RELIGION IN EDUCATION:

PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

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Abstract

The National Policy on Religion and Education emphasised the value of recognising the diversity of belief systems in South Africa, particularly in the school system. The document focuses on the South African Constitutional values while the framework is based on the co-operative model of legal separation and the possibility of creative interaction between religion and state. In order to implement this new approach in schools, both teachers and students from diverse religions and belief systems will be required to facilitate religions, values as well as belief systems other than their own, in a professional manner. Their professional skills in facilitating different belief systems may also be vital in the successful implementation of the policy in schools. This article reports on an empirical research with pre-services teachers on the factors that influenced their perceptions on religion in schools and multireligion education, in particular during their compulsory school practices.

Key Concepts: Academic knowledge, facilitation strategies, skills, perceptions

Introduction

Prior to 1994, minority belief and value systems in education in particular, were largely ignored in South African public schools. Perceptions of South Africa being a predominantly Christian country were implicitly acknowledged in most schools, especially in so-called *Former Model C-schools*[1] and in previously Afrikaans-speaking tertiary institutions. Minimal, if any, attention was paid to the creation of policies and practices to accommodate different belief and value systems. Prior to the introduction of the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (September, 2003), there was a long and fierce public debate in the media and in education circles on the implementation of an inclusive curriculum on different religions, belief and value systems. The National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) urged all in-serve and pre-service teachers (students) in public schools, to be knowledgeable on the diversities of different cultures, religions, beliefs and value systems. In the learning area Life Orientation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (2002)[2] the assessment standards were outlined and already

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[1]   *Model C-schools* were at first schools that only white children attended. Since 1993, these schools changed their admission requirements, and are called *Former Model C-schools*. According to the School Act 1997, no child can be turned down for admission to the school of his/her choice. However the school fees of *Former Model C-schools* make it sometimes impossible for a majority of children to pay the submission fees. *Former Model C-schools* have a very good output on examination results and the teachers are well qualified. The schools are mainly situated in good middle-class and higher income suburbs and are becoming more multicultural and multireligious in recent years due to education results.

[2]   The Revised National Curriculum Statement (2002) replaced Curriculum 2005 (1997) of the Outcomes-Based Education Model, which was introduced in 1997. In these curricula Life Orientation as a learning area was

part of the entire school curriculum. Teacher training programmes at a few tertiary institutions in South Africa already incorporated modules on inclusivity and diversity of different religions, belief systems and values. Although students were knowledgeable on facilitating the outcomes and assessment standards, students were in most cases confused and frustrated on school policies regarding religion education. The majority of the schools and teachers they visited during their school practices were still working from the old mono-religious paradigm. In most cases classes were given from a confessional religion education approach, irrespective of the diversities (cultures and religions) in the classroom. From observations made during the compulsory school practices for students, it seemed that English-speaking schools and schools in multireligious environments, where about 40%-50% of the learners were from different religions, an effort was made to introduce some multireligion education content in the Life Orientation learning area as requested by Curriculum 2005 (1997) and the RNCS (2002). However, with feedback from the students, it seemed that factors emanating outside their knowledge on different religions and belief systems, influenced their perceptions and enthusiasm on religion as part of the school programme. It seemed that although third-year students completed three-quarters of the BEd-module in Religious Studies successfully, non-academic factors inflict negative perceptions on students' enthusiasm to teach the subject in their next and final school practises (fourth year) or as professional teachers when employed.

This article will demonstrate that, despite in-service teachers (students) being enrolled in Religious Studies (a module on the diversity of religions, belief and value systems) and having obtained academic knowledge, facilitation strategies and skills, their first encounter with the school environment played a vital role in their perceptions that might influence their future teaching career. The arguments will be endorsed by an empirical research done through a survey with observations during school practices, feedback-reflections (reports) and qualitative questionnaires after the students completed their school practices.

In-service Teachers (Students) and Change

Religious Studies is a fundamental subject in the BEd III (Bachelor of Education) and the National Education Certificate (NEC)-programmes for in-service teachers at the tertiary institution where the empirical research was conducted. The majority of students attending the Religious Studies module in 2003 were predominantly from different denominations and groups of Christianity, with a small number of members of other religions like Bahai, Islam and Judaism. There were during the past few years also a growing number of students, which defined themselves as non-religious, non-churchgoers, agnostics and spiritualists (students who do not relate to any religion or religious ideology).

