

Towards understanding (religious) (in)tolerance in education

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In recent years, schools and education authorities world wide have been paying increasing attention to issues surrounding diversity and religious (in)tolerance. The term 'tolerance' is, however, clouded by considerable confusion and vagueness. This article seeks to contribute to recent scholarly attempts at understanding (religious) tolerance and the term that denotes it. After a brief semantic analysis of the term 'tolerance', arguments concerning the onticity of *tolerance* as phenomenon or entity are discussed. By examining its onticity we explore and explain some of the essential features of *tolerance*. The article ends with a brief discussion of some of the implications of our examination that we foresee for (religious) education.

Tolerance: Conceptual confusion and vagueness

A review of the available literature of the past 9 years or so, reveals that the concept 'tolerance' is clouded by considerable confusion and vagueness (cf. Dawkins 2006; Dennett 2006; D'Souza 2007; Garrison 2007; Harris 2004; Haught 2008; Hitchens 2007; Leiter 2012; Mendus 2008; Powell 2013).¹ Its diversity of meaning becomes obvious when it is used in conjunction with the adjectival qualifier 'religious' (Rangus 2001:1; Tobing 2013). To further complicate matters, the terms 'tolerance' and 'conflict' are often used in the same breath, seemingly in an attempt to denote propositions and counterpropositions in connection with religious attitudes. In some official international human rights documents, the words 'tolerance' and 'discrimination' are used interchangeably,² whilst in others they are used to denote different phenomena (Rangus 2001:2).

In recent years, schools and education authorities world wide have been paying an increasing amount of attention to issues surrounding diversity and religious (in)tolerance (cf. Collins 2009; Goodin 2006; Ignatieff 2004; Jarvis 2009; Pape 2005; Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2004, 2010; Roux 2000, 2006; Sardoc 2010). The need for tolerance has not only increased because of an epidemic of hate crimes committed,³ but also because of daily social interactions that require treating one another with respect and dignity. Religious intolerance is most frequently reflected in educational contexts such as classrooms, hallways and playgrounds, and manifests itself in the form of 'insults, angry outbursts, social cliques, put-downs and dismissals of others' viewpoints during class discussions' (cf. Gateways to Better Education 2005:1, 2; Schweitzer 2007:89).⁴

On a methodological note

We endeavour to add, on the basis of a semantic and etymological analysis, to recent scholarly attempts at understanding (religious) tolerance and the term that denotes it. Where appropriate, we also allude to relevant sociological notions.⁵ We firstly conduct a brief semantic analysis of the

1. We refer to *tolerance* (in italics) when we speak of it as onticity (as a phenomenon, entity or particular reality that may be viewed as a way of being), and to 'tolerance' (single quotation marks) as the concept or term that refers to that onticity. When 'tolerance' is used in normal print and not in inverted commas, it refers to either *tolerance* as onticity or to both.

2. To say that they can be used interchangeably seems counter-intuitive, unless 'discrimination' refers to singling out a particular person or group for special favour; to recognise or understand the difference between, to constitute or mark a difference, or to be discerning – in other words, to treat in a positive manner (cf. Sinclair 1999:410).

3. The current strife in Syria, the recent 'Arab Spring' uprisings and the conflict between the Muslim north and the Christian south of Nigeria count as examples. Peck (2006:173) correctly points out that differences can exist between atheists and theistic believers as well as within religious groups: 'We see dogmatism, and proceeding from dogmatism, we see wars and inquisitions and persecutions. We see hypocrisy: people professing the brotherhood of man killing their fellows in the name of faith, lining their pockets at the expense of others, and practicing all manner of brutality' (Peck 2006:184). In Wright's (2009:421) view, 'the bulk of westerners and the bulk of Muslims are in a deeply non-zero-sum relationship, [and] by and large aren't very good at extending moral imagination to one another'. Alford (2009:57) concurs with him in saying that religious fundamentalism seems to be the cause of many of the world's ills, the reason for this being that people tend to operate from a narrower frame of reference (worldview) than what they are capable of, thereby failing to transcend the influence of their particular religion, culture, particular set of parents and childhood experience upon their understanding (Peck 2006:180). Alford (2009:57) sees 'religious fundamentalism as the cause of so many of the world's ills – suicide bombers ..., intolerance ...'. The following statements seem to attest to this possibility: the name of the Islamic organisation which was suspected to be responsible for the 2010 Old Eve's bomb explosions in Nigeria (in which 23 people were killed) is *Boko Haram*, which literally means 'Western education is prohibited' (Okonta 2011:12); in 2012 a murder took place in a rural South African town, the victim was murdered just because he had a beard which is associated with Muslim men (Cilliers 2012).

