A CURRICULUM PROPOSAL FOR THE SCHOOL SUBJECT, *RELIGIOUS STUDIES*

Cornelia Roux & Dorette Steenkamp
Department of Didactics
University of Stellenbosch

Abstract

Religious Education in schools in South Africa is on the threshold of new development. The mono-religious approach and curricula of Religious Education in state schools may change to a multi-religious approach in order to accommodate the different religions in school communities. Religious education is in dire need of a relevant core curriculum. A curriculum with responsible guidelines to accommodate different components and role players is proposed. The 'Three-Facet Curriculum Model' used guidelines from the Stellenbosch-project 1993/1994 to recast the suggested theory into a particular model.

1. Introduction

Religious education in South African schools is on the threshold of new development in view of the emphasis on religious freedom as expressed in the Constitution of the country. It is possible that the mono-religious approach and strong Christian emphasis on religious education in schools may diminish and that the explicitly Christian-Reformed input to curricula may be changed.

This article will present

(i) a brief description of, and motivation for a subject Religious Studies as against Religious Education,

(ii) an outline of a research project conducted within Religious Studies in primary and secondary mono- and multi-religious schools in the Western Cape,

(iii) guidelines and proposals for curriculum design for religious education in mono- or multi-religious South African schools,

(iv) recommendations for the implementation of these curriculum proposals in Religious Studies.

2. Religious Education as Against Religious Studies

In the past serious questions have been raised about the nature and role of religious education in South African schools (cf. Summers 1992:32). The main problem seems to be twofold: firstly, the subject is known by different names, Religious Education, Bible Education or Religious Instruction, and each of these names may imply a different focus. Secondly, religious education has almost exclusively boasted a 'Christian' curriculum. This situation needs to be addressed if the diversity of religious beliefs and cultural groups in South Africa are to be taken into consideration.

For the purpose of this article the term Religious Education (RE) will be used when describing the situation in South Africa.

As a compulsory subject in South African schools, Religious Education may be viewed and interpreted as 'Christian nurturing', which as such is highly defendable in view of this country being considered 'Christian' in nature. However, what has become clear is that both the teaching and promotion of Biblical or Christian values have been subjected to a great deal of moralization and that the subject has also been approached and presented in an evangelistic or confessional manner. Although the curriculum emphasises a non-dogmatic approach to the Bible, teachers tend to approach very much from a personal point of view.

Religious teaching in schools has clearly been guilty for a long time of teaching the worst type of subject matter for the worst possible reasons. (Grimmit 1978:48)

Unfortunately different connotations are attached to the term 'Religious Education'. It may refer to activities of the 'church school' (cathechesis), to religious education in 'missionary schools', or to religious education in a 'secular school'. In all of these different circumstances 'religion' and 'education', have different meanings and imply different methodological approaches. The question to be answered is whether the name of the subject and possibly some of the contents need to be changed in order to define the scope of the subject more adequately.

In many countries where religious education is offered in schools, there is a tendency to move away from a mono-religious to a multi-religious approach, but without any change in the subject name. For instance, in Britain a multi-religious approach has been accepted, while South Africa still adheres to a mono-religious approach. In South Africa due to current connotations and different curricula, the term Religious Education cannot accommodate a change from a mono- to a multi-religious approach. A change in name should, however, not be merely superficial but indeed be a reflection of the nature of the subject.

The concept 'education' is problematic: is Religious Education the 'instruction' of or the 'education' in of a specific religion or different religions? Can the concept 'to educate' religion be the purpose of a secular institution, like a school? To 'educate' children in 'religion' should rather be the purpose of religious communities and religious institutions. Some educationalists will argue correctly that the home and religious institutions have the prime responsibility for the child's religious education and development (cf. Cole 1988:81).

A sensitivity regarding the subject matter may also be perceived in the school community involved. Perceptions at present are that only Christianity should be taught. However, what about the diversity of denominations within Christianity? This problem has obviously not been solved as it is well known that Christian children of certain denominations do not attend Religious Education classes. The reason for this inconsistency may be a wrong emphasis in the curriculum.

Furthermore there are different views on the purpose of Religious Education. Some educationalists argue that Religious Education needs to serve a new purpose. The mono-religious character of the subject is not suited to the secular school. The pluralistic society and well as the diversity of the school community (even within a Christian community) needs to be accommodated more realistically. Children need to

understand the broader society in which they live religiously. In this sense the secular school is in a favourable position to 'educate' the child in understanding his or her social environment better. Cole (1988:81) emphasises that the purpose of Religious Education should be to study religion in order 'to understand its place and function as an aspect of human activity and its importance in life'. Smart (1989:42) defines the purpose of Religious Education in schools as follows:

> The aim of religious education in schools should be that of creating in pupils certain capacities to understand and think about religion.

The purpose of Religious Education in the schools should therefore never be confused with 'religious education' in 'Sunday-' or 'Sabbath' schools or any other institutionalised religious education. In these circumstances where the child functions within the security of his or her religious community, religion and belief systems, religious education should be based on the particular religious dogma.

The broader approach towards religious education, that of teaching about religion and religions, is not yet part of religious education in South Africa. The acceptance of a new 'Religious Education' curriculum, with no confessional purpose or approach may be problematic, specially for Christian teachers. A multi-religious approach to religious education will certainly have an effect on religious communities and educators (cf. the Stellenbosch Project, to be discussed later). However, the multi-religious diversity particularly in state schools in South Africa is a fact, and it is necessary to accommodate different religious groups within religious education. A new approach towards religious education is inevitable. However, it is possible that fears may arise with parents, religious communities, and especially teachers who will be involved in the 'education' in a different or strange religion.

The realities of this country require a curriculum in Religious Education where the emphasis is not on *educating* children in a new religion or in other's beliefs, but in assisting them to *understand* aspects of the different religions. To understand does not imply experiencing or worshipping in other religions. The main purpose is to *study* the content that distinguishes different religions. This represents a cognitive approach to the subject which may aptly be described as *Religious Studies*.

