Religious and Human Rights Literacy as Prerequisite for Interreligious Education

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Introduction

Secularisation and social construct of societies today have a direct influence on the position of interreligious teaching and learning. In some countries people tend to become less religious and others more fundamentalistic in nature. People simultaneously are more aware of democratic and human rights in general and of their individual rights (based on their cultural, religious and belief systems) in particular (cf. Ter Haar, 2007). Religions and beliefs have become polarised in many regions in the world due to international political, economical and social circumstances. Xenophobic attacks on foreigners in many countries raise questions on individuals' behaviour towards one another, be it political and/or economic refugees. The main question to be asked is, Can education on human rights issues – be it intercultural and/or interreligious – contribute to a better understanding of oneself and of the world the learner is living in? Ter Haar argues in his chapter 'Rats, cockroaches and other people like us' that during the twentieth century human rights issues have been largely a 'matter of legislation' (Runzo et al., 2007, p. 80). He recognised that theologians and scholars of religion recently added their voices to these debates. However, one should question how scholars in education could add another dimension to the arguments on human rights, religions, cultures and interreligious education. I would like to argue that education, especially in religion education, should propose educational arguments for human rights literacy and use the means to a more balanced view of teaching and learning interreligious education.

I would like to focus on three aspects in this chapter:

- the interplay between human rights praxis and academic enquiry;
- the contextualisation of these issues for teaching and learning in 'Religious Literacy' and 'Human Rights Literacy';

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- a short report on a research project (2004–2008) in South Africa with in-service teachers and student teachers on the process and development of facilitation dialogue strategies in school praxis on human rights in interreligious education.

The Interplay Between Human Rights Praxis and Academic Enquiry

World events change all the time, from the freedom of oppression in South Africa, Eastern Europe and other countries in the world to the events of 9/11 in the USA and the effects thereafter in North America, Europe and the Middle East. Violence towards and alienation of immigrants is an emerging issue which starts to engulf the societal make-up of the African continent, especially in economically deprived environments. The reason might be that the importance of ethnicity, religions and cultures was not understood by its conquerors during colonisation and in some instances also not by its 'democratic leaders' in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

News on Afghanistan, Iraqi, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other war-torn countries and regions brings inhumane practices, suffering and poverty, from Africa to Asia, from the East to the West, from Europe to the Americas, into our homes. The rise of fundamentalism (be it cultural, ethnic or religious) in different parts of the world urges us to re-evaluate and reflect on our educational stances for the benefit and sustainability of education as an *education of hope*, as Paolo Freire (1998) describes it in his book *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

The question I would like to put is whether interreligious education in schools can really contribute to an education of hope where the next generation of teachers and children will be able to learn from each other and from the mistakes of previous generations? One should take cognisance of developments of social orders and interpretations of the function of societies, for example cosmopolitanism, with the notion that all humanity belongs to the same moral community, sharing basic values and norms (Booth and Dunn, 1999, p. 61). In South Africa one should also critique replacements or new introductions in educational systems due to the fact that these systems are not necessarily better opportunities for the social construct of a particular society in general and for Religion Education in particular (Roux, 2007c). The transformative democracy, with an emphasis of unity in diversity, and the introduction and the persistent redefining of Outcomes-based Education (OBE) in South Africa are examples of a continuous transformation of the social construct.

My contribution to the debates on interreligious education and human rights will be the notion that hermeneutical and religious literacy are prerequisites for religious teaching and learning in social contexts (interreligious education) and the understanding of human rights education. Arguments regarding the relationship between self-understanding of religion and interreligious education today are important, especially in countries and societies where rapid political and social

transformations are continuously influencing the social construct. These notions also influence the understanding of a multireligious and multicultural society as well as schools' teaching and learning environments.

Understanding One's Own and the Other

In many publications on understanding *the other* scholars have given philosophical, theoretical arguments and empirical analyses of the need to understand individuals who differ from one's religious, cultural and ethnic background (Du Preez, 2008; Levinas, 2006; Roux, 2007c). This understanding of *the other* seems to be more important when teachers as agents need to facilitate interreligious education, world-views and values, and where there should be a deliberate openness and sincerity to diversity and the plural make-up of students in their classrooms.

According to Knitter (2002, p. 6) in his book *Theologies of Religions* it is practically human to learn about *the other* and, therefore, important that one has to implicate the *significant other* culturally, religiously and socially. However, I would like to argue that it is not a natural process to learn about *the other* in a rapidly changing society, where diversity in all different aspects of life and in society has been politicised in the past, and where perceptions prevail that it is continuing to do so in the present. The social context plays such an important role in understanding and knowing about *the other*. Knitter's argument (2002, p. 5), that the *many religions* are a newly experienced reality, through television programmes, new immigrants, new neighbours, visits to local bookstores and dialogue, does not reflect all multireligious and multicultural societies, and should be questioned.

One wants to acknowledge the argument of Knitter (2002, p. 5) that the 'religious life of mankind from now on, if it is to be lived at all, will be lived in a context of religious pluralism . . .' and thus should be understood as a universal phenomenon. A creative process should thus be initiated in order to understand and to be involved in *the other* as part of a diverse cultural and religious society. This process of understanding *the other* has also the potential for interpretations and perceptions to fluctuate continuously. This fluctuation of one's own and *the other* can also influence the self-identity of the teacher in interreligious teaching and learning. In studies (Jarvis, 2008; Roux, 2007c) the self-identity of the teacher seemed to be under pressure when entering a religion education environment at schools that differ from their own understanding of teaching and learning about religions. The notion of the basic human right of religious freedom (as protected in the SA Constitution 1997) is not constituted in the teachers' understanding of religion in education. According to Jarvis's study '. . . teachers' religious identity affected their whole outlook on their teaching context, influencing everything they thought, said or felt' (Jarvis, 2008, p. 177). Jarvis further explored the fact that the teachers, who did not adhere to the majority religion in the schools, were victims of discrimination regarding their so-called *lack of virtues*. This study emphasised that these teachers had no other choice, but to identify themselves in terms of religious identity

categories (*cf*. Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Jenkins, 1996) with emotional significance attached to their religious memberships.