4. Although education will not be frequently mentioned in the following semantic analysis, it should be kept in mind that the investigation was sparked off by incidences of intolerance in education, particularly schooling. The investigation was done for the purposes of providing theoretical substantiation for drafting a questionnaire on religious tolerance amongst teachers and their pupils (students). The pedagogical context should therefore never be lost sight of in the rest of the article.

5. We do not attempt to offer any psychological analysis of religious tolerance, although such an analysis may yet prove to be valuable for understanding, for example, the attitudes of individuals and groups.

term 'tolerance'. This is followed by arguments concerning the onticity of *tolerance* as phenomenon or entity, and with an examination of its onticity through which we penetrate to the essential features of *tolerance*.⁶ Since the issues that have emerged from our study appear to have some implications for (religion) education; we therefore conclude the article with a brief discussion of some of the major implications.

Conceptual-theoretical discussion

Distinctive human attributes, actions and behaviour

Numerous attempts at defining tolerance can be found in the literature. Little, as quoted by Tobing (2013:n.p.), defines it for example as 'a response to a set of beliefs that are originally thought to be objectionable, with disapproval but without using force or coercion [to change them]'. According to him, tolerance not only does not imply coercion or force against an opponent, but rather respect of the other's viewpoint. Little (in Tobing 2013:n.p.) seems to claim that there exists some kind of relationship between repression of aggressive impulses and tolerance when he argues: 'It is natural for us to punish people we do not agree with. To repress that impulse is tolerant.' Little's (in Tobing 2013:n.p.) claim corresponds with Zagorin's (2003) explanation that tolerance represents:

the practice of deliberately allowing or permitting a thing of which one disapproves. One can meaningfully speak of tolerating, i.e. of allowing or permitting, only if one is in a position to disallow. (pp. 5–6)

These and most other definitions conceptually denote certain distinctive human attributes, such as individual(-ised) attitude, capacity, action, form of behaviour or response. Most definitions also seem to cover a considerable spectrum of descriptive and illustrative values (Enslin, Pendlebury & Tjiattas 2001; Gateways to Better Education 2005; Ranguis 2001; Schweitzer 2007; Tobing 2013; Van der Walt, Potgieter & Wolhuter 2010; Visanmiu 2012). We return to this problem in the paragraph entitled 'Tolerance in terms of a spectrum of behaviour' below.

Modern liberal views of tolerance

The liberal ideal of tolerance which looks at a rational consensus (cf. Habermas 1984, 1992) 'on the best way of life was born in societies divided on claims of a single way of life' (cf. Kelly, 1988:442). It cannot show us in modern times how to live together in societies that harbour many ways of life. Our task nowadays 'is to consider what becomes of this patrimony in societies which are much more deeply diverse than those in which liberal [*tolerance*] was conceived' (Gray 2009:22). Because of industrialisation, globalisation and digitalisation, the autonomy of the individual has steadily gained preference *vis-à-vis* that of the group. Human rights are increasingly being construed as individual human rights (cf. Angus 2004; Apple 1999, 2004; Bates 1996; Boyd & Lugg 1998; Budhwar & Debrah 2004; Codd 2005; Gewirtz & Ball

⁶Although this study does not purport to be a phenomenological investigation, we nevertheless followed Husserl's appeal that the investigator should 'go back to the things themselves' (Du Plooy, Griessel & Oberholzer 1983:218).