Traditional arguments in support of the name Religious Education emphasize the justification of the subject on educational grounds, as well as on its potential multi-religious character. These arguments, however, will undermine the above mentioned purpose of the subject. Children in Religious Education classes differ from one' another, therefore in 'teaching' religion every child's religious developmental stage, religious background, religious experiences and religious perceptions should be taken into consideration. This seems to be an impossible task. Problems of the past concerning the confessional and evangelical approach in religious education will remain part of the misunderstanding of the purpose of a multi-religious curriculum. A new didactic approach towards any multi-religious content is necessary and may provide a solution.

The implementation of *Religious Studies* as a subject to replace Religious Education or Bible Education may contribute to a better understanding of the purpose of the subject for a multi-religious community. It will further provide a non-

confessional framework for the presentation of religious content. The teacher will also need to assume a new role, that of a *facilitator* instead of an *educator* in different religions (belief systems). The professional approach of the teacher towards the subject will also be of the utmost importance. Tolerance towards the different religious beliefs in the school community is one of the keystones in Religious Studies. It will be in this situation that the teacher's professionalism and skills come to the fore. This approach requires knowledge, not faith, respect for religion, and the ability to let the pupil and the content meet in a predetermined goal. Attitudes and skills will have to be acquired by both the teacher and the pupil. (cf. Cole 1988:82)

South Africa has a diverse society - even within Christianity. The way in which multi-religious content will operate at mono- or multi-cultural schools will depend largely on the attitude of specific school communities. In this sense, the school community and the different religious backgrounds of the pupils can define the religious approach of the curriculum.

3. The Stellenbosch Project (1993-94)

A comprehensive research project of the Department of Didactics at the University of Stellenbosch was undertaken in 1993 and 1994. A multi-religious approach was implemented and evaluated in selected primary and secondary schools. The project was conducted in two phases - during 1993 the emphasis was on primary schools and during 1994 on secondary schools. The aim of the 1993 sub-project was to test the hypothesis that the implementation of multi-religious content using a specific didactic approach would enhance the child's understanding of his or her own religion. The aim of the 1994 sub-project was to determine which multi-religious content would be most suitable for a curriculum for secondary school pupils. For the purpose of this discussion these two sub-projects involving 650 children from selected multi- and mono-cultural schools in the Western Cape will be discussed separately. As the 1994 sub-project has not yet been finalised, the discussion will focus mainly on the primary school project.

Phase 1: The 1993 primary school project

Target group

A total of approximately 350 primary school children from different cultural backgrounds were involved in this study. The focus was on pupils in the senior primary school phase (Std 2 to Std 5) between the ages of ten and thirteen. The reason for this was the corresponding religious developmental stages of the pupils. During this children usually show an interest in more profound religious issues and question their own religious customs (cf. Roux 1994).

Content

Curricula for multi-religious education from different countries were analysed and a new core curriculum was created in which Religious Studies was taken as point of departure. The latter calls for a more cognitive, academic approach - thereby limiting the possibility of inappropriate nurturing in an unknown religion.

The contents of only three main religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam, were used in the process of micro-curriculating lessons. The motivation for this was both the monotheistic nature and the focus on the Old Testament as common source of religious information. The socio-religious character of pupils in the Western Cape also relates to these religions. It was suspected that children would take to the new content more easily because of their acquired social experiences.

The aim was to keep the content as relevant as possible. An international tendency to treat subject content in Religious Studies thematically (cf. Watson 1987, 1992) was followed. Some of the themes decided on were:

Places of worship; religious symbols; different religious festivals; ceremonies; the family; lifestyles.

All religions were treated within their specific context and not comparatively. In order to prevent children regarding their own religion as 'wrong' or 'inferior' no religion received more attention than another. The aim of the lessons was not to equate religions, but rather to communicate and provide cognitive information about religious groupings and their beliefs and practices.

Teachers

Twenty-four primary school student teachers from the University of Stellenbosch participated in the project. All the students had already undergone three years of theoretical training in Didactics and Bible Education/Religious Studies. They had all had practical training in neighbouring schools as well. Every student had additional training in presenting multi-religious content - either by means of conventional didactic approaches or by innovative heuristic methods.

The chief researcher discussed each multi-religious lesson to be presented in detail with the specific student to ensure an objective approach as well as sufficient knowledge of the specific multi-religious content and the proposed didactic methods. All lessons were thus prepared and administered under supervision of the chief researcher and project leader. The teachers' personal experiences were also carefully noted by means of questionnaires and their recommendations were taken into account in the final analysis.

Didactic approach

The religious and cognitive development stages were taken into consideration when choosing a teaching method. Every lesson followed a definite prescribed didactic approach. Student-teachers had to adhere to the predetermined didactic methods. By doing this, it was possible to predict and evaluate the interaction between contents and didactics.

A written evaluation of pupils' perceptions about God and religions in general was done before commencing with lessons. Following the lessons, the researcher determined the religious development of pupils by means of the well-known Garreth Matthews-method (Matthews 1984). These conversations were also audio taped for further examination.

In choosing methods, didactic guidelines were also taken into account. Two didactic approaches were followed:

(i)   Heuristic method - where pupils come to grip with the content on their own by means of self-exploration and experiencing.

(ii)   Innovative narrative method - where content is communicated through innovative didactics, for example by reading a letter to pupils in which a child belonging to a different religion writes to the class to tell them about the community's customs.

Pupil participation by means of groupwork as well as individual assignments was emphasised. Some basic principles of Suggestopaedia (cf. Botha 1986) were also incorporated to ensure joyful learning experiences. These experiences were created by means of educational games, music, defocused learning and groupwork with huge puzzles. Pupils also used fictitious names throughout the lessons.

Visualisation forms an integral part of the didactic approach. The teachers kept to the following guidelines with regard to visualisation in presenting the multi-religious lessons:

(i)   Visuals must be inexpensive and easy to produce.

(ii)   All material must be suitable to the specific media available in different schools.

(iii)   Colour association is an important prerequisite in teaching different religions. The religions should preferably be colour coded.

(iv)   Peripheral stimuli, such as pictures of religious customs and places, were encouraged to enhance the content.

