, through education, training, exposure and experiences of their communities. The programme, in many ways, prepared learners for the global world which was becoming smaller, dynamic and interdependent. The socio-political/economic forces of the western world were imposing their standards and expectations on Africa in an unprecedented manner. Learners were therefore made to understand that it was time for change.

Order and freedom in society also has three important sub-themes: justice, service and loyalty in society. Order, freedom, justice, loyalty and service were seen as critical for national stability, development and democracy.

Life –deals with three sub-themes: happiness, unending life and success. The subject of life, its meaning, sustenance and the whole concept of *botho* were critical to the development of learners.

Man and woman –discusses matters of family life, sex differences, courtship and marriage, empowered learners for practical life. The expectations of the community are clearly defined and communicated to learners.

Man's response to God through faith and love, covers the sub-themes: man's quest for God, man's evasion of God and Christian involvement in the world. The key message imparted to learners here is that religious experiences of people should inspire them to serve their community (Chapman 1981).

As the methodology summarized above shows, the Christian Living Today was broad based and contextual programme in the way it addressed issues. It drew examples from the contemporary society, tradition, history and from the Bible. Finally, at the synthesis stage and as a way of conclusion, it equipped and trained the learner to draw lessons, implications and analysis from each topic. This stage challenged the learner to re-examine issues learned and apply them to their lives, family, church and society.

The Multi-faith Curriculum Approach

In the 1990s teachers who had studied world religions began to challenge the relevance of teaching a Christian-based RE curriculum in public schools. This led to a syllabus review, which coincided with the Kedikilwe Commission of 1993, the result of which was the introduction of a multi-faith RE programme in the junior secondary schools in 1996. As indicated above, the Roman Catholic Church and the UCCSA strongly opposed the new syllabus. They complained to the Minister of Education and managed to stall the process of finalising the multi-faith syllabus for senior schools. At the moment there are two draft syllabi, one drafted by the government curriculum taskforce and another by the team of church representatives from the above-mentioned churches (Interview with Boitumelo Gaseitsewe 10 October 1996).

It must also be mentioned that the Kedikilwe Commission strongly recommended the separation of Moral Education and RE, which had from the 1980s been taught as one subject. The commission recommended that RE be taught as a multi-religious programme, while the Moral Education taught as a different subject from RE. It was hoped that the introduction of the multi-religious education curriculum in schools would influence the way young people lived. It was expected that different religious traditions would contribute towards producing a responsible, morally upright, committed and hard-working society. Both the government and parents were concerned about the level of morality in schools, and hoped that the teaching of RE would impart positive religious values that would help in moulding children's behaviour and reduce the escalating teenage pregnancy (Mmolai and Gaie 2009; Molosiwa and Moswela 2012). The multi-religious approach like the Bible knowledge curriculum introduced by missionaries and continued by the government with the support of Christian churches after Independence, aimed at inculcating morals and values. The only major difference between the two programmes was that the current curriculum has brought in the multi-faith approach.

Major Themes of RE Curriculum in Primary and Secondary Schools

The analysis of the primary and secondary schools RE materials and curriculum reveals that the subject aims at developing moral values and social cultural identity, self-esteem, good citizenship and desirable work ethic (Republic of Botswana 1977 and Republic of Botswana 1994). Despite the weight that is given to the subject in terms of what it is expected to achieve as far as imparting moral values are concerned, and the significant contribution in promoting these values and qualities, it is taught as an optional subject at the junior secondary school level. At both the primary and senior secondary schools it is taught as an enrichment subject. Enrichment subjects refer to 'general skills development courses, small entry subjects and non-examinable subjects' (Ministry of Education 1998:9) its role and impact in schools is, therefore, seriously undermined by this arrangement. The primary school syllabus, which is also multi-faith based and inclined, covers the following themes:

1. Human experiences: culture and HIV and AIDS, morals within the traditional society, law, crime and punishment, caring for others and choices and consequences.
2. Key religious elements: festivals, worship and rites of passage.
3. Religious Laws.
4. Rights and responsibilities: children, women and animal rights (Nkomazana *et al* 2008:187-203)

The junior secondary school syllabus, which laid a foundation for the junior certificate programme, covers the following topics:

1. Introduction to Religion: What is religion? Characteristics of religion and Origins of religions
2. Origin of the universe and humankind: myths of creation and African ideas of God.

3. Religious practices and ceremonies: festivals and rites of passage.
4. Basic beliefs, teachings, intermediaries and sacred literature and objects
5. Respect for life: abortion, murder, suicide and substance abuse
6. Family life: marriage, divorce, sex and sexuality, contraception
7. Others include HIV and AIDS, freedom and justice, human rights, capital punishment, authority, loyalty and friendship (Nkomazana 1999:110-123)

Both the primary and secondary school syllabi require that these themes be dealt with from a multi-faith approach. In each case examples are drawn from different religious traditions such as Islam, ATRs, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and the Bahai Faith. The discussion of family issues, for instance, shows that different religions are expected to produce children or future parents that will contribute towards the establishment of upright, strong and moral families. From the 1970s onwards, the rate of teenage pregnancy that also resulted in high school dropouts of school going girls worried both the government and parents. This worsened the problem of unemployment due to rural – urban migration (Curry 1987:71-87).