2000; Gewirtz 2002; Hall 2005; Kelchtermans, 2009, 2012; Meyer 2002; Morley & Rassool 2000; Moses 2004; Schneider 2003; Simkins 2000; Thrupp & Willmott 2003; Tikly 2003; Torres 2002; Webster & Mosoetsa 2002; Wright 2001; Zipin & Brennan 2003). How we can and should relate to this development seems to be a pivotal question with regard to the being and meaning of tolerance. Liberal freedom, for example, does not seem to tolerate a person who has derived his or her identity from (and associates it with) a larger group (i.e. heteronomy). Liberal freedom seeks to liberate such people. This is why Gray (2009:21) claims that we should see it as our task to refashion liberal tolerance so that it can guide the pursuit of a *modus vivendi* in a more plural world. In the classical sense, liberal tolerance has contributed immeasurably to human well-being, but, for the reasons posited above, it cannot be our guide in late modern circumstances (Gray 2009:21).

Tolerance is not only the centrepiece but also the paradox of liberalism: Liberalism propounds tolerance of opposing viewpoints and allows them to have their say, leaving it to the democracy of ideas to decide which of them shall prevail (Grayling 2009:8). Paradoxically, liberalism also allows intolerance as a view (Walzer 1997:80, 81) but in essence does not tolerate intolerance. Instead, it opts to employ the power of argument and honest reasoning. As Grayling (2009:8) rightly avers, one can be confident that in most cases the reasoning of an informed mind will come out in favour of what can be tolerated (cf. Dworkin 1981:53, 54).⁷

Semantic exploration of the term 'tolerance'

As authors, we have a good command of three languages, namely English, Dutch (as well as South African Afrikaans which is akin to Dutch) and German. In Dutch and German, the term 'tolerance' appears in two forms. The Germanic term for 'tolerance' in Dutch and Afrikaans is '*verdraagsaamheid*' and in German it is '*Erträglichkeit*'. All four languages nowadays seem to prefer the Latinate form: English – 'tolerance'; Dutch – '*tolerantie*'; Afrikaans – '*toleransie*' and German – '*Toleranz*'.

According to Sinclair's *Collins Concise Dictionary* (1999:410), the word 'tolerance' is derived from the Latin '*tolerare*' (Eng. 'to sustain'; 'to endure' [Soames & Stevenson 2008:455]). A semantic analysis of the Dutch '*verdraagsaamheid*' and the English 'forbearance' reveals interesting parallels. In Dutch, the signifier is '*dragen*', which means 'to bear'. The addition of the prefix '*ver-*' creates the verb '*verdragen*' (Eng.

⁷Intolerance 'is a psychologically interesting phenomenon because it is symptomatic of insecurity and fear. Zealots, who would, if they could, persecute you into conforming to their way of thinking, might claim to be trying to save your soul despite yourself; but they are really doing it because they feel threatened. Fear begets intolerance, and intolerance begets fear' (Grayling 2000:n.p.). The cycle seems indeed to be a vicious one. In light of the above, it is not difficult to understand why some people who belong to extremely orthodox, fundamentalist faith communities may experience the notion of tolerance as painful. It essentially asks of them to betray their own confessional convictions and life-view-related norms, values and attitudes. Tolerance nevertheless remains an important attitude for orthodox believers as well. On the one hand, the global society in general tends to support a liberal interpretation of behaviour: everyone has the right to come to his or her own conclusions; the individual is increasingly becoming the standard yardstick of all things (even though many religions contest the proposal that the individual has absolute freedom) (N. Boersma [Driestar Educatief, Gouda, Netherlands] pers. Comm., 08 December 2011). On the other hand, tolerance increasingly becomes a valid question for every religion and religious denomination, because no one can ever claim monopoly of and over the truth.