(v)   Visual materials must be functional in its support of the contents and didactic approach.

Results

The results presented here are qualitative in nature and references to tendencies reflect a majority of responses.

(i)   Pupils were often unable to recognize or reproduce knowledge about their own religion in the classroom. Children from different religious backgrounds showed signs of a lack of knowledge about their symbols, festivals and customs. This tendency made it difficult for pupils to come to grips with new content about their own and other religions. It appears that Christian children in particular lack religious experiences. This leaves them insecure in a multi-religious setting.

(ii)   Classes often relied on pupils of different religious convictions to give additional information about the contents and experiences related to their religion.

(iii)   Content was just as unfamiliar for pupils in a multi-cultural school setting than to those in mono-cultural schools. There was also little difference in the way Afrikaans- and English-speaking children dealt with multi-religious[*] content.

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[*] Multi-religious does not necessarily signify multi-cultural.

(iv)   Pupils were able to study religions together constructively, and didn't make disparaging comments about their classmates' different faiths. Some pupils presented fear of the unknown. This disappeared largely once more knowledge about unfamiliar religious customs had been acquired.

(v)   The cognitive and religious developmental phases of pupils directly influenced the degree of grasping new content. For example some forms of religious terminology were too difficult for younger pupils to comprehend because of their undeveloped faculty for abstract thinking.

(vi)   In using visualisation it is important that all the religions' presentations are treated equally. It is dangerous to conceive, for example that a Jewish child doesn't require a visual representation of the synagogue in dealing with that specific content.

(vii)   The effectiveness of peripheral stimuli must not be underestimated, since it contributes directly to the understanding of unfamiliar religious concepts. Even if teachers did not refer to the visuals in the lesson, the children were able to pick up on the content and images displayed along the walls of the classroom.

(viii)   The use of different colours in visualizing the religions was very successful. The colour association had an influence on communicating different contents correctly.

(ix)   Lessons in which more than one didactic method was used, proved to be more effective. Pupils also understood the content better when they participated by means of groupwork, etc.

(x)   At times the same content was presented using alternative didactic approaches. It became clear that the success of a multi-religious lesson depends a lot on the choice of method.

(xi)   In the lower standards too much content in one lesson led to a loss of pupils' attention - specially when the innovative narrative method was used.

(xii)   Children with a strong background of religious nurturing enjoyed the multi-religious content because their own religious experiences helped them to cope with the belief and value systems of the other religions. It seemed that children without any religious experiences or background could not cope with multi-religious content as well. They experienced a feeling of insecurity when dealing with unknown religious concepts.

(xiii)   The teachers' lack of additional knowledge about the various religions often resulted in unanswered questions and limited the understanding of a religion within its context. In some instances teachers drew on their own religious background and experiences; which resulted in subjective statements.

Phase 2: The 1994 secondary school project

This sub-project has not yet been completed, however, in many instances the results support findings of the 1993 project. Various lessons have already been learnt about the nature and content of a curriculum for Religious Studies.

Target group

A total of approximately 300 secondary school children from different cultural backgrounds were involved in the presentation of multi-religious lessons. However, a

total of 500 pupils were asked to complete questionnaires on their perceptions of God and on their views of other religions and religious education in general. These results are still being processed and will be published later.

Teachers

Student teachers with a three year degree in Biblical or Religious Studies conducted the programme. These students received six months training in presenting multi-religious content in the secondary school. The methods of the 1993 project were used in assisting the student teachers to become familiar with the content and the didactic approach. However, more emphasis was placed on the content of the different religions.

Tentative results

(i)   Secondary school children have more religious experiences of their own, and seem to cope quite well with multi-religious content.

(ii)   Children in the senior secondary standards (Std 8-10) should have the opportunity to integrate their religious knowledge, religious experiences and social behaviour within a common value system.

Recommendations

Based on results mentioned in the two sub-projects, the following recommendations are made:

1.   A particularistic religious approach - in which there is access to only one religion - is strongly recommended for the pre-primary and junior primary school phases.

2.   The training of teachers is an absolute prerequisite for the successful implementation of a multi-religious core syllabus in Religious Studies. Provision must be made for intensive in-service training.

3.   The new curriculum for Religious Studies should be community-based, so that the content is relevant and contributes to the establishing of tolerance and respect for community values.

4.   An experience-based curriculum, in which pupil participation in religious events or customs is practiced, will be problematic. Lessons should accommodate the child's religious experiences, but should never provide children with religious experiences from different religions.

5.   Children's religious, and cognitive development (at different developmental phases) should be taken into consideration when designing a multi-religious syllabus.

6.   A cognitive, academic approach to Religious Studies is highly recommended. Given the diversity of belief and value systems in multi-cultural school settings, it would be naïve to think that the school as such could live up to the role of educating children religiously. (This is in essence the task of the various religious communities). The school itself can only supply children with the necessary cognitive knowledge about religions and people belonging to them, as well as with the general skills of tolerance, critical thinking, communicating, etc.

7.   Attention should be given to didactic approaches when designing a multi-religious curriculum.

The generally accepted view that any child can cope with multi-religious content easily should be treated with extreme circumspection. Only when children have established a sound religious base themselves, will they be able to study other religions. This will equip them with a knowledge of the pluralistic society in which they live.

4. Guidelines for Curriculum Design

Various aspects need to be taken into consideration in designing a curriculum for Religious Studies for South African schools. The history of Religious / Bible Education in this country; the diversity within Christianity; conservative Christian communities and other school communities; the fear of other religious influences in a mainly Christian dominated community; the unawareness of the diversity within South Africa and the child's religious development and experiences, are all important factors to consider when designing a curriculum for such a diverse community. Many may suggest that the British model for Religious Education (Agreed Syllabus 1988 cf. Watson 1987) may be a solution for South Africa. However, the diversity in education, development and skills that prevails in this country needs a unique model.