As part of an effort to strengthen the family, the multi-faith programme covered topics such as family and community life, single parents, marital values, questions of virginity, divorce, homosexuality and HIV and AIDS.

The question of human rights, crime, violence and punishment are particularly very interesting subjects, especially the discussions on children's rights and abuse including the role of different interest groups, such as religions, government and non-governmental organisations. As indicated above, the importance of caring, compassion, tolerance in the light of 'Vision 2016' advocates for a moral and tolerant nation. Issues of gender, discrimination, justice, freedom, dishonesty, corruption, violence and tolerance are also crucial aspects of the school curriculum. Respect for life is another important topic of the RE curriculum that contributes towards influencing the society. It includes topics such as abortion, murder, suicide and substance abuse. From the late 1990s there was a rise in ritual murders and the so-called passion killings in Botswana. Different religions were expected to respond to these challenges through the RE programmes.

The Relevance and Influence of RE

Two issues are consistently being asked about the role of RE, being its relevance and influence. This is the central question that academics and educators have for many years been battling with at conferences and forums dealing with the teaching of RE. The answer is obviously yes. What we need to underline is that even where religion seems to be losing impact, it is evidently far from losing relevance. Opinion about religion may be changing rapidly and dramatically, but the sense that it remains relevant to contemporary problems has been remarkably constant for many years. In recent years there has been a surge of opinion that religion is losing influence. The coming of 'modernity', gave the impression that religion's influence in Botswana was in a downswing or losing ground (Nkomazana and Lanner 2007).

The growth of science and technology has deliberately pushed religion to the margins in the school curriculum at the primary, secondary and tertiary level. The majority of young adults have been influenced to believe that religion was waning rapidly. Nevertheless, the sentiments tends to change rapidly when we talk to those young people who have been exposed to RE in schools. Despite all this, both the government and the people of Botswana have in the last 50 years argued for the inclusion of the teaching of religion in schools, because religion is believed to be essential to understanding both the nation and the world. Omission of facts about religion can give students the false impression that the religious life of humankind is insignificant or unimportant. Failure to understand even the basic symbols, practices and concepts of the

various religions makes much of history, literature, art and contemporary life unintelligible. It is for this reason that it will be a mistake to think that we can as a nation do without the teaching of RE in our schools.

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that the study on religions is also important if students are to value religious liberty and tolerance. Moreover, knowledge of the role of religion in the past and present promotes cross-cultural understanding essential to democracy and world peace.

Another very important point is that religion is more than just a belief in a deity but a philosophy and way of life. It can define who one is, how they view the world around them and how they interact with it.

One of the most relevant points, already emphasized above is that the teaching about religions relate to the teaching of values, which is important for maintenance and transmission of moral and ethical standards. It makes students aware of the civic duty and self-reliance. The multi-faith RE curriculum recognises that there are basic moral values that are recognised by the population at large; such as honesty, integrity, justice, compassion and others. These values can be taught in classes through discussion, by example and by carrying out school, community and national policies. However, teachers should not invoke religious authority.

What is important is that in teaching the various religious and non-religious perspectives concerning the many complex moral issues confronting the society, perspectives ought to be presented without adopting, sponsoring or denigrating one view against another. The teacher of RE must be balanced, informed and tolerant of views he/she does not personally subscribe to.

Conclusion

It should be pointed out that the teaching of RE to Botswana has always been part of their education system. It was inseparable from their formal and informal education and immensely contributed to the quality of people's lives. RE is about everyday life and draws its examples from everyday life experiences. The subject has also immensely contributed to the prevention of drug abuse in our schools and community. It creates a positive social environment for our youthful populations. Furthermore, RE, more than any other school subject provides the educator with great opportunity to infuse issues of HIV and AIDS into the school curriculum. It focuses on social, moral and ethical issues of diverse kinds. It is about decision making. Religion permeates the whole of human life. There are no human relationships that have no moral and religious implications. RE demonstrates the inseparability between religion and culture. This is why the RE programme agrees with the country's national 'Vision 2016' that the concept of *botho* (personhood) should be the most acceptable development paradigm. Being human is being morally upright. Hence the adoption of *botho* as one of the central pillars of Botswana society makes sense. It supports what RE has been all about all these years.

In support of the 'Vision 2016' pillar that calls for a moral and tolerant nation, the RE system stresses the value of a multi-cultural society. Botswana must rediscover a collective identity based upon shared values and a respect for ethnic or cultural differences, or differing views or religious beliefs.

Teaching RE is teaching students to engage in the process of developing relationships that are relevant to life. It is about critical values of honesty, tolerance among others. It is also worrisome that studies (Nthoi 2001) suggest that Africans are increasingly less tolerant of the religious views of others while being less likely to compromise when their religious views are at stake.

Religion has always played a significant role in shaping society. The nation's religious heritage, including its pluralism, remains deeply intertwined with Botswana culture and identity. In recent years, however, the public voice of religious views has declined even as the nation's religious diversity has increased. In this context, maintaining a pluralistic democracy after 50 years of Independence demands a

corresponding advance in our citizens' capacity to understand religious differences in order to maintain the ability and willingness to engage across differences of belief for the common good.

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