'to forbear'). In Dutch, the addition of the suffix '-saam' not only changes the word into the adjective '*verdraagsaam*', but also intensifies the meaning (Eng. 'forbearing') in the sense that it now refers to something beyond itself, namely to an attitude, an action or some form of behaviour. The adjective refers to a state or condition, the state or condition of being tolerant, of exhibiting some kind of exemplary, internalised behaviour or attitude characterised by a propensity (N. Boersma, [Driestar Educatief, Gouda, Netherlands] pers. Comm., 08 December 2011) to forbear another person or his or her attitude and behaviour. The further addition of the Dutch suffix '-heid' changes '*verdraagsaam*' into the noun '*verdraagsaamheid*' (Eng. 'forbearance', tolerance). All these changes can be detected in English as well: 'bear' – 'forbear' – 'forbearing' – 'forbearance'. What is interesting, is that the English word 'bear' is akin to the Dutch verb stem '*baren*' (to bear, to give birth; cf. Eng. 'born', 'borne' and 'birth' – all of Germanic origin).

As far as the English word 'tolerance' is concerned, we can see the same process of intensification unfolding, except that there seems to be no Latinate form for 'to bear' in the sense of 'to carry'. The verb takes the Latinate form 'tolerate'; the adjective is 'tolerant' and the noun 'tolerance' (from the 16th century onwards, preferable to the older form of 'toleration').

In all these languages, the noun '*verdraagsaamheid*' (and its synonyms in other languages, such as 'forbearance', 'tolerance') seems to denote an entity (state, condition or propensity) with a certain observable (albeit abstract) status. This entity or 'being' (ontic) status can only be observed as a quality, attitude, action or behaviour of a person with respect to something else, such as a certain state of affairs, or another person's or group's actions, behaviours and attitudes. In this sense, it has the same ontic status (onticity) as (abstract) entities such as hate, love, respect, education, endurance, kindness, sympathy – all of which can only be observed via attitudes, actions or behaviour. Put differently, 'tolerance' possesses the ontic status of a mental construct that comes into existence through (theoretical) analysis, enquiry, discourse, critical thinking, reflection and self-reflection, the creation of rational coherence, theory-construction, hermeneutic interpretation, conceptualisation, the use of logical space of reasons, propositional relationships, sensory qualia and mental imagery (Van der Walt & Fowler 2006:33, 34).

Based on the assumed ontic status of tolerance we now proceed to reflect on a possible ontology of *tolerance*.⁸

An ontology of *tolerance*

Thinking ontologically about tolerance

Ontology is the study of being, or of that which is (Bochenski 1972:84) (with 'being' the best English translation for the German word '*sein*'; the French word '*être*'; the Dutch word '*zijn*' or the Afrikaans words '*syn*' or '*werklikheid*'). 'Onticity' would thus mean existing in being. What we attempt to do in this section is to investigate the ontic or 'being' status

⁸See footnote 1.

of 'tolerance': does it exist in being, a-priori to human invention, or is it a human artefact or invention? This process involves an epistemology centring on hermeneutics and phenomenology, and not on the development of an ontology (which would constitute a scientific contradiction).

A (religion) educationist should be aware of the 'being' of all things (religiously) educational, in other words the ontology that he or she entertains, including the phenomenon or onticity of (*in*)*tolerance*. Ontology as a discipline focuses on questions regarding the relationships between the individual and the universal, unity and diversity, uniqueness and coherence, the unchangeable and the changeable, that which is determined and that which may be regarded as contingent, the knowable and the unknowable, the preconditions for (in this case, *tolerance*) and that which is conditioned by them as well as the relationship between wholes and their parts (Van der Walt & Potgieter 2012:222). (Religion) educationists therefore should have an understanding of where entities in reality, including (religious) (*in*)*tolerance* originated, or how they believe it to have originated, and what its 'being' means or constitutes. Before we can give a name to the phenomenon of *tolerance* or (*in*)*tolerance* respectively, we must first understand what onticity is. This can be done by hermeneutic-phenomenologically searching for its essential features and by constantly corroborating the upshot with the available scholarly literature on the subject.