A proposed curriculum for an emotive subject such as Religious Studies should follow responsible guidelines to accommodate different components and role players. The ethos of the school, the teachers, the parents and the religious communities are all factors that should be taken into consideration in designing any curriculum. However the most important aspect in any religious curriculum should be the religious development of the child. The influence of religion on a small child differs from that of an adolescent. The child's religious, cognitive and emotional development are important factors in any curriculum development, therefore no advances can be made, or decisions reached, without taking into account the motivation of the child's development. (cf. Schremer 1992:80)

The curriculum should never divert the child from his or her own religious community or religious experience. This problem can only be overcome if the curriculum creates a nurturing phase where the child's religious experiences and development are fostered before implementing multi-religious content.

No curriculum develops and grows in a social vacuum. This means that in curriculum planning all the different role players should have the same objective. If the aim is to create tolerance and respect for the diversity of a community's religion and way of life, this should be emphasised in the curriculum.

An essential part of this development is an awareness of, and respect for, the beliefs and ways of life people whose cultural background and traditions differ from those with which we may be familiar. (Read et al 1993:5).

The curriculum proposed for Religious Studies encompasses three approaches:

(i)   A 'nurturing' approach where the emphasis is on nurturing the child in his or her own religion. This phase will engage children of the pre- and junior primary school level.

(ii)   A phenomenological approach, which constitutes the second phase and which focuses on relevant phenomena within the subject. This phase will engage children from the senior primary up to the junior secondary school level.

(iii)   An integrative approach in which the integration of values and religion is emphasised. This will be introduced to children at senior secondary school level.

The curriculum therefor fosters personal development and orientation towards religion (phase 1); a knowledge of relevant content (phase 2); and a systematic integration of the known content and personal religious experiences (phase 3).

5. The Nurturing Approach

Findings of the 1993 Stellenbosch project strongly support some form of nurturing in the school. What is meant by 'nurturing'? The Report of the British Council of Churches (1984:19) describes 'nurture' as follows:

> Christian nurture is one of the terms used to describe everything which aids this process of growth (religious growth, CDR). This growth does not take place in isolation, but in company with others who are also walking the same way.

Religious experiences can only be acquired from nurturing within a specific religious community. The privilege of nurturing children into religion surely belongs to the religious community and to the home, and Cole (1988:172) points out that '…It is not an aim to be pursued in schools…'

The situation in South Africa, however, is somewhat different to that traditionally encountered in other western countries. There are vast rural areas with communities lacking even basic literacy skills, where it is virtually impossible for parents to perform this task. Similarly, there are vast areas where religious institutions function on an extremely limited scale and where it is not given that children will receive any form of religious education from that source. In many instances, however, the school is an integrated part of the community and the ideal place for basic nurturing in religion.

In the past the Christian National Education (CNE) approach in South African schools have left no room for the religious nurturing of children from minor religions or 'alternative' Christian denominations. A suitable curriculum, given content by the community it serves and supported by adequately trained teachers, will give real meaning to the religious nurturing of children.

A rootedness is one's own tradition - developed through rituals, sacrament, language and symbols of the community - forms a sound basis for religious nurture. (Ratcliff 1988:125).

Nurturing within a specific dogma remains the task of the church, parents and of the religious community at large. The 1993 project clearly indicated that children with positive religious experiences and with education in tradition were able to cope with

the multi-religious content confidently and with understanding. Guiding and passing on a tradition is particularly important for the religious education of the young child. Communities, parents and children should not feel threatened in their religious beliefs if they allow their children the 'right' to nurturing.

The nurturing approach in the curriculum needs to be implemented in the pre-primary and junior primary school phase. The religious developmental stage (cf Roux 1994) of these children gives meaning to a specific religion; their 'religion' is experientially based. They tend to do things in the name of religion that they do not really understand, but still believe is 'right'. Through experiencing their parents' religiousness as well as the religious community to which they belong, they are secured in their religious belief system. The nurturing approach in the curriculum will thus be child centered, particularistic, mono-religious and community based. The aim is to give the child a religious identity and/or to strengthen that identity provided by the family or the church, in order to feel free to express him/herself in any situation with (religious) confidence.

6. A Phenomenological Approach

A phenomenological approach in a Religious Studies curriculum does not claim that the student's understanding should be an empathic understanding appropriate to affect-related beliefs and actions. The emphasis is on knowledge with the aim of tolerance within the diverse South African community. It is important for children to know that there are different religions in society. It is equally important to be knowledgeable about the specific manner in which people live religiously, about their attitudes and beliefs. This content orientated approach emphasises the cognitive, leading to structural studies of religious traditions. However, this does not imply that there is no room for any fruitful discussion on religious traditions or experiences.

The 1993 project indicated that children tended to express own religious experiences when their own religion was under discussion. The children felt comfortable in providing more information for a better understanding of their religion and customs. However, it was remarkable that only children with a sound religious background and who had had nurturing participated in this manner. They did not feel threatened in any way and could cope objectively with the content of different religions. The children are introduced to a religion and they put it then into a self-understanding (contextualising) of that religion.

What this requires in terms of a pedagogy is a way of accommodating a faith community's demands that the study of religion is contextualised within that faith's self-understanding while allowing the outcomes of that study to be re-contexualised within the pupil's own understanding (Grimmit 1987:257)

A thematic approach in the proposed curriculum may give rise to a more tolerant school community. The reason for including a thematic approach is that similarities or differences in places of worship, feasts, prayer, etc. can be studied more effectively. Religious traditions as integrated living systems are studied with a focus on the multifaceted interaction between religion and culture.

To some extent there are problems in solely adopting a phenomenological approach. It does however not imply that the emphasis should only be on content and understanding (eg. Astley 1994:92) to the exclusion of references to religious experiences. Although the proposed curriculum does not concentrate on content for the expression of religious experiences, some themes do allow for such expression. Problems with religious experiences should be channeled to a more understanding attitude of respect.

Encouraging the phenomenological approach does not mean only that we should engage the children's understanding of the world of the religious person, but also that we should engage the children's understanding of their own world. (Leech 1989:75)

The uniqueness of the own religion will not be destroyed. Pupils are taught to understand and appreciate their own beliefs and to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own faith. The perception prevails that children are not truly educated for life in our pluralistic society unless they have a basic knowledge of the religions of the world.