Knitter (2002) further wrote that '(T)he world religions are confronting each other as never before, and they are experiencing a new sense of identity and purpose because they, like atoms and humans and cultures, are sensing the possibilities of a more pervasive unity through better relationships with each other' (p. 10). This argument might be applicable in environments where academics and scholars in Religious Studies and interreligious education are engaging with one another in order to enhance their students' understanding of religious diversity. However, can this notion also be applicable to every diverse education environment? Students in Religion Studies, according to Knitter (2002, p. 5), increasingly feel that they have to be intact and firm in their own religion and, therefore, they have to be acquainted with others. I argue that hermeneutical and religious literacy and the understanding of the ontological self, influences the way a person deals with the *alterity* embedded in *the other*. The focus is on the *ontological self* as determinant of the understanding of *the other*. According to Levinas (2006) 'Our relation with him (the other) certainly consists in wanting to understand him, but this relation exceeds the confines of understanding. . . . To understand a person is already to speak to him' (p. 5).

However, I would like to argue that this situation can only be valid if students in interreligious education understand their own theology, ontology and identity as part of their social construct. This notion is also compelling to teachers in interreligious education. The argument I want to pose is that first understanding *one's self* might contribute to understanding *the other*.

The Classroom as a Meeting Space?

Responsible classroom spaces are needed as starting points for constructing and understanding diversity, otherness and equality in religions regarding different world-views, belief systems and values. However, what will happen when the teacher is not within his/her own inner space and does not buy into a process of reconstructing his/her perceptions and world-view or religious understanding of *the other*. Teachers' biographical context and understanding of their social identity becomes more and more important as it influences and shapes their understanding of religion education (Jarvis, 2008; Roux, 2007c), as does the school context. Jarvis's study showed that school principals and teachers, whilst paying lip-service to the importance of the basic right of religious freedom in schools, were in fact unable, in praxis, to articulate a substantial understanding of religious freedom, as expected by the SA Constitution, and more specifically, as embedded in the *SA Policy on Religion and Education* (2003) and the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (2001). It is thus very difficult to provide a sustainable environment and a classroom space as a safeguard for teachers as agents, and learners as participants of interreligious teaching and learning.

Skeie (2006) states that the classroom should be the meeting place of two cultures as well as a place for negotiation and education regarding religious and non-religious life interpretations. He argues further that religious education is not only a place to learn about religious differences, but also to work with 'concepts used to capture what religions and religiosity is' (p. 97). A meeting place should be on equal grounds when mutual understanding and respect, either for *the other*, or for one's self, and understanding should be the outcome of this meeting. When a captured audience (like learners in a classroom) in the meeting space and teachers' social construct is not within the expected paradigm, can understanding of *the other* really occur? As researchers we can argue that modern and traditional approaches in teaching and learning interreligious education within the context of social constructivism should try to merge a *sense* of understanding in order to enhance the *processes* of understanding *the other*. Research has shown (Roux, 2007c; Jarvis, 2008) that the social identity of the teachers from so-called mono-cultural environments (religious or culturally) in multicultural societies, influences the *meeting space* in the classroom and determines the outcome of the religious and value construct. This means that every curriculum designed for diversity and inclusivity in religion or values education has to take cognisance of the social construct of the teacher as the interpreter of the curriculum, the particular content and the learners as participants in this construct.

Skeie (2006) also states that '(i)n religious education we need concepts about people's religious and non-religious life interpretations, the way they understand themselves and the way they want to present themselves with others' (p. 97). This stance should be the ideal, and many of us are striving through teaching and learning in pre-service teacher education to become agents of good teaching and to generate an awareness of the social construct in schools' classroom praxis. The question however is, can we as researchers in interreligious education assume that teachers in religion education understand themselves and that they are in a position 'to present themselves with others'?

There is a tension between teachers as agents of interreligious teaching and learning and as representatives of their own life stances in an educational and multireligious environment. This tension is also compelling with teachers' interpretations of interreligious content and human rights in diverse contexts (Roux, 2007c). I argue that to overcome this tension and become the *rational* agent with reflection on the classroom interaction in all the activities, including understanding *the other* (students and contexts) is a hermeneutical process. The teacher interprets the interreligious content and the social context of *the other* in the context of his/her own understanding of the context.

According to Atkinson (2004) teachers' interpretations of the value of the 'meeting space' (classroom) are complex. Teachers' reflection on classroom practice involves 'reflection on the self in action in terms of interrogation of one's beliefs, attitudes, assumptions prejudices and suppositions that inform teaching' (p. 380). Teachers should be the guardians of their classrooms as meeting spaces where understanding of diversity and inclusivity as well as teaching and learning should take place. This can then also constitute the teacher as a reflexive practitioner and be

defined as 'a double hermeneutic process' (Atkinson, 2004, p. 380; Du Preez, 2008). The complexity of teachers' self-understanding of their own theology, their identity as well as inner and peripheral influences on their social construct will shape their hermeneutical framework and their own progress of religious literacy. If teachers develop a hermeneutical literacy it might also have the propensity to contribute and enhance valuable notions for religious literacy. These literacy processes will influence their teaching and learning strategies and their learners could develop the same capability dealing with understanding 'otherness'.

The Contextualisation of Religious Literacy and Human Rights Literacy

Hermeneutical Literacy and Social Construct Curriculum Development

Berling, in Pollefeyt (2008) states: 'Human understanding is always shaped by the interpreters' location and experience, which may be quite different from the location and the experience she(he) seeks to understand' (p. 26). He further argues that those experiences and issues that constitute or shape our past play a vital role in understanding other religions. Berling (2007, p. 27) constitutes different principles to understand the 'entering of other religious worlds' and argues that a course or programme on other religions should stretch and challenge the ways in which learners think and only then will the 'otherness' or the 'differences' of the religions properly being introduced. I would like to argue that hermeneutical and religious literacy are key elements in social construct curriculum development as well as interreligious teaching and learning. It should also manifest in the development of human rights literacy[1].