The essential features of tolerance

Tolerance involves decision-making based on values

Tolerance implies the degree of deviation from a set standard, norm, principle and/or value that a person is willing to allow. What a person tolerates will depend on the rigidity or rigorousness of that norm. According to Lusenga (2010:19), these standards, norms or values are the principles by which a person lives or the conception of the desirable that guides a person to make choices and decisions in given situations. These standards, norms or values, can be both implicit and explicit assertions of what is desirable, important, useful or worthy for a person, predispose the allowable degree of variation with which that person may be prepared to tolerate opinions, practices, races, religions, nationalities, et cetera, that may differ from his or her own. The allowable degree of latitude depends on how a principle or value has been formulated, and this implies conscious decision-making. The decision-making, as Morton (1998:167) explains, occurs within the dynamics created by the values of other people, own and others' preferences, likes or dislikes and leads to different forms of behaviour for different people (Morton 1998:168).

Tolerance involves ethical behaviour

As mentioned:

if liberalism has a future, it is in giving up the search for a rational consensus on the best way of life. Nearly all societies today contain several ways of life, with many people belonging to more than one. (Gray 2009:22)

Rational inquiry in ethics – including the ethics of tolerance – therefore does not yield consensus on the best life; it shows that the good life comes in many varieties. What is new in the modern world, according to Gray (2009:22), is not acceptance of diversity (i.e. *difference*) in styles of life but rather hostility to hierarchies. We need to understand that humans nowadays prefer to live *differently* and yet should strive towards living peacefully together (Gray 2009:24, 25). J.S. Mill's view (quoted by Grayling 2002:7) remains relevant even today: 'Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest.'

Mill's view carries a number of significant implications for our time. It defines a tolerant person as one who respects the differences amongst human beings or within a society. A tolerant person also holds that the human community benefits by permitting a variety of lifestyles to flourish because they represent experiments from which much ought to be learned about how to deal with the human condition. He or she furthermore upholds the premise that no one has the right to tell another how to be or how to act, provided that such being and acting does no harm to others (Grayling 2002:7).⁹ To permit, allow, comply or forbear is a form of tolerance that is easy to defend from a purely pragmatic point of view: we permit, allow, comply and forbear because we have a right to live our own lives and therefore do not want to radicalise or subject everything to some kind of inquisition. It simply makes practical sense to do so.

'Tolerance' is a social concept that not only refers to the mental construct *tolerance* but also requires serious philosophical (theoretical and conceptual) reflection. As De Botton (2012) avers:

We will never discover cast-iron rules of good conduct which will answer every question that might arise about how human beings can live peacefully and well together. However, a lack of absolute agreement on the good life should not in itself be enough to disqualify us from investigating and promoting the theoretical notion of such a life. (p. 83)

It therefore follows that in education all stakeholders and role players should, at all times, have an understanding of *tolerance* and *intolerance* as mental constructs.

Tolerance involves reasonable argument

Faith and religious thoughts and actions are based on deliberate reflection and reasoning. A religiously tolerant person, for instance, will allow others with opposing viewpoints to have their say and will then leave the upshot to what Grayling (2007:8) refers to as the democracy of ideas, that is, the power of argument to decide which ideas shall

9. Although this modern liberal view of tolerance might explain the need and fact of tolerance in the secular environment that is currently taking root all over the world, it might not be satisfactory to (religion) educationists preferring to educate and to look at tolerance from a particularist, confessional perspective. Permitting, allowing, complying and forbearing may be a preferable middle ground to some followers of many orthodox religions: they may not necessarily be denouncing something, but they may be prepared to avert their eyes temporarily.

prevail. The only coercion in these conditions, Grayling (2002:9) correctly argues, should be that of argument; the only obligation should be honest reasoning.¹⁰ In saying this, Grayling harks back to the opinion of J.S. Mill who said that one should reason with a person holding a view that is incorrect according to your opinion (Mill in Morton 1998:170). On the one hand, Mill (in Morton 1998:171) defends the right of individuals to express their beliefs freely, even when those beliefs contradict widely-held political, religious or moral beliefs. On the other hand, he stresses the benefits of free reasonable discussion with such persons.