7. An Integrative Approach

The integrative approach leads to the integration of values and religion. Children at the senior secondary school level will be introduced to this approach. There seems to be growing support for the view that the study of values should be an integral part of the study of religion (cf. Grimmit 1987). Although some researchers argue that the study of values should be part of a Life Skills or Moral Education curriculum (cf. Engel 1992), the view is held here that religious education supplies the most appropriate base for value clarification.

The religious development of children implies that they should be able to understand and integrate religion and values (cf Roux 1994). It should be seen as an opportunity to examine religious interpretations of the meaning, purpose and value of life. Understanding nurturing values within the context of the wider community will help children in their personal development. Education in the school cannot escape the influence of particular ideological values. This integrative approach will therefore facilitate a wider perspective on values in the society. It will also minimize the moralisation of, for example, Bible stories in the Christian faith, and concentrate more on Christian values in society.

Children will have the opportunity to learn from religion the basis of behaviour and values. An integrative approach will prevent one religion or ideology from furthering its own cause at the expense of another. Children will compare different value systems in society to that of their own religion. Religious Studies will thus not only encourage knowledge of different religions, but also of values and an understanding of the purpose of their own religion.

An integrative approach towards religion and values will assist children in coping with the social environment in which they live. This approach does not isolate school children's studies of religion and values in school from their faith communities.

8. The Implementation of a Curriculum Model for Religious Studies

Religious education in South Africa is in dire need of a relevant core curriculum. Using the suggested guidelines, it is possible to recast the suggested theory into a particular model, presented here as the 'Three-Facet Model'. Lee (1973:33) states that the purpose of such a model is 'to extract from theory significant inferences that might otherwise remain hidden from notice'.

9. The Three-facet Model for Religious Studies

The proposed curriculum model has several distinct characteristics. The name of the model indicates that not just one approach to religious education is propagated. Instead, three apparently contradicting approaches are used - given their merits within a specific context.

The 'Three-Facet Curriculum Model' should be implemented as a whole, since the units are essentially interrelated. In the model the school phases are thus presented as connected or overlapping circles. Each of the three sections - Mono-religious Studies, Multi-religious Studies and Studies of Religion & Values - has its unique educational focus and approach, but the success of one is largely dependent on the functioning of the others.

For the present the three facets of the model will be defined as:

Unit 1- Nurturing approach
- (Mono) Religious Studies
Unit 2- Phenomenological approach
- (Multi) Religious Studies *or*
- African Religious Studies / Christian Studies / Islamic Studies / Jewish Studies
Unit 3- Integrative approach
- Religion and Values

Figure 1

Each unit operates as a separate curriculum, with a unique approach and focus. The thematic approach has been used to choose curriculum content in all three units. Much can be said for and against this approach, but it provides the kind of embodiment of a structural analogy needed for Religious Studies.

The different units of a Religious Studies curriculum in a pluralistic society will now be discussed. Data from the 1993 Stellenbosch project will be incorporated where applicable.

A THREE - FACET CURRICULUM MODEL
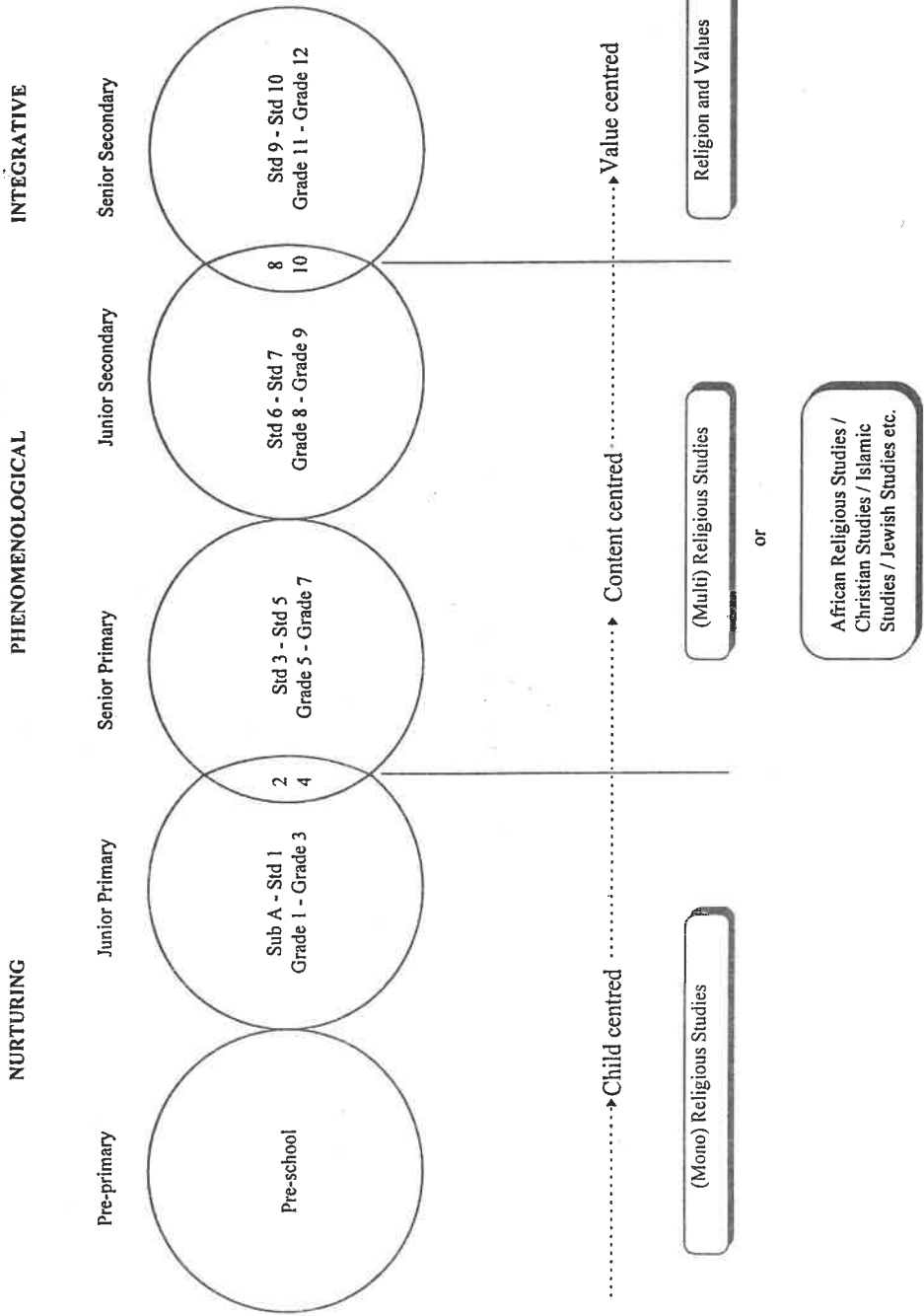for Religious Studies in a pluralistic society