Hermeneutics has become more and more essential to bridge the gap between religious traditions and the social constructs of contemporary societies and religion education. This is even more important in interreligious teaching and learning with a changing social construct that continuously influences perceptions (Roux, 2007c). Hermeneutics is not merely the method of interpretation and understanding, but also an attempt to describe and explain the circumstances within which understanding must be able to take place (Gadamer, 1975; Roux, 2007c). The object of the *otherness* of the text (in this case interreligious teaching and learning curricula) must appeal to the interpreter (teacher or learner) in order for understanding to be possible. Understanding of the other is, therefore, a dynamic process, and thus interpretations and individuals' perceptions can and will fluctuate continuously. The interpretation of the *action*, in other words how text/content/links are interpreted and

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[1]*Human rights literacy* constitutes the understanding of the processes and implications of human rights in social contexts.

then applied by the authors and the readers (*cf.* Roux, 2007c), can also be translated to the interaction between the *I and the other*.

This argument has a direct influence on the handling of interreligious teaching and learning within a social construct such as in a diverse educational environment and/or classroom. Learners and teachers are constantly involved in dealing interactively with the content and text that they interpret from their own and others' perspectives. The action (*praxis*) that they apply in whatever way in the teaching and learning environment thus becomes a direct product of a hermeneutical exercise. Hermeneutics teaches us to begin with the *I* and the ontological understanding of the *I* before I/we engage with *the other*. The teacher must provide the learner with the opportunity to understand and interpret the *otherness* (alterity) and in so doing try to change his/her prejudices to a richer and more developed understanding of *the others'* issues and problems. An attempt must be made to change concepts from learners' own notions of religion into opportunities for understanding firstly one's *own* and then the so-called *unknown* religious contents. This constitutes *hermeneutic literacy*.

Hermeneutic literacy becomes an important denominator and significant tool for teachers' training in interreligious education. It has the propensity within a context of changing social constructs to support teachers in their interpretation of curricula and promote reflexivity on their praxis. Research in educational change in a multireligious and multicultural society in South Africa (Roux, 1999; Ferguson & Roux, 2003a; 2003b; 2004; Roux, 2005; Roux & Du Preez, 2006, Roux, 2007c; 2007d) underpins the argument that hermeneutics in religion teaching and learning, from the perspective of social constructivism, provides relevant discourses for hermeneutical debates in interreligious education.

Social construct curriculum development (Gergen & Gergen, 2003) provides a foundation for this hermeneutical approach that is in line with interreligious learning, exploring one's own religions/religiosity and discovering aspects of the religions of others. With this hermeneutical approach teachers and learners have a direct influence on religious environments beyond the formal educational context and in the broad society within which the educational community functions. The educational function of revealing the truth and taking a position in order that the audience (in this case the learner) can understand and learn about it can be defined as the development of hermeneutical literacy of teachers, and should also be explored by the learners. A social construct curriculum development for interreligious learning provides a space for a new approach towards religious literacy which is founded in human rights literacy.

Research by McKenna, Ipgrave, and Jackson (2008) on learners' capacity for dialogue and to voice their understandings through e-mails on their daily lives and religious backgrounds gives valuable insights in understanding *the other*. The question, however, is: Was understanding *the other* done with reference to the *I* (me)? This further constitutes my line of reasoning that the social construct will influence the learners' hermeneutical literacy. The difference between rural and metropolitan communities, especially in developing countries, and the availability for interaction with, for example, technology by these different communities, will further influence

their approaches (hermeneutically) in understanding *the other*, be it culturally and/or religiously.

Religious Literacy

In literature it seems that the concept *religious literacy* does not have a monomorphic meaning and is defined according to the purpose of the context. I argue that religious literacy can be described as *the ability to develop a self-identification (the self) and to communicate with understanding with/or about world opinions (the other)*. Therefore, the hermeneutical must attempt to make sense of the content and explain the interaction between the past and the present concept of *understanding*. Communication must eventually become dialogue (Du Preez, 2008) where I situated my critical approach within a specific context, for example how I express myself; how I analyse the events or context; and whether I am critical of the influence of diversity of religions, world opinions and globalisation on my direct religious, social and living environment.

In our debates on interreligious learning in contemporary times, we may renounce any idea of affecting young people for or against a particular religious commitment. Religious education seems to be safe with this notion of religious literacy as an apparently innocent aim. In education systems, for example the South African model, the underlying principles and outcomes are knowledge, skills and values, which are imbedded in understanding the *I* and *the other*. Religious literacy requires thus processes of religious conscience in order to participate with *understanding* in discourses of diverse religious and social environments. I would further like to argue that understanding is always an interpretative process and one's own preconceptions and prejudices influence these interpretations (Gadamer, 1975; Roux, 2007c). Therefore, the art of understanding lies in the object of the *otherness* (alterity) that must appeal to us in order for understanding to be possible.

Roebben (2004, p. 204) stated that religious literacy is based on two components, namely the hermeneutical and the communicative. However, I want to challenge the idea that only these two notions should be taken into consideration. The importance and influences of social contexts and environments constitute a social construct curriculum development process as well as praxis in interreligious learning. These influences and demarcations are not necessarily taken into consideration in interreligious teaching and learning when approached only as hermeneutical and communicative.

I have evaluated a few Hollywood films on their stories and interpretations on religious diversity, interactions and humaneness. The Hollywood film *Not Without My Daughter* is a good example of the struggle between recouping one's religious identify and literacy, but negates the understanding of *the other*. In most of these stories on religious diversity examples are given on the influences of social construct and religious experiences and deconstructing *me and the other*. These images from films, for most regular movie-goers, can become integral parts of their (learners') experiences of the social construct, broad social environments and education

(*schooling)* for life and will influence their perceptions on dealing with religious issues within social contexts. The impact and influence of the social construct and environment on the development of interreligious teaching and learning compel teachers to *deconstruct* constructed, intrinsic, religious knowledge. This enables a *reconstruction* (within the social construct) of the relationship between the interpretation and meaning of the knowledge or content (hermeneutics) in order to attempt to understand diversity and inclusivity within the complexity of the social educational environment. The notion of how praxis entails the critical actions and decisions by responsible individuals (teachers) and the responsibility of the whole community to reach a common outcome is fully described in Roux (2007c). Learners should opt for the opportunity to integrate their religious praxis and opinions, and surround their own life philosophy with the social context of *the other*.