Morton (1998:172) derives two principles from Mill's view: Free and open discussion is a social good, and free and questioning discussion often leads to discovery of the truth. In the present case, free and questioning discussion will lead to discovery of what is acceptable regarding religious tolerance. Discussion will reveal the reasons for (*in casu*, religiously intolerant) beliefs and actions; discovery of those reasons will affect an individual's choices. In sum, says Morton (1988:173), individuals need to think hard about what one might call a person's map of certainty amongst his or her beliefs. The best way to do this is by being intelligently sceptical. Peck (2006:4) agrees: It is only when we encounter problems (in this case, with an intolerant life and worldview) that we grow mentally and spiritually (Peck 2006:174). To develop a realistic religious perspective and/or worldview, that is, one that conforms to the reality of the cosmos and our role in it (including what actions are expected of us in it), we must constantly revise and extend our understanding to include new knowledge in the larger world.

Tolerance implies difference

One of the reasons why some people may choose to be tolerant of others who exhibit intolerant behaviour could be traced back to the uniquely human characteristic of individuation and separation (as advocated by Developmental Psychology) (N. Boersma [Driestar Educatief, Gouda, Netherlands] pers. Comm., 08 December 2011); in other words, to the notion of *difference* – that which makes each person unique (Visker 1996, 2004). If we asked the mental constructs *tolerance* and *intolerance*: 'Why are you here?' and demanded from them to give account of themselves, the answers that surface all seem to point to constructs outside of these two constructs themselves. In the case of *tolerance*, the answers point to human qualities such as kindness, patience, courtesy, humility, self-control, courage, resilience, respect, et cetera; and, in the case of *intolerance*, to human qualities and behaviours such as stereotyping, discrimination, avoidance

10. La Folette (2007:7) offers two sets of practical guidelines for conducting such a reasonable discussion. Firstly, we have to ask ourselves whether an argument or a view is plausible, defensible, based on full information, careful calculation, astute perception, and if it has successfully survived the criticism of others in the marketplace of ideas (i.e. the power of argument). The second set entails the execution of six steps to decide whether a view, argument or action can be morally justified: (1) we should strive to make an informed decision based on the best evidence and then act accordingly, even though the best evidence will never guarantee certainty. (2) To make such an informed decision, the discussants should understand the relevant issues, (3) take a longer-term perspective, (4) set aside irrational biases, (5) and inculcate a willingness to subject their tentative conclusions to the criticisms of others. (6) And finally, the discussants should acknowledge their uncertainty, admit their fallibility, and be prepared to consider new ideas, especially when they are supported by strong arguments.

and religious conflict (Wolhuter, Van der Walt & Potgieter 2014:10–17).

If we asked *difference* to explain why it is here and to give account of itself one notices that it is not able to give an account of itself in terms of something outside of itself in the same way that (*in*)*tolerance* was able to do. This is, according to Visker (2005), because *difference* seems to reside and rest in itself; it can only point to itself, suggesting that it may be its own reason-for-being. Visker (2004:13, 25, 46) says that this is because *difference* is only accessible to the thing or person who actually carries the *difference*. With reference to Spinoza, Visker (1997:158) explains that everything – insofar as it is in itself – endeavours to persist in its being, adding that ‘a thing cannot have anything within itself whereby it can be destroyed.’ The reason for *difference* therefore rests within *difference* itself, suggesting to us that it may be the ontic fountainhead from which all intolerant attitudes and behaviour may spring. Put differently, if *difference* did not exist (did not have ontic status) there would have been no cause to discriminate against or be intolerant of others with different attributes.

It may be argued that this line of reasoning by Visker presupposes an idealistic, Platonic, abstract human being who is somehow disengaged from all culture (cf. Visker 1997:159), whereas the daily *conatus essendi* reality of all human beings – albeit somewhat simplistic – seems to suggest that everybody is always attached to, rooted in, absorbed by and fully immanentised into a particular (cultural) context or series of related contexts (cf. Visker 1997:159). So, although the reason for *difference* may very well rest within *difference* itself, the context-bound, daily *conatus essendi* reality of us human beings allows for *difference* to be comprehended in terms of observable qualities outside of itself.