NURTURING   PHENOMENOLOGICAL   INTEGRATIVE

Pre-primary   Junior Primary   Senior Primary   Junior Secondary   Senior Secondary

Pre-school

Sub A - Std 1
Grade 1 - Grade 3

2
4

Std 3 - Std 5
Grade 5 - Grade 7

Std 6 - Std 7
Grade 8 - Grade 9

8
10

Std 9 - Std 10
Grade 11 - Grade 12

Child centred ·········· ▶

Content centred ········· ▶

Value centred ▶

(Mono) Religious Studies

(Multi) Religious Studies

Religion and Values

African Religious Studies /
Christian Studies / Islamic
Studies / Jewish Studies etc.

or

Figure 2

Unit 1

The educational aim of Unit 1 is to facilitate religious experiences, so that the child can develop an own religious identity.

The need for such an identity, to cope with content in Unit 2 of the proposed curriculum, was clearly demonstrated by the 1993 project . The section has a particularistic religious base and can be called '(Mono) Religious Studies'.

The section, Mono-Religious Studies, proceeds from pre-primary to junior primary (pre-school up to Std 2 / Gr. 4) In the model the first two circles indicate the area under discussion. The curriculum of Unit 1 can be divided into five competency levels - illustrated by the columns the in large dotted-line rectangle.

All content is presented thematically. Each main theme can be subdivided into the first four competency levels according to the amount and complexity of detail.
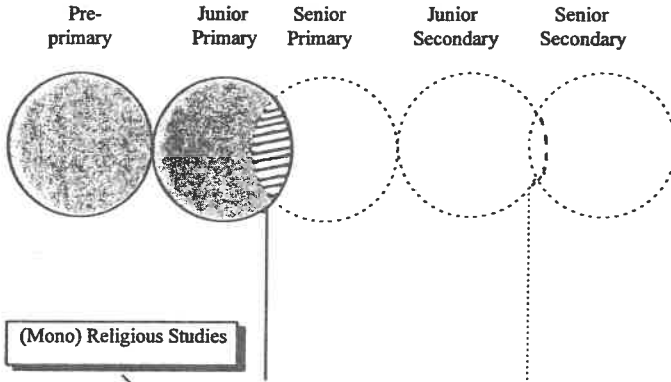
Level 5 deals exclusively with the theme of 'related values' in a mono-religious tradition. The cognitive and religious developmental phases of the child at Level 5 enable him/her to cope with abstract concepts and religious values. The 1993 research project indicated, however, that pupils (at this age) find it very difficult to study and understand values of unfamiliar belief systems.

Level 5 (Std 2 / Gr. 4) connects Unit 1 with Unit 2. The sole purpose of this level is to encapsulate nurturing values (from religious experiences in Unit 1) so that pupils will be able to cope the unfamiliar multi-religious content (in Unit 2).
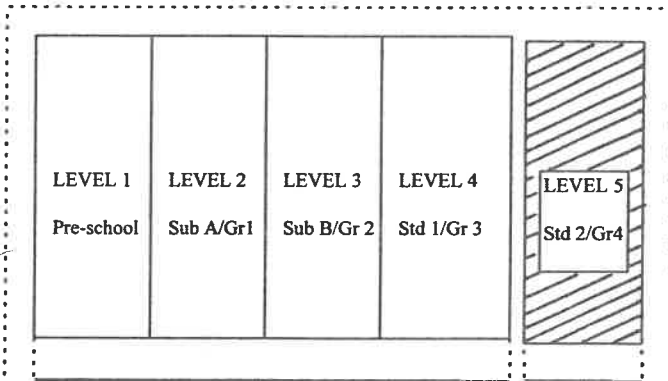
In practice there should be a (Mono) Religious Studies curriculum for every religion represented in the school. The principle of competency levels will enable a school to group all the children from minor faith traditions together for a nurturing session. The themes can be structured in such a way that differentiation is achieved by selection of content, groupwork, projects and assignments.

Training for the presenting of different nurturing curricula should be a prerequisite for primary school teachers volunteering for religious education.

UNIT 1
(MONO) RELIGIOUS STUDIES

| Pre-primary | Junior Primary | Senior Primary | Junior Secondary | Senior Secondary |

(Mono) Religious Studies

NURTURING APPROACH

LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
Pre-school	Sub A/Gr1	Sub B/Gr 2	Std 1/Gr 3	Std 2/Gr4

STUDY AREAS FOR MONO-RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Example: Christian orientated

Who
What
Where
When
Why
How

- Bible
- Jesus
- *Values
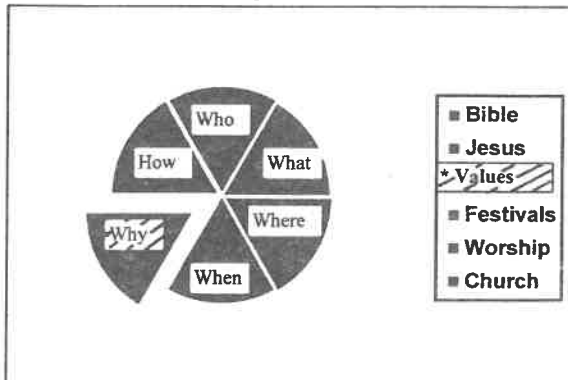- Festivals
- Worship
- Church

Figure 3

Unit 2

The educational aim of Unit 2 is to enhance religious tolerance, based on religious knowledge and understanding. Lee (1985:159) describes knowledge as 'information concerning the facts basic to a given reality'. The phenomenological approach in Unit 2 focuses on a given religious reality to gather information about it. To achieve the aim of religious tolerance, a second cognitive process, understanding should be present. Lee (1985:159) defines understanding as follows:

> Understanding perfects knowledge and is superior to knowledge because understanding yields the 'why' and not just the 'that' and because it supplies a deeper insight and awareness of the nature and operations of a given reality.