Human Rights Literacy and Interreligious Teaching and Learning

Most democratic states function from within a humanist frame of reference (collective or particularist) and determine the social construct of the society and the handling of ethnic, culturally and religious diversity. I would like to argue that different interpretations of secularisation, which also has a social impact on understanding religions, can bridge the gap between persons, groupings, social and educational environments. To redefine the role of interreligious education and human rights with a *pedagogy of hope* as Paolo Freire (1998) explained, one could argue that interreligious education should be conceptualised and reflect on its contribution to human rights education and literacy.

The question, however, is through which medium interreligious teaching and learning will be able to function more positively in an ever-growing and in a less politicised manner, but yet within the social construct. Many authors (*cf.* Runzo et al., 2007; Osler & Starkey, 1996; Gearon, 2004; Davies, 2000; De Tavarnier & Pollefyet, 1998) debated human rights education and the interrelationship with religion and/or citizenship. My argument regarding introducing interreligious teaching and learning through the means of human rights education stems from the notion that in a diverse environment a common denominator (a human right) might overcome differences skewed by previous political dispensations with a history of violating human rights.

Gearon (2004, p. viii) argues that human rights are universal constructs and emphasises the international significance of human rights in education. Citizenship education seems to be the logical vehicle for introducing human rights with social responsibilities into education (i.e. schools). Arguments for or against the two notions on human rights being universal and/or particular are frequently being placed as opposites of one another (Gearon, 2002; Coates, 2002; Du Preez, 2008). The argument for or against universalisms or particularism will not be discussed (cf. Gearon, 2002; Du Preez, 2008). However, I will argue that I am not in favour of the bifurcation of the universalist and the particularist paradigm. My reason is that the ontology of *human rights literacy* and developing an understanding of the *I* and *the*

other merge these two notions as processes in human rights education. There are human rights issues which are universal and can be, as such, morally bound to international declarations and constitutions and applicable to all humans. On the other hand, there are also particularistic understandings to human rights issues and people respond differently in their cultural and/or religious communities and environments to these issues. By saying this one can argue that knowledge about human rights can be relative and seems to be particularist. However, it is not an excuse to abuse any universal human rights in the name of a specific cultural or religious praxis. The moral underpinning in understanding human rights and human rights values (Du Preez, 2005; 2007; 2008; Roux, et al., 2006) is a crucial element of human rights literacy. This should be upheld in any teaching and learning environment on human rights and religious and cultural diversity and inclusivity.

According to Ter Haar (2007, p. 82) there is no common moral language for all humanity. He further states that '(T)he central paradox here is that achieving such a goal requires the prior development of an indigenous human rights language within the various moral traditions'. It is in this regard that Du Preez (2008, p. 85) also argues for a moral underpinning in understanding human rights education. She further argues that in separating human rights from its 'moral significance' in human rights education will also be detrimental for dialoguing and infusing a culture of human rights in classroom settings in particular. Du Preez (2008, p. 105) recognised the importance and role of 'ethical communities' in classrooms. However, the fixed knowledge of a contextualised community on moral issues in human rights might 'undermine the vibrancy and intellectual sobriety needed to sustain a vigorous ethical community', thus arguing that knowledge is relative (Du Preez, 2008, p. 105).

The *South African Constitution and Bill of Rights* (1996) and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), together with the latter's support by many countries, provide a medium to approach religious diversity from a human rights perspective and principles. It also facilitates religious diversity in educational environments from that perspective. Individual rights and the rights of cultural minorities are imbedded in the SA Constitution. On the other hand, the liberal discourses in education failed to generate the development of individuals teachers' voices and/or ethical communities in classroom praxis (Du Preez, 2008; Jarvis, 2008). The exploration of human rights literacy as an important underpinning of interreligious teaching and learning (Roux, Du Preez, & Ferguson, 2009) reflects also the arguments constituting hermeneutic and religious literacy as underlying principles for human rights literacy. See graphical representation of arguments.

A further aspect in education as a whole is the growing number of non-religious learners and learners in educational environments, which compels a renewed critical reflection and secular understanding of their belief systems and values within the diverse social and economic environments. The growing number of non-religious learners cannot be alienated for the sake of the concept of religious diversity and inclusivity, and it can be argued that basic rights of association and cultural and religious freedom of individuals and groups must be protected and supported. This ambivalence is a challenge and a sensitisation to protect individual and
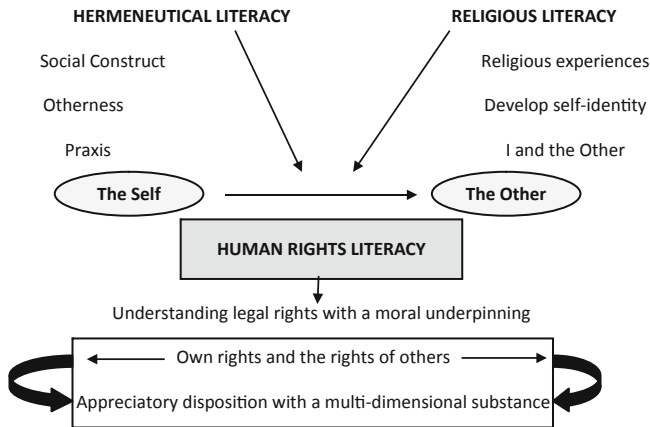
HERMENEUTICAL LITERACY   **RELIGIOUS LITERACY**

Social Construct   Religious experiences

Otherness   Develop self-identity

Praxis   I and the Other

[The Self] ———————————> [The Other]

[HUMAN RIGHTS LITERACY]

Understanding legal rights with a moral underpinning

<——— Own rights and the rights of others ———>

Appreciatory disposition with a multi-dimensional substance

Fig. 1 Graphic representation to illustrate arguments on human rights literacy and religious literacy

communal rights at all costs. Educational environments are forced to enter into these debates of human and religious rights, underscored with a moral obligation, in interreligious teaching and learning, and to research this terrain so that dialogue and discourse between world opinions, religions and cultures can be promoted.