This helps to explain why all observable instances and examples of intolerance that are based on perceived differences are merely attempts at depriving the Other¹¹ of their alterity (Visker 1997:160), to reduce them to their ‘form’ – the colour of their skin, the physiognomy of their face, et cetera. The alterity of the Other is thus reduced to particular characteristics which make them different from us and, in this way, the Other is robbed of their mystery or their enigma – a mystery which consists precisely of the fact that the Other’s alterity is not the consequence or the sum of their other ‘qualities’, but *precedes* them; is independent of them. To reduce the Other to their form, to their role, to their context, to contextualise them within their culture is tantamount to murdering them, depriving them of their unique dignity, reducing them to exemplars of some or other sort, taking from them that which makes them each to be a singular person – in short, misrecognising their individual personhood. It denies the other the privilege to become and to be – first and foremost – a person (Visker 1997:161).

This, then, also helps to explain why tolerance seems to come into play when we are confronted with the outwardly

11. Visker refers to the alterity of the other person as ‘Other’ (*Fr autrui*) with a capital ‘O’, in much the same way as has been done earlier by Emmanuel Levinas.

observable instances of perceived *difference* – in terms of these above-mentioned contexts where it becomes possible for human beings to perceive, for example, culture, religion, habits, customs, clothing, cuisine and manners. Tolerance can, therefore, be understood as the outgrowth of character qualities such as kindness, patience, courtesy, humility, self-control, and courage – each of which is underpinned by a particular hierarchy of values. Intolerance (or, more correctly, *especially* intolerance) is also usually expressed through these personal qualities (Gateways to Better Education 2005:1, 2).

Tolerance implies a spectrum of behaviour

According to Vermeer and Van der Ven (2004) and Cush and Francis (2006), (religious) behaviour could be plotted on a spectrum. At the one end of the spectrum *tolerance* may be understood to reflect a permissive, laissez-faire and completely inclusivist attitude toward those whose opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, et cetera, may *differ* from one’s own.

Towards the middle of the spectrum, *tolerance* is usually understood to represent an attitude that reflects freedom from bigotry. *Tolerance* is an individual ability to treat someone or something with indulgence or forbearance, to bear, to put up with. In this sense, to tolerate means to allow the existence or occurrence – of something that one dislikes or disagrees with – to endure with forbearance. A person may condone what he or she cannot concede, but which he or she nevertheless forbears. *Tolerance* is also understood to be an (individual) act of showing interest in and concern for those ideas, opinions, practices, et cetera, that may be foreign to one’s own; it represents a liberal, undogmatic viewpoint with regard to such opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, et cetera. Towards the middle of the spectrum, *tolerance* is usually described as a fair, objective attitude toward such opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, and so forth. It is also understood as an individual’s capacity to endure – a kind of sustained behaviour of resilient endurance. Human beings are naturally diverse (i.e. *different*) in many ways; *tolerance* therefore means, amongst others, accepting every reasonable way of being human (Visanmiu 2012:1, 2). Acceptance and tolerance are however, not the same thing, because one can tolerate something without actually accepting it. What underlies tolerance seems to be:

the recognition that there is plenty of room in the world for alternatives to [*co-exist*], and if one is offended by what others do, it is because one has let it get under one’s skin. (Grayling 2009:9)

At the opposite end of the spectrum, we find extremely intolerant behaviour due to extreme dogmatism and orthodoxy flowing from socially unacceptable stances such as religious extremism and exclusivism, fundamentalism and even fanaticism.

All of the following stances can, for example, be plotted on this spectrum or continuum: from inclusivism to exclusivism, from religio and dialogic pluralism to religio-centrism, from

discrimination, fundamentalism, stereotyping, defensiveness to wholehearted acceptance of religious and other differences in other people (also see Gateways to Better Education 2005:2; Wolhuter, Van der Walt & Potgieter 2014:1, 2, 10–17).