The paradigm shift for students coming from any predominantly monoreligious and/or monocultural background from a monoreligion to a multireligion programme, is not an easy procedure. Studies have shown that if an unenthusiastic and biased school environment confronts students recently changed perceptions to this new paradigm, their perceptions might be influenced again (Roux and Steenkamp, 1995; Roux, 1996; Ferguson, 1999 and Ferguson and Roux, 2003a; 2003b; 2005).[3] These studies indicated that a well-defined structured academic module, with applicable mediation and facilitation strategies is a

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introduced and in one of the outcomes it is stated that learners should take cognisance of different cultures and religions.

[3]   *Religion and peace: the role of religious education and values* Panorama. (International Journal of Comparative Religious Education and Values) Vol 16 (Winter/Summer 2005) p. 107.

necessity to ensure that students are not alienated from the basic content required for a multireligion education programme. Another important aspect is that students need not to feel threatened while embarking on this new approach to religion education. In the outline of the module in Religious Studies in question, it was important to encourage students to explore the phenomena of religion, however; the presenter was always aware that information on different religions might inflict feelings of disillusionment (Du Preez and Roux, 2005).[4]

Since 1995 studying the diversity of religions, belief systems and values (a multireligion programme) was introduced in the BEd-programme. It was a shift away from the then Christian-based religion education content. The aim of this new approach in 1995 in the pre-service training programme was to ensure academically skilled, critically and self-thinking professional teachers that can serve any multicultural school in the then changing South African society. One can argue that those students also faced the enormous task to change their own perceptions and attitudes towards people and religions other than their own (Roux, 1996).

Students in the 1995 survey were aware that they could have an influence on the perceptions and the ethos of their learners and colleagues long before a new policy on religion in schools might be introduced. The Religious Studies module was mainly introduced to be in line with international developments in religion education, and not because of the student composition at the faculty or requirements for teaching religion in South African schools. The religion education programmes in the majority of public schools until 1997 was officially still based on Bible Education (monoreligious Christianity). Attempts and initiatives through ministerial committees in 1997 by the National Department of Education to change the religion education programmes in schools were received with hostility from many of the religious, educational and public spheres (Roux, 2001). All the uncertainty was however eliminated with the introduction of the National Policy on Religion and Education (2003).

Discussion Points to Eliminate Disillusionment for Students at the Beginning of the Religious Studies Module

In the process of facilitating the paradigm shift in the Religious Studies-module in the BEd-programme, the following points of departures are part of the first introductionary section of the module. This approach is to ensure that students have the opportunity to feel secure with their own frame of reference to present an inclusive curriculum. The subsequent points of departure are also taken into consideration during the rest of the academic year.

- The student's ability to understand his/her own religiosity and frame of reference.
- The vital understanding of different perceptions on religions in the teaching profession especially in public schools.
- The awareness of diversity, even of different denominations and groups of different religions, belief and value systems.
- The different interpretations of scriptures and narratives (sacred stories) by members of the same religion.
- The importance of ethics in the different religions and belief systems.

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[4] *Clarifying students' perceptions on different belief systems and values: prerequisite for educational praxis.* (Forthcoming publication).

- The religious development of individuals.
- The ability to adapt to change through an understanding of the context of the new paradigm.
- In order to help students to overcome possible academic problems with the Religious Studies content outlined in the curriculum, the following strategies were used as part of the dissemination process:
- Discussions on the outcomes of the whole module and its role in understanding inclusivity and diversity, the choices and the reasons for conceptualising the contents.
- Critical discussions and dissemination of important international and local research studies regarding religion education, religion in education, religious development theories and theories on the notion of a socially constructed curriculum.
- Discussions on the dissemination processes of religious content for professional school practices.
- Critical assessments of the role and responsibility towards the broader society and the school community (teachers, parents, learners). All the possible scenarios were outlined, discussed and critically evaluated.

The reflections of the students in the evaluation processes of the module at the end of each year indicated that the abovementioned dissemination processes contributed to the students understanding and reflection of the module in all its facets.