The Research Project: 2005–2008

Understanding Human Rights Through Different Belief Systems: Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

The impact of teachers' teaching a culture of human rights through intercultural and interreligious dialogue across different social and cultural settings in South African schools should be placed against the backdrop of the understanding of human rights and the development thereof in the South African context. My contribution will not concentrate on the legality of children's rights or human rights in society or schools. I have already discussed and emphasised the contribution of human rights literacy as prerequisite with a discourse of a moral code attached to human rights. South Africa's human rights were articulated in the education realm through the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (2001), a support document to the National Curriculum in schools. The understanding of the shared and collective human rights is derived from the South African Constitution (1996) and should be infused into teaching and learning from primary to tertiary level. It is envisaged that all teaching and learning activities should be rooted in the *Manifesto's* democratic values. These values are democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, human dignity, an open society, accountability/responsibility, rule of law, respect and reconciliation (Manifesto, 2001). The document also strongly refers to the interpretation of interreligious education and promotes dialogue in classroom

praxis. The theoretical and philosophical underpinning of dialogue as facilitation strategy in human rights education will not be outlined in this chapter (*cf.* du Preez, 2007; 2008).[2]

The identification of the research project has been underscored by different research studies since 2004 (Roux et al., 2005; 2006; 2009), as well as the lack of sustainable human rights education in whole school environments. It supports the need for research on the comprehension of transformative curriculum development aimed at learners, as the principal recipients of human rights education. Further the collaboration between human rights praxis and academic enquiry and the contextualisation of these issues for teaching and learning in 'religious literacy' and 'human rights literacy' were important theoretical underpinnings for interreligious teaching and learning. Colleagues and students of various South African Universities participated in an international research project and forum where religious, cultural and human rights literacy represented a new dimension within the educational context.

This section will present a short report on the description and evaluation of the process and development of facilitating dialogue strategies in school praxis on human rights and interreligious education (South African Netherlands Project on Alternative Development [SANPAD]). The research project 2005–2008 involved one University of the Netherlands; four South African Universities; 357 student teachers and 50 in-service teachers.

The Aim of the Project

The main aim of the 4-year-project was *to explore the impact on teachers' teaching of a culture of human rights through intercultural and interreligious dialogue*. The research focus is ethnographic and qualitative in nature (*cf.* Hammersley, 1990, pp. 1–3, 25; McCutcheon, 1999), and theoretical notions with evaluative elements for programme evaluation and participatory action research guide it. The project had two subprojects (in-service teachers and pre-service teachers [students]). Three universities took part in the pre-service research and the fourth university commenced with the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) for in-service teachers[3]. The scope of the research included educators in two sectors: pre-service student teachers and in-service teachers (ACE students) (2005, 2006), and a phase of dissemination of results amongst educators as *communities of practice* and the development

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[2]*Understanding religious education through human rights values in a world of difference* (C. Roux, P. du Preez, & R. Ferguson), in *Religious Education in a World of Difference* (Eds. Prof. Siebren Miedema & Wilma Meijer, 2009), reports substantially on the participating action research initiative in the pre-service training programmes, during the first phase of the project (2005).

[3]In the questionnaires the ACE students (in-service teachers) reflected on their experiences in their teaching classes separately. The feedback on this part of the project took a different stance as it was impossible to draw a comparison between in-service teachers and student teachers.

of a professional programme in human rights education. The reason for including educators in these particular sectors of education in South Africa was to engage all who are involved in teaching and learning about human rights and interreligious education and for them to become informed by way of the research process. At the end of every year a workshop was held to reflect on the previous year's results and to plan the next year's approach. These workshops were attended by all the researchers and students. The international collaborator and two critical independent referees (a researcher in Interreligious Education and a professor in Law specialising in Children's' Rights), gave valuable inputs and influenced the dissemination process for the last phase in 2008. These results of the project thus far, and the feedback on the importance of the dissemination processes, ended in extra funding from the sponsor for dissemination processes in 2008.

The following research questions were put: (i) Are teachers in the South African school community capable of facilitating human rights issues across the school curriculum in multicultural and multireligious school settings and (ii) What type of dialogical strategies should be implemented in order to be successful?

Research objectives were identified as

- a critical and comparative review of existing literature in this field of study, focussing on ambiguities in terminology
- a critical review on literature regarding dialogical theories and strategies in ethnographic environments and research terrains
- to identify and analyse the curricula of identified service providers on human rights issues and different belief systems
- to explore the perceptions of the selected groups of teachers (pre-service and in-service) involved in facilitation strategies
- to describe and evaluate the process and development of dialogue as facilitation strategy by the service providers
- to describe and evaluate the process and development of dialogue as facilitation strategy across the curriculum and, in some instances, in Life Orientation programmes (where interreligious education is taught)
- to define a framework and guidelines for dialogue strategies for service providers and teachers through the process of participatory action.

The Process of Project Development

In October 2004 a start-up workshop was held at which the project was discussed in detail and the researchers' and students' different participation and research domains were defined. This process was very important as the working schedule and timetables as well as the theoretical underpinning of the management processes had been discussed. One of the most important aspects was the defining of the constituencies of the team members regarding the understanding of multiculturalism

and their personal position in the research team (Roux, 2007d). An issue being indentified at the start-up workshop was the understanding of different cultural environments at tertiary institutions that may cause imbalances in teacher training. The problem being identified is that these imbalances cannot enhance or develop all the different aspects of diversity and inclusivity in education. Another reason for the collaboration of the five tertiary institutions was to conceptualise theories and to identify practical implications applicable to teacher training in a multicultural society and to enhance human rights across the curriculum in school environments. The short report and feedback in this chapter will highlight the role which human rights in interreligious education played and will not argue for the notion of human rights across the curriculum as outlined in the first research question of the project.