As part of normal religious development, (cf. Roux 1994) pupils in these school phases may show an interest in religions other than their own. Pupils seek to *understand* the religious world around them. When dealt with correctly, this is a positive force that will ensure both mono-faith enrichment and multi-religious tolerance. A phenomenological approach in Unit 2 will supply teachers with enough structure to study religions objectively. A section like this has a multi-religious base and can be called '(Multi) Religious Studies'. In the model the proposed section is illustrated on the left.

However, the reality in South Africa is that pluralism has never been accounted for in religious education. The pluralistic nature inherent in Christianity, Islam and Judaism has been ignored in the curriculating process. The 1993 research project showed that Christian children have just as many (if not more!) wrong conceptions and lack as much knowledge about Christian denominations than about other religions. An alternative to the (Multi) Religious Studies curriculum in Unit 2 can therefore be 'African Religious Studies', 'Christian Studies', 'Islamic Studies' or 'Jewish Studies'. If this alternative is chosen, a compulsory component of the (Multi) Religious Studies curriculum should be included. The inclusion of a multi-religious component is highlighted in the three smaller charts on the right. The educational aim of religious tolerance is true for all the sections.

The sections will proceed from senior-primary to junior secondary (Std 3 / Gr. 5 - Std 7 / Gr. 9). In the model the third and fourth circles indicate the area under discussion. The curriculum of Unit 2 is introduced by a study of mono-religious values (Unit 1) and culminates into a study of multi-religious values (Unit 3). This planned curricular placement of religious studies ensures that the study does not function in a vacuum.

It is closely related to the reality in which pupils find themselves: On the one hand they belong to a specific religious group (with nurturing values) and on the other hand, they live in a pluralistic society (with communal values).

The content is treated thematically. The themes are grouped into categories which are made user-friendly for the teacher:

- *Who*:   People involved - origin and maintenance.
- *What*:   Essence.
- *Where*:   Important places.
- *When*:   Important days and festivals.
- *How*:   Worship and lifestyles.
- *Why*:   Related values.

The categories are explored by means of themes across the curriculum, and apply to (Multi) Religious Studies as well as to the alternative section. The last category, on 'related values' has been integrated as a minor part of phenomenological religious study. The category expands into the section, 'Religion and Values' in Unit 3.

In selecting themes for religious study, two questions were consistently raised:

(i) Is it possible to study the theme phenomenologically and intellectually, and

(ii) does the theme uphold the educational aim of enhancing religious tolerance?

Some examples of themes are the following:

* Key figures, such as Moses Jesus, Muhammed, Buddha and Guru Nanak.
* Pilgrimages to Mekka, Jerusalem, River Ganges, Badh Gaya.
* Symbols and artifacts.
* Ways of worshipping.
* Religious customs and ceremonies.
* Festivals.

Various factors were taken into account in categorising the themes. Some of these were the pupils' interests, their religious developmental phases (Research project: 1993) and cognitive development.

Unit 2 is designed to acknowledge pluralism in religion and to encourage religious tolerance. Although the aims are admirable, this multi-religious curriculum will only function effectively if it is implemented innovatively. This implies effective teacher training and the development of applicable textbooks.

UNIT 2
(MULTI) RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Pre-primary   Junior Primary   Senior Primary   Junior Secondary   Senior Secondary

(Mono) Religious Studies

or

African Religious Studies / Christian Studies / Islamic Studies / Jewish Studies etc.

MULTI-RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Who   Why   What   How   Where   When