Reasons for the Commencement of the 2003 Investigation

Students are assessed every year by teachers and lecturers through observations of the lessons they have to present in schools during a three-week school practice in August. Students normally choose their main subjects, but through an agreement with the coordinator of the practical programme, students present at least one lesson in Religious Studies during their school-practice in April and August every year. The reason is twofold: First to assess the students' knowledge, teaching and facilitation skills in real-school environments; and secondly to help them to overcome their fear for presenting multireligious content in real-school situations. The latter is mainly because schools tend to distrust the new approach and agree for a student to present a multireligious lesson only when the lecturer is present. Students tend to struggle with their own perceptions and insecurity on multireligion education (Ferguson and Roux, 2003a) before they present any multireligious content. In the previous year (2002) students were reluctant to teach the multireligion curriculum (RNCS, 2002) in schools. The main reason given in their feedback reports was that most schools did not cater for a multireligion programme, despite the outcomes of the Life Orientation learning area in the RNCS (2002). The feedback reports were discussed during the first contact session after their school practices at the faculty. Students were also not allowed to present lessons on any topic consisting of diversity of the religions in South Africa. Students started to question the importance of an inclusive curriculum in the multicultural and multireligious school environment. In order to counter the abovementioned reasons and reluctance of the students to interact with the multireligious content, the investigation of 2003 was initiated during the August school practical sessions. The main reason was to further explore on the reasons provided in the students' feedback reports given in 2002. The research question was formulated as follows: *What are the factors influencing students' perceptions during their compulsory school praxis on teaching a mulitreligion programme in schools*?

It was decided to embark on an empirical research in order to get answers on the above-me praxis in a multireligious class. It was clear that many factors influenced the students' perceptions on their experiences during their educational praxis. The commitment with empirical research and participants' involvement is according to Mouton (2001) to *empower the participants.*

Studies that involve the subjects of research as an integral part of the design use mainly qualitative methods in order to gain understanding and insight into life worlds of the research participants (Mouton, 2001:150).

Mouton further defines the changing of the social conditions of the participants as an important aspect. In order to counter the conditions during the school practice that might influence their perceptions of a multireligion education programme, every student had to write a report of their personal experiences in the religion education classes. Most of the students reflected on all the religious activities in the schools during their 3-week visit.

Research Methodology

Three research methods were use to strengthen the validity of the research in question. The following procedures and methodologies were used:

- Written observations by the lecturer during the students' practical sessions in schools.
- Discussions and feedback with students after every observed lesson.
- Short reports of the students' experiences on their school practical sessions.
- A qualitative questionnaire taken during the students' first contact session at the faculty and after the school practice.

These methods also served as a means of triangulation on the data given by the students (Babbie, 1979:205; Descombe, 2003; Le Compte and Pressle, 1993; Mouton, 2001).

The participants in the research consisted of 30 students in the Intermediate – and Senior Phase.[5] Twelve of the students were English speaking and 18 were Afrikaans speaking. The lecturer was the only observer during the school practices. It was, however, not possible to observe all 30 students during the August school practise due to the limited time frame, but they all gave their written reports and participated in the qualitative questionnaire. However, not all the questions in the qualitative questionnaire were completed or motivations given. This had an influence on the final analysis and may influence the outcome of the data.

Analysis of the Data

Observations by Lecturer

Observations as a research method was based on the systematic research instrument as outlined by Croll (1986:44). The reason for choosing observations as one of the methodologies in this research was first to assess students on the specific issues identified in their approaches and facilitation strategies in the multireligious class situation. The second reason was that in using systematic observations strategies the lecturer could concentrate on the specific objectives with the student teachers in the short period of time like the classroom situation (Croll, 1986:46). It was important to observe the presentation skills of the students in order to identify what factors

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[5] Intermediate – and Senior Phase is the second phase in the school programme and consist of Grade 4-9 learners. However, these students did their school practices only with Grade 4-7 learners.

outside their academic knowledge might influence their perceptions on a multireligion education programme in schools (Carr and Landon, 1998) and if their facilitation strategies were influenced by the approaches of the in-service teachers.