The First Phase (2005)

In the first phase of the project, the three universities responsible for pre-service teachers (third and fourth year students) took the lead. Data was collected using two empirical methods, namely, a qualitative questionnaire implemented to determine student teachers' understanding of human rights in relation to religious and cultural diversity, and reflective journals which students used and in which they reflected on their teaching practices in schools.

It was necessary to determine in the questionnaires whether the students had any understanding of the concepts 'human rights', 'interreligious' and 'intercultural', given the significant role that interreligious and intercultural dialogue would play in designing appropriate teaching and learning strategies to facilitate the infusion of human rights in classroom practice. The questionnaire was designed to determine the students' initial level of understanding of human rights and the extent to which they could establish a relationship between knowing about and understanding religious diversity and human rights and values. It was important to establish what the students understood about the various concepts before they could be guided towards the idea that interreligious education could serve as a vehicle for teaching and learning about human rights values.

The reflective journals (Morrison, 2000) were used to detect, first, whether human rights are infused integrated into the classroom by teachers in general; second, if human rights are infused across the curriculum; and third as a means of reflection by pre-service teachers on their lessons presented on human rights in interreligious education. During the first phase the students involved in the project were all enrolled in a module at the three universities on Religion Studies (multireligion and interreligious education). The connection between human rights, human rights values and different religions and belief systems was an integral part of the module. Students participated in designing and commenting on content knowledge and their hermeneutical understanding of content, context and interpretations thereof.

Short Analyses of the Questionnaires and Reflective Journals

Student responses to the questionnaire indicated that they were well-informed regarding human rights in general and human rights violations in particular, especially in cases where students' own rights had been directly infringed upon. The students were also positive regarding the facilitation of human rights in interreligious education, provided they were assisted in gaining the knowledge and skills to do so. Almost all of the respondents were able to provide good examples of facilitative strategies for investigating human rights and values in the classroom despite suggestions of being inadequately prepared to do so. Although the respondents were not always able to articulate human rights and values in relation to religious diversity, the theoretical clarification informed the development of strategies for coping with interreligious education in practice.

The analyses of the reflective journals indicated an alarming matter that most of the teachers in classes had ignored – human rights as an important aspect in teaching and learning. Students detected that special moments prevailed in the classes and gave teachers the opportunity to react and/or to introduce dialogue on human rights. It became clear that students' own strategies used to facilitate human rights should further be broadened in order to understand religious and cultural differences.

The Second Phase (2006)

In the second phase, the researchers did a follow-up of the pre-service students in their fourth academic year, during their school practices as well as with beginner in-service teachers. The main aim during the second phase was to observe students in their school practice, to give them the chance reflect critically on their teaching and learning, interpret interreligious content and critique their acquired knowledge (*cf.* Hornberg, 2002).

Students completed questionnaires on *explaining academic content and concepts acquired during their third year*. They received refresher courses where they were exposed to the key aspects of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, human rights and values in the context of various belief systems. Students were also required to write reflective notes on their experiences in school practices in relation to the new content they received. Various schools (interreligious, intercultural, rural and metropolitan as well as different economic environments) were visited and lessons observed. The reason for the follow-up exercise was mainly to determine whether students, after a year of initially being exposed to the relevant content, were adequately prepared to deal with human rights values where the diversity of religions and cultures are being taught. Each student was given a schedule. All students received a copy of the observation form, a form of consent regarding ethical issues concerning the taking of photographs during their lessons and recording individual interviews after the lessons.

An Example of the Integration of Human Rights and Interreligious Learning

A short feedback on the observations and interviews will be given to illustrate the process of exploring whether students could integrate human rights issues into interreligious learning (2007). The originality of interview was upheld.

Context

The context was an English-medium, co-educational, suburban, independent, working class, under-resourced secondary school. The school was relatively new and situated in two prefabricated buildings. The school had a small number of learners, with potential for growth. Learners with learning problems were readily accepted and because of the small class sizes, the success rate with these learners had been very high. The school had a Christian ethos,[4] but both the staff and learner component were multireligious with Christianity, Traditional African Religion, Buddhism and atheism, amongst others, represented. The school had children from different ethnic communities.

Teaching and Learning – Content

The student started in a controversial manner by asking the learners if they had heard about South Africa's new *one child policy*. Learners had to pretend that they were at a dinner party and each given a role and had to respond to this new *one child policy*. Their perspective should be whether they were for or against the policy. The following scenarios were given and the roles introduced different perspectives from different cultures and religions.

Scenarios

(a) You are an orthodox Catholic who is a devout follower of Pope Benedict XVI who does not condone the use of condoms. You believe that making use of contraceptives is against the will of God.

(b) You are a traditional Zulu in whose culture children represent wealth. Whilst you need a boy to carry on the family name, daughters bring in 'lobola'.[5]

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[4]Many public schools in South Africa have so-called Christian Ethos. This means that the governing body of the school has the power to determine the value system of the school.

[5]*Lobola* is a traditional custom in some ethnic South African communities where the son-in-law and his family pay a dowry to the father of the bride.

(c) You and your partner are a childless couple who wish to adopt children, as you believe that there are already too many unwanted children in the world.

(d) You are a Hindu and in your culture family is very important. The relationship between siblings is very important. Also, children are expected to look after their parents in later life.

(e) You are a modern career woman who has no desire to have children. You know from your advanced education that the world is already too overpopulated.

(f) You are a doctor who frequently has to treat abused children, who are unwanted by their parents.

(g) You are a Muslim patriarch who needs sons to look after the family businesses when you are too old. In your eyes, women cannot suitably fill this role.