African Religious Studies

Christian Studies
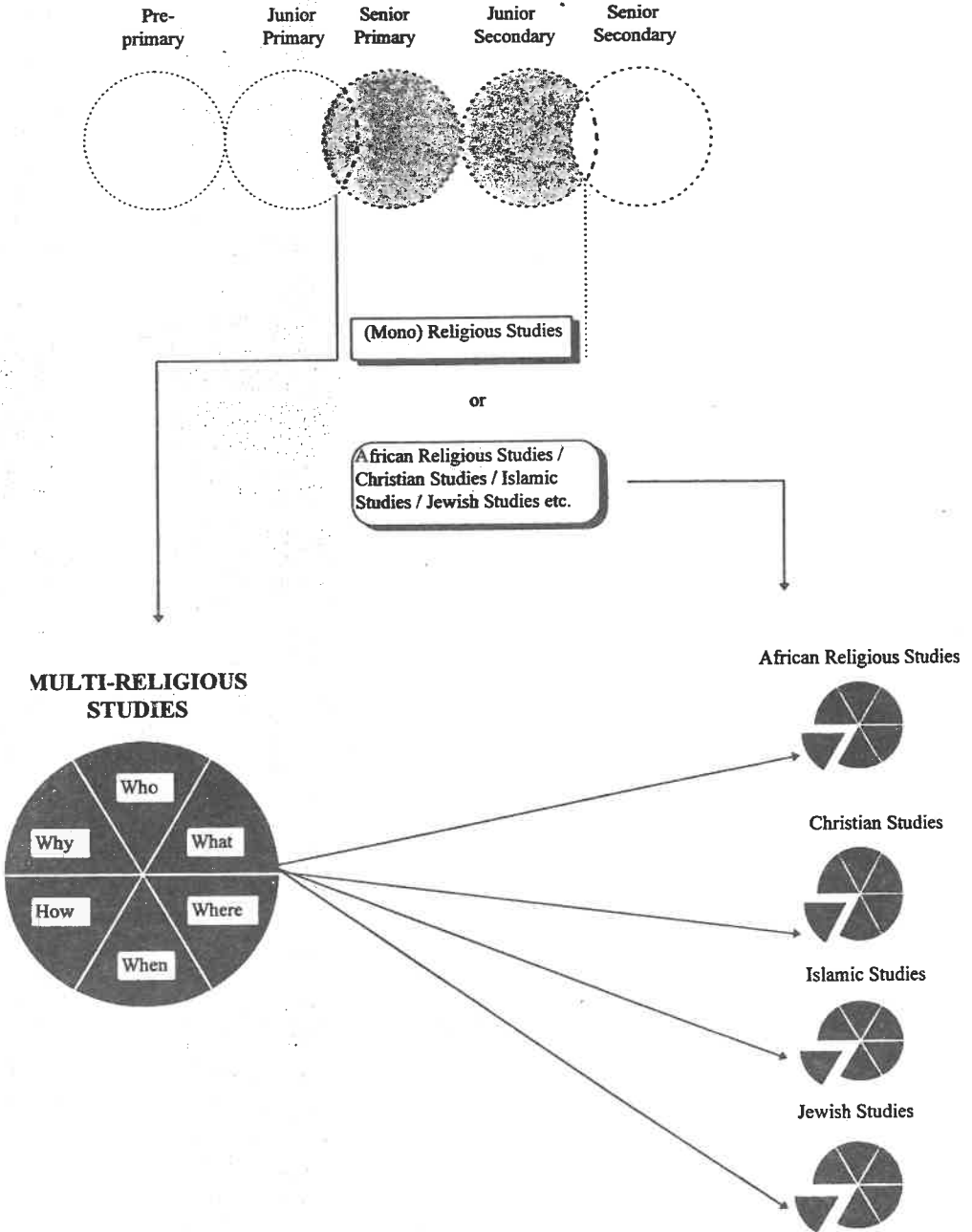
Islamic Studies

Jewish Studies

Figure 4
Unit 3

The underlying educational aim of Unit 3 is the clarification of values; thus enhancing the pupil's individual value system.

The integrative approach in Unit 3 underlines the importance of the integration of values and religion. The child should be able to examine the meaning of life within a secure educational system, such as the school. The importance of discovering and creating a shared value system in a multi-religious school should also not be underestimated.

The section, 'Religion and Values', constitutes the third part of the proposed Three-Facet Curriculum Model. In the model the last circle illustrates the area under discussion. Unit 3 commences at the beginning of the senior secondary school phase (Std 8 / Gr. 10).

The curriculum of Unit 3 is introduced by a study of values and leads to a thematic approach based on certain categories. The curriculum is in fact a structural analogy of the curriculum in Unit 2 - the single difference between the two being their construction of categories. The categories are as follows:
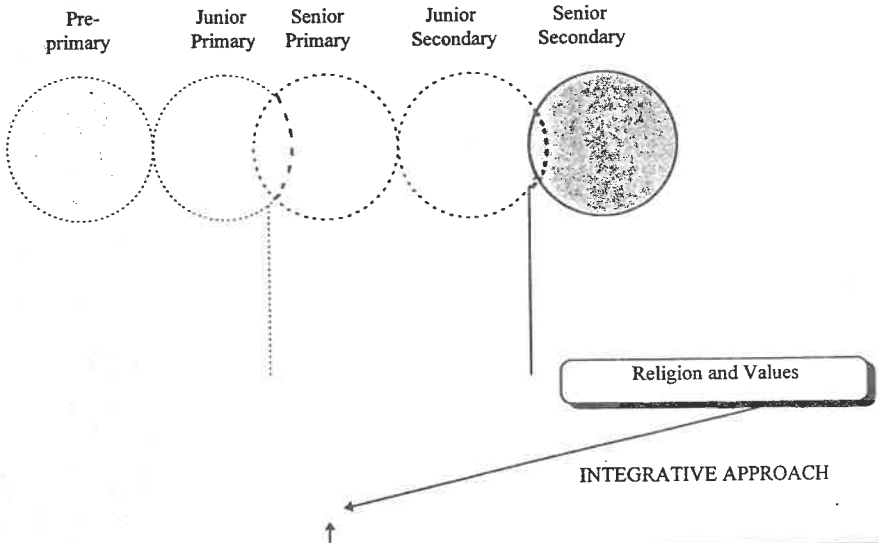
- (i)   Personal;
- (ii)   Relationships;
- (iii) Material;
- (iv)   National;
- (v)   Health and medical;
- (vi)   Nature.

The categories are also explored across the curriculum, and applied to (Multi) Religious Studies, as well as to the alternative sections with a particularistic orientation. Note that the latter should also contain a compulsory component of multi-religious values!
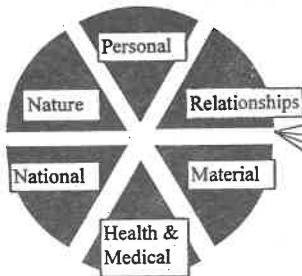
Unit 3 should be seen as inherently part of the proposed model. The history of moralisation and evangelisation in South African schools calls for a model in which the education of values can be 'structured'.

The preceding phenomenological approach (Unit 2) should provide the necessary base for a sound study of values in religion. The child's religious identity obtained and/or developed by means of the nurturing approach (Unit 1) should also provide the necessary religious experiences to make 'Religion and Values' a relevant and vibrant section.

UNIT 3
RELIGION AND VALUES

Pre-primary | Junior Primary | Senior Primary | Junior Secondary | Senior Secondary

Religion and Values

INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

VALUES IN VARIOUS RELIGIONS

Personal

Nature

Relationships

National

Material

Health & Medical

African Religious Value

Christian Values

Islamic Values

Jewish Values

10.   Conclusion

Children from pre-school up until their final year of school need the opportunity to develop cognitively, emotionally and religiously.

With this proposed curriculum they will have the opportunity to be nurtured in their own religion, to understand other religions and to interpret and give meaning to their own religion and value system. Is this not what religious education is all about?

> ...religious education that does not also contribute to the personal development of the child is not worthy of the name. (Cooling 1993:20)

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