A summary of each section will be given and the main issues will be discussed. Only 12 students were observed during the observation sessions due to the time limit of their school practice. The following issues were identified during the observations of the 12 students' presenting lessons during the August school practice: Namely the implementation of their academic gained knowledge; the facilitation strategies used during the contact session and their performance in class (mono-or multicultural/religious class settings).

Implementation of their Academic Gained Knowledge

All twelve students implemented their gained knowledge during the lessons without any problems. Although some students were uncertain whether their reply to learners' questions was the correct answer, they seemed to handle content-issues well. The questions being asked were also not that difficult, thus students should be concerned about their academic knowledge.

Facilitation Strategies used during the Contact Session

The facilitation strategies used in the class were well defined and creative. Students used their experiences with different facilitation strategies and were very creative in keeping learners occupied with the new content. In two cases the teachers remained in the class during the observation sessions. The teachers' comments after the contact sessions were very positive and they could not believe that religion education could be such a creative experience with learners.

Performance in Class (Mono-or Multicultural/Religious Class Settings)

One of the most important aspects of the observations was to identify any problems in the students' performances in a mono- or multireligious class environment. However, the multireligious class setting was more important to the observer than the well-known monoreligious environments. As students were accustomed to teaching in multicultural schools, the multireligious environments did not distract them from their performances. However, they were sometimes off guard when learners from the so-called minority religion in the school responded. In discussions after the observation sessions it seemed that students were for the first time aware of certain learners' religious affiliation, due to the excitement and comments learners made when elements of their own religion had been discussed (Roux, 2003).[6]

Discussions and Feedback with Students after every Observed Lesson

At the end of every observation and class performance (Wellington, 2000) the lecturer and student, who presented the lesson, had a discussion on the observational remarks made by the lecturer. The compulsory observation form made accessible by the Faculty of Education was used as point of departure. However, only the abovementioned points were used in the analysis of the observations for the multireligion lesson.

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[6]   For a full discussion on the participation of learners from so-called minority religions in a school environment see Roux, 2003.

Reports of the Students on their School Experiences

All thirty students, irrespective of whether they had been involved in the observations, had to hand in reports on their school experiences (Moon, 1999:157-158). It is interesting to note that students reported on every religious activity in the entire school. Students were only requested to report on their personal experiences in the classroom. However, they reported on the organisation of the assemblies, religious observances, religion education class experiences of lessons they or the teachers presented, learners' religious meetings during break time and every other aspect of religious issues in the schools, from religious quotes on circulars to teachers or comments to children. One interesting analysis of this phenomena was that students defined the entire school's religious environment as very valid for understanding the reasons for specific religion education approaches. This is a significant development in understanding students' perceptions on religious activities in schools. The National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) addressed all the above-mentioned aspects of religion in education in schools. It is interesting to note that the comments that the students made in their reports correlate with some of the sections and recommendations made by the policy document (2003). However, the question to be asked is why students could make observations that correlate with the recommendations of the policy document (2003), but are not recognised as important factors for managing multireligious school environments by the in-service teachers in schools. Students tend to analyse the school situation as *business as usual* with no intention of taking cognisance of the policy document at all. One has to admit that the policy document was only published in September 2003, but the RNCS (2002) curriculum is the only official curriculum. The public debate and media coverage on the Draft National Policy on Religion and Education (June 2003) was still a heated debate.

The short reports of students were mainly their personal experiences at the schools. Their experiences were diverse in their analyses of the school environments. However, two main clusters were identified, namely their personal experiences in the school regarding religion and the teachers' attitudes (expressions) when students requested to present a multireligion education lesson. An analysis will be given with examples of the most valid remarks that can motivate the findings.

Personal Experiences in the School Regarding Religion

The remarks in this cluster showed the students diverse personal experiences at the schools. From the summary it was clear that students either had the opportunity to teach a multireligion lesson (*I think I can do this; I am aware of children' religious development – worried about new concepts*) or that they were refused to introduce their newly gained knowledge. The following remarks illustrated this point. (*I am not sure – I wasn't allowed to teach religious education (multi); No need to do this – the school has not changed*). Some personal remarks were given of their own experiences as a result of the load of work (*A lot of work for too little time in school*) to an awareness of the influence of the new content on their learners (*I feel uncertain of the influence on my own and others religions*). One student changed her attitude towards Religious Studies as the academic subject completely after being in a former Model C-school (*I am a reborn Christian – no more of this*). In the analysis of this report it was clear that the school in which she was teaching made no effort at all to recognise or to accommodate the religious differences in the school environment. Learners from other religions were ignored and had to adapt to the religious environment of the school. This is an alarming remark and should be taken seriously. The reason for this is twofold: First the basic

human and constitutional rights of the learners are violated; and secondly the influence of the teacher on her *captured audience* is an alarming factor.