The following human rights were addressed directly and indirectly in the way in which the lesson was presented

Democracy: the class decided democratically on boundaries so that respect would be shown and the consequences be upheld if it was not adhered to rule of law. The student used a system of yellow and red cards to enforce the democratically established boundaries. She created an 'Open society', an environment in which there was free discussion without fear, nipping any disrespect by means of stereotyping.

Interview with Student

The student said that although the class were responsive they usually participated even more. She felt at ease with the class and felt that the lesson outcomes had been achieved. The composition of the class was multireligious and consisted of Christians (i.e. two denominations – Catholic and Latter Day Saints), Buddhists, African Religion and atheists. The student indicated that although different worldviews or belief systems were represented in the class the learners respected one another and during her practice no occurrences of conflict happened during class discussions.

Analysis of the Researcher

The lesson helped learners to understand the complexity of overpopulation and measures taken to deal with the issue. Learners looked at the death rate caused by euthanasia, war and HIV Aids. An increase in population numbers, because of immigration and refugees, was also discussed, as well as the moral implications associated with some of the above issues.

The student coped very well with handling issues related to human rights in the classroom. She used class discussion and interreligious dialogue with a connection between human rights and religion. Issues related to human rights were consciously prepared for and well-executed. The student could have also mentioned abortion, as

this was a very important human rights issue as well as being in some instances a fundamental religious value.

Comments of Project Leader

The remarks of the researcher brought the possibility to take the teaching and learning experience to a higher level. The student should be able to understand the religious and cultural contexts, convey her/his own religious literacy and verbalise human rights literacy to the effect of different religions' values and fundamentals. This next level of teaching and learning could help the student to instigate inter-religious dialogue on human rights issues as outlined in the Bill of Rights (1997) and Manifesto (2001). The question I put was: Did the student suppress dialogue so that there was no conflict, or could she bring a new dimension to the chosen human rights issues? Dialogue on identified issues in the Manifesto (2001), for example, on over population, abortion, euthanasia, HIV and Aids and other fundamental issues on human life could be taken from the points of view of different religions.

Interviews with Beginner In-Service Teachers

Beginner in-service teachers (first year as professionals) who were students in 2005 were also visited and interviewed. The reason was mainly to explore the beginner-teachers' ability to cope in real professional circumstances and their approach after their professional training of 4 years. School visits were conducted during the first and second semester of the year. The follow up was conducted in schools in only one region and in metropolitan schools. The beginner teachers' teaching and learning were observed, written up and discussed by a senior researcher. Interviews were also conducted by an independent researcher of the project during a round trip to all the universities involved. The interviews were conducted after 8 months as 'professional' teachers in schools. The analysis of the interview (1) as presented below indicated that this young professional teacher could respond to the challenges put in his teaching and learning. In interview (2) it seemed that responses to interreligious learning and human rights were more specific.

Summary of Interview (1)

The teacher responded positively regarding human rights education. Human rights education seemed to be done in the school as a whole. He affirmed the importance of human rights, but mentioned the difficulties associated with teaching human rights in the school, which was very diverse. The teacher was not certain if the learners internalised the human rights issues although he addressed human rights in the classroom on a regular basis. He was uncertain as to how to integrate human rights

across the curriculum or whether or not his colleagues were including human rights ('I think they do, I hope they do ….'). He was quite confident that he included human rights always in his own teaching. He gave some examples when he taught about different religions ('I have a broad … a very diverse class … it is quite nice to teach about all different religions'), included human rights specifically (refers to parent's smacking their children), learners being aware of their rights and already knowing how to exploit them ('take it over the top'). It was very clear that the teacher referred to human rights education in relation to disciplinary issues ('boy's fighting', 'ill-discipline in your class') and acted as facilitator between boys in fights about ethnicity.

The teacher further explored discussions in classes by encouraging group work and setting up debates where learners argued whether human rights are necessary or not. He mentioned specific incidents regarding human rights education and spoke about interreligious education and religions in a positive way. In an assignment learners had to draw up a 'Freedom Charter' and placed it in different classrooms for everyone to see and to work with. In the explanation of these assignments he indicated that the inclusion of religions was to affirm the learners' identity. This remark links what he had been exposed to in Religious Studies and interreligious education in the modules taken during the teachers' training programme at the specific tertiary institution and as part of the project. The teacher was confident that his dealing with facts about different religions and strategies was interactive, but did not recognise the implicit way in which he had included human rights.

Summary of Interview (2)

The teacher initially indicated that human rights education was not included overtly or addressed adequately in the school. She expressed the importance and the need to address human rights because of the behaviour of the learners in the school. The teacher stressed the need to address human rights explicitly or formally because she felt that parents were failing in their duties at home.

It was interesting to note that in the rest of the interview the teacher gave interesting examples of how she and her colleagues had included material with potential for reference to human rights education by including religion in a theme and that they were in fact affirming the religious diversity of the learners.

The following examples were given

- In the Social Sciences – ancient civilisations, including their religions, medicine and religion, or apartheid and democracy.
- English – speeches on learner's own religion and rites of passage.
- Natural Sciences – evolution and beliefs in religions.

The teacher seemed to integrate human rights unknowingly simply in the nature of the contents of her lessons. She was very conscious of the need to remain 'human

rights aware' and the way in which she dealt with unfair accusations or labelling of children (the Madrasah children who left her classroom untidy). She was confident and prepared to address human rights matters in the classroom. Other than in relation to discipline, she mentioned how the use of 'current affairs to introduce human rights issues like the war in Iraq, Palestinian-Israeli conflict, war between Lebanon and Israel, etc.', explore new issues in dialogue. The language choices of words the teacher used during the interview seemed to indicate serious problems with behaviour in the specific school ('we are not animals, we don't behave like that').

Comments of the Project Leader

The two young professionals seemed to cope in diverse and difficult situations with human rights issues in their classes. However, the infusion of human rights and interreligious content (teaching and learning) did not guarantee that learners will internalise the values underpinning the content (selected by the teachers) or show respect for one another. One could also argue that it might not be the teachers' intention to do so. From the interviews one could also detect that the modules in Religious Studies on interreligious education and human rights education gave them some tools to cope with. However, the question should be asked: Did these two teachers construct knowledge and give meaning to the actions they observed or applied to develop their own theory on their praxis?