Teachers' Attitudes (Expressions) when Students requested to present a Multireligion Education Lesson

Teachers are constrained to professionalism toward their profession. One can thus argue that the teachers in any religion education class should adhere to professionalism. However, when religion education is taught it seems that another side of professionalism comes to the fore. Taking this into consideration, as well as the history of a monoreligion confessional approach in schools for many years (Roux, 2001; Ferguson and Roux, 2003b), in-service teachers tend to define professionalism in multireligion education as *objectivism* or *neutral* and in contradiction to their faith. According to Kruger (2004) this has nothing to do with a betrayal of his or her faith, or ... relativism*, or some hidden absolutism, but with human dignity, social justice and professional duty.*

The other notion was given namely that students are not well-qualified to facilitate a multireligion education programme. This argument is not valid. The reasons given in the reports that their methodologies and facilitating skills may lack experience may be true, but they obtained the academic knowledge to teach the content required in the curriculum for the Intermediate and Senior Phases. One can argue that they might be in most cases more skilful than the teachers who have to assess their teaching abilities on religious content. One might even argue that teachers, due to their lack of knowledge and fear of change might feel threatened by the students' ability to teach a multireligion education programme (Roux, 1998; 1999a; 1999b).

Students in general reflected very negatively on their experiences with most teachers' attitudes and the school's ethos on the diversity of religions. The following remarks are self-explanatory: *The schools do not cater for this subject; Teachers are negative; there are no opportunities; Teachers say I am wasting my time; Teachers are not positive – I was on my own.* From the analysis and abovementioned reasons and arguments it became apparent that students were influenced by the attitudes of the teachers and schools' religion education policy or ethos. These influences and personal experiences in schools reflected in students' attitude towards the module in the last quarter of the semester.

A Qualitative Questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire (Babbie and Mouton, 2001; Wellington, 2000) was used to give respondents the opportunity to provide and motivate through selected questions and issues, their opinion on their experiences. The questionnaire was designed and finalised before the written reports of the students were analysed. The reason was that the questionnaire should not contain any questions which may be given in the reports. However, as indicated below (Table 1), one question put in the questionnaire on teachers' remarks or expressions when students requested to present a multireligion education lesson, correlated with the content of the reports of the students. One can thus argue that teachers' attitudes towards religion in education, and education in general, will influence students' perceptions towards their professional training, especially in Religious Studies.

The qualitative questionnaire consisted of nine questions. The questionnaire was designed only from issues identified during the observations made by the lecturer and discussions with the students after their presentations at the schools. The formulation of the questions of the questionnaire was also influenced by the informal discussions and remarks

made by the students' feedback reports of the BEd-class in 2002 as mentioned before. The questionnaire was put in Afrikaans and English in order to give students a chance to reflect in their mother tongue. Due to the fact that some of the students reflected in Afrikaans (their home language), impromptu translations were made but the language of all the remarks was edited. In the analysis of the questionnaire the questions were clustered in three groups (Babbie, 1979:576).

The clusters were:

▪ Teachers' remarks (expressions) upon the requests of students to present multireligion education lesson.

▪ Experiences after the opportunity of presenting a multireligion education lesson.

▪ Religion education as a challenge in schools.

Remarks on the questions asked in the different clusters are a condensed version of the analyses. Interpretations and an analysis of the remarks of the clusters will be given after every table.

Teachers' Remarks (Expressions) when Students requested to present a Multireligion Education Lesson

(All 30 students in the module answered the questions in this cluster)

Positive	Negative	Uncertain	Remarks
5			It was good to learn from other.
			This was new knowledge to the teacher.
			She liked the interesting approaches.
			They were worried if I could handle the content on different religions?
	22		She disliked thinking spiritually of other religions that were presented in her class.
			They were sure that the subject had no purpose or could not help children.
			I was scared to embark on this uncertain terrain and the teacher was also uncertain how to approach the content.
			He was sure that it would confuse the children.
			One teacher said it was a New Age approach of the Department of Education.
			Teachers are not positive – I was on my own.
			I cannot do this – the school has not changed.
		3	What is the purpose of RE in schools anymore?
			Interesting, but they were not certain if it can work for SA schools.
N = 30:5 (16,6 %)	N = 30:22 (73,3 %)	N = 30:3 (10 %)	

Table 1

The remarks and expressions of the teachers towards the students correlated with the reports presented by the students. If students indicated that 73.3% of the teachers which they approached to teach a multireligion education lesson refused, several reasons might be given. In previous research reports (Roux 1999a; Ferguson & Roux 2003b; 2005)[7] it was noted that participating in-service teachers indicated during research studies that they feel threatened and unqualified to handle any multireligion education lesson. However, the alarming factor is that the pre-service teachers (students) were influenced by these teachers' own negative perceptions on a multireligion programme, irrespective of the students' understanding of the Draft National Policy on Religion Education,[8] academic knowledge on different religions, and facilitation strategies for a multireligious class environment. One can argue that the implementation strategies and dissemination processes for the policy document in schools will be a difficult operation for the Department of Education if teachers still pursue negative perceptions on the policy.

Experiences after the Opportunity of presenting a Multireligion Education Lesson

(Only 12 students presented a multireligion education lesson. These students' abilities to facilitate a multireligion education programme were included in their observation reports)

Positive	Negative	Uncertain	Remarks
8			New knowledge was useful – I had fun. Children responded very well. Understanding of the diversity at schools. It made sense in the school – the school has children from Islam and Christianity. The teachers were supportive. First scared, but after I started it became interesting. I used relevant content. It was a wonderful experience. It brings tolerance into the class. Interesting to see learners responses. I learn a lot from my own religion. Important.
	2		I will not give RE – there is no room for it. The school is still on Bible Ed – I don't have interest anymore.
		2	I don't have enough knowledge and I was uncertain of the applicability of the knowledge. I was afraid that the content would confuse the learners and I was not sure I gave learners the correct answers on their questions.
N=12:8 (66.6%)	N=12:2 (16.6%)	N=12:2 (16.63%)	

Table 2

Although only eight students were positive on their performances regarding the multi-religion lesson they presented, one can also argue that a third of the students were negative or uncertain on their performances. The issues raised by the students who indicated that they were uncertain can be dealt with during the contact sessions of the module. Although the students were positive on their knowledge and skills, it seemed that their confidence had been diminished. The two students who gave negative answers and comments were both in a multireligious school, but with a monoreligion education programme, where learners from other religions had been ignored. However, the two negative remarks are still of great concern. The remarks can be interpreted as specific shift from understanding diversity in religions to a reluctance to teach multireligious content. This issue could unfortunately not be cleared with a follow-up questionnaire or interviews. Thus the comments on the remarks of students who indicated a negative experience should be further investigated.

Is Religion in Education a Challenge during School Practices?

(The last cluster incorporated all 30 students. The three questions in this cluster were also answered by the students who were part of the observations and who presented lessons in the schools)

Yes	No	Uncertain	Remarks
13			Only in a multicultural environment.
			I tried to accommodate everybody.
			I accepted the new approach and tried some issues.
			RE is really a new challenge.
			Yes, I think there is a place for RE.
			The kids loved it – but the time is to short.
	20		I don't have enough knowledge.
			Not certain of the content of a lesson.
			It takes to much of my time.
			The schools are not ready – this will take years.
			The teachers influenced me.
			It is still only Christianity.
			The other kids are the minority.
			The school refuses to do anything.
			It is part of Life Orientation,[9] but they ignored it.
		3	It remains a strange thing to me – did not give a lesson.
			I see no need for RE – there was nothing – sometimes I think one should learn something.
			I have to try hard not to put my own view to the learners – I am not sure anymore.
N=30:13 (43%)	N=30:20 (66.6%)	N=30:3 (10%)	

Table 3

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[9]   *Religion Education* is an education programme in the Life Orientation learning area that enables learners to engage in a variety of religious traditions in a way that encourages them to grow their inner spiritual and moral dimensions (cf. National Policy on Religion, 2003:9).