   I would like to argue that thus was not the case. Their comments indicated that one should further explore their own understanding of religious and human rights literacy in relation to their personal and professional context. Such an understanding might contribute to a broader perspective of understanding *the other* within the reference of the *I* (me) as explored in the first half of this chapter.

The Third Phase (2007)

The third phase was the first stage of the project's dissemination process with the community of practice (in-service teachers) (Wengler, 1998). The group of in-service teachers was selected in the North West Province of South Africa. The region was chosen because it was not covered by the previous empirical processes and investigations of the project. The research team wanted to explore the possibility of an *innovative curriculum and approach* in human rights with in-service teachers who never had the opportunity to be introduced to the content and teaching and learning approaches offered at that time at the universities involved in the project. The main aim was to perceive what the impact of interreligious and intercultural dialogue constituted to the infusion of a culture of human rights education. It was also important to detect if this initiative (*curriculum and approach*) could further be developed as a professional development programme for in-service teachers.

A qualitative intervention research study was undertaken from January till March 2007 in three diverse cases of in-service educators in the Mafikeng/Mmabatho area in South Africa (Du Preez, 2008). The intervention research design was chosen because it could serve as foundation for professional development programmes of in-service educators (dissemination 2008). The outcome of this process was the development of a pilot in-service professional development programme which culminated in a second funded dissemination strategy with selected schools and independent workshops in one of the provinces.

The Final Dissemination Processes (2008)

The focus in 2008 was on workshops with in-service teachers, disseminating and providing the participants with tools and materials to empower them in teaching and learning human rights in a sustainable manner. In the extended part of the research, participative intervention research, as framework for the refinement and further dissemination of the pilot professional development programme was developed (Du Preez, 2008). This research process consisted of pre-group interviews, introducing the professional development programme to selected in-service teachers, conducting post-questionnaires, unstructured group interviews and classroom observations.

The research objectives were

- to determine in-service teachers perceptions about human rights, dialogue as facilitation strategy, and working in interreligious and intercultural education settings,
- to determine how these in-service teachers assimilate the professional development programme into their practice through researching its impact by using a process-orientated participative intervention research methodology,
- to identify communities of practice, consisting of in-service teachers which could assist in identifying new challenges and processes for further research,
- to further develop and enable capacity building initiatives for post-graduate students and
- to provide more academic outputs and simultaneously to augment community interaction which is much needed to round off this research project and to set the scene for further research.

It was easy identifying schools that want to take part in the final dissemination process. However, it was also important to select schools that fit the profile of diverse cultural and religious school settings. The workshop was held in a common area at one of the tertiary institutions and six in-service teachers attended. They were from a predominately Xhosa speaking school in the Stellenbosch vicinity. The aim of the workshop was to determine the teachers' basic perceptions and experiences regarding the infusion of a human rights culture. Teachers were also exposed to a

programme (previously developed and used) about human rights and dialogue in religiously and culturally diverse settings. The entire research workshop and subsequent unstructured focus group interviews were video recorded for further analysis. Next, the programme presenter's overall feelings regarding this workshop will be provided.

Analyses of the Dissemination

The participants' basic discourse regarding human rights was very sophisticated. They had very specific ideas about the topic under discussion and demonstrated a good understanding thereof. Second, the most prominent feature of the interviews and general discussion concentrated on how teachers spontaneously started to engage in the debate of human rights being universal or particular (without using the terms as such). The following question was raised by one of the teachers: 'We should ask ourselves: what were first, human rights or culture?' The participants agreed that culture was more important and that they were the generation in which culture lost its significance in their community. They mentioned that it is their role to maintain their cultural values, but that many of these cultural values and ideas were in contradiction to human rights values and ideas. However, the teachers' discourse was characterised by inner-contradiction because they did not want to repudiate the significant role that human rights has to play in society. They indicated that human rights were more important for their learners (and children in general), whilst culture and religion were more important to them as teachers. It was argued that this notion lead to clashes between teachers and learners, and also amongst learners who grew up in the cities (townships) and those that come from the rural areas. (The former being more cosmopolitan and territorial, whilst the latter are more culturally orientated, but has to constantly attempt to fit into such cosmopolitan environment.)

Many more peripheral and important aspects derived from this research workshop, but the above notion (as described in the second point) was indicated by the research team at the most significant aspect to take to further research. A further investigation into learners' perceptions and experiences about their intercultural and interreligious relations (e.g. Xhosa-speaker learners from township and those from rural areas) seemed to be the next step in the project. There appeared to be a degree of ambivalence between teachers, who value culture and religion as important and their learners who value human rights more.

Apart from being a project funded for alternative development[6] as specified by the financial sponsor (SANPAD), there were also numerous academic outputs. The dissemination strategies and outcomes of the project were in the form of international and national papers, publications in academic journal, post-graduate studies and an applied in-service professional development programme. The project funded

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[6]The main aim of SANPAD is to sponsor research and to make a difference for development; academic outputs are also crucial for a sustainable development programme.

five MEd and two PhD students. Four MEd and one PhD student were successful in their completion of their studies at the end of 2008. One PhD student has still to finalise her studies on the ACE project.

Conclusion

The growing influence of different social orders on the social construct have a direct impact and influence on how we constitute our role as interreligious educators in classroom praxis. Should interreligious education not reconstitute its ideals to infuse a classroom with human rights in order to understand the other? In many countries and especially in developing and transformative democracies, education can become an influential tool to bring about change in understanding the other. Respect for the *I* may engender respect for the other. I believe that understanding the other is more complex in developing multicultural and multireligious societies and the challenge is to understand *the other* within the reference of the *I*.

This project tried to explore possibilities to infuse human rights and interreligious teaching and learning in such a manner that teachers might be able to engage in the complexities of human rights and interreligious education and to apply and develop their own theory on their praxis.

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