It is interesting to note that only 43% of the students were positive about religion education in schools. This is alarming if one takes into consideration that it is only five more students than those who were positive with the conditions and experiences of their presentations (Table2). One of the interesting remarks is that although the students felt that their teaching skills were not used – or that they felt unhappy with the situation of religion in schools, they indicated that multireligion education is still a challenge.

The fact that 66.6% (two-thirds of the class) had negative experiences in the schools is more than alarming. This is a very good example of the influence of the school environment and teachers on student-teachers' perceptions regarding any multireligion education in schools. It also seemed that there was no support system at schools (competencies of in-service teachers), to present a multireligion education programme in the Life Orientation learning area as outlined in the outcomes (RNCS 2002) or that they were just not interested anymore due to other more *important* contents of other *subjects*. The comments also indicated clearly that schools either ignored the possibility of the new policy document, or they felt threatened, or just reluctant to accept diversity as part of their school environment. This is a factor that should be investigated, due to the fact that this will have severe implications for the dissemination process of the policy in schools and the understanding of diversity in all its facets.

Of the three students that indicated an uncertainty, only one had the opportunity to present a lesson. It also seemed that it was more a lack of experience with facilitation strategies, than with religion education *per se*. The other two comments, however, indicated clearly that they had no opportunity to present or observe a multireligion education presentation.

Final Remarks on the Analysis

In the analysis of the students' abilities to apply their teaching skills in schools, a few aspects came to the fore. First, the teachers' view, perceptions, attitudes and presentations played a significant role in the students' perceptions on religion in schools. These perceptions also indicated that students' perceptions influenced their perceptions and attitudes towards the completion of the Religious Studies module at the tertiary institution. A growing number of in-service teachers (students) changed their positive attitude towards the subject, in some instances even their methodology and strategies when dealing with any religious content during the school practice.

Secondly, it was also interesting to note that students' reports indicated that they observed religion in a much wider context as only the religion education classes. The reason may be their pre-knowledge of some issues discussed in the draft policy document (June 2003). However, one could argue that the schools visited by the students made religion in education exceptionally visible in many different ways. The only aspect that was mentioned in all the reports was that only one religion was still dominant in the multireligious school settings.

Thirdly it was clear from the observations that students showed competencies in the practicing religion education lessons. Students' reports also indicated that lessons where the teacher was the only observer, their facilitation strategies in the *real school situations* had to be changed to be in line with the strategies and methodologies used by the teacher's religion education programme (Bible Education). According to the reports, these strategies used by the teachers were outdated and confessional and did not match their own abilities to present religion education with a more creative and innovative approach.

Conclusion

One of the most important issues this research study illustrated was that there should be a more sufficient support system for student-teachers to present a multireligion education lesson during their school practices. There are just not enough opportunities at the identified schools allocated for the pre-service teacher training programme for them to practice their newly developed knowledge and teaching skills in religion education. It is a fact that the majority of teachers in public schools who have to implement the new policy seemed to be negative about the diversity of religions and are also not equipped with knowledge or understanding of the diversity of religions. The alarming issue, however, is the fact that students, during their first year as professional teachers, might also not be able to take the opportunity or have the courage to initiate a mulitreligious approach in the schools they adhere to, irrespective of their knowledge and teaching skills regarding multireligion education.

The school community's attitude towards multireligion education seems to have a direct influence on the teaching perceptions and strategies of student-teachers in a multireligion education programme in schools. One can also argue that the teachers who are presenting religion education with a monoreligious approach, still argue that the previous religion education model with the old confessional approach is still applicable. How these issues will be solved or handled, will only depend upon the dissemination strategies of the policy spelt out to the schools by the National Department of Education. However, the implementation strategy of the National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) in schools will not necessarily change the attitudes and methodologies of any teacher when dealing with different religions. Young professional teachers may thus be captured in schools that ignored the new approach towards diversity and an inclusive curriculum in religion. One can therefore argue that in-service programmes for teachers needs to include newly graduated teachers as well.

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