The foregoing analysis of 'tolerance' and *tolerance* has important pedagogical implications, particularly for religious education, as well as for religion education.¹² The following implications flow from the above discussion.

(Religion) Pedagogical implications

Religion educationists should possess a profound understanding of (religious) tolerance

The child comes into the world from the maternal lap of human society and finds his or her abode in a world of fellow human beings who differ on many grounds, including in terms of life and a worldview. Inherent in the condition of childhood is the idea of yet-to-be (Du Plooy *et al.* 1983:46); in order for children to learn the virtues of tolerance towards those who may differ from them, they are also dependent on education of, for and about tolerance. This implies that their teachers and caregivers must command a profound understanding of the essential features of tolerance as a mental construct and how contextual contingencies, coupled with human attitudes, actions and behaviour impact on its realisation or, alternatively, on its negation (privation) such as intolerance.

Religion educationists should inculcate (religious) tolerance from an early age

Tolerance is a uniquely human phenomenon, construct and concept. It is therefore of import that the inculcation of (religious) tolerance in terms of culture, religion, habits, customs, clothing, cuisine, manners et cetera should start at an early age. Even very young children should be taught that tolerance means respecting, accepting, appreciating and, sometimes, even celebrating and embracing the rich variety of human differences.

Religion educationists should focus on observable behaviours and attitudes to redress the problem of (religious) intolerance

Tolerance is not a final product; it is always a work-in-progress. It is never a destination, but always a journey. One is not tolerant, *per se*; one becomes (progressively more) tolerant over a period of time. This journey is (and should be) plotted along particular observable behavioural and attitudinal coordinates (which can then, retrospectively, be used to assess, evaluate and rectify any problems that may occur along this journey). This implies that educationists should focus on inculcating and encouraging behaviour such as love, respect, compassion, endurance, kindness, sympathy, patience, forgiveness, mercy, et cetera in order to pre-empt and redress the problem of (religious) intolerance.

12. It might also have implications for an empirical survey about the state of religious tolerance amongst religion education teachers and their learners. Each of the implications discussed below could be rephrased and used as an item in a questionnaire.

Religion educationists should be informed about the liberal view of tolerance, especially as it has been modified to suit modern society

It seems that the liberal ideal of tolerance which looks at rational consensus on the best way of life, remains worthy of our consideration. The reason for this being that liberalism propounds tolerance of opposing viewpoints and allows them to have their say, leaving it to the democracy of ideas and the power of argument to decide which of them shall prevail. This implies that educationists should be well informed about the essence, limits, place and role of the *modus vivendi* approach to tolerance.

Religion educationists should create safe dialogic-dialogic spaces for inculcating tolerant behaviour

Educationists should consider constructing dialogic spaces (see Rule 2004) where teacher-educators and learners may be allowed the freedom to explore the potentially unifying power of honest conversation (on a dialectical *niveau*) with regard to religious differences. These dialogic spaces should be constructed as safe dialogic spaces where all participants may securely explore (and learn to assign meaning to) the full spectrum and continuum of tolerance-related issues, attitudes, actions and behaviours.

Religion educationists should strategise their interventions with intolerant learners on the basis of the five essential features of intolerance discerned above

Focus on tolerance as dependent on conscious decision-making

In order to set out on the journey towards becoming a tolerant person, it is vital that teacher-educators, caregivers and learners alike should understand that tolerance, in the final analysis, always involves conscious, deliberate decision-making.

Focus on tolerance as dependent on reasonable argument

As part of the socialisation process that forms the core of education, logical argument and honest reasoning should lead teacher-educators, caregivers and learners to understand all the relevant issues concerning religious and other forms of (in)tolerance. Through the power of reasonable argument they should strive always to take a longer-term perspective and to set aside irrational biases. Teacher-educators should seek to inculcate in their learners a willingness to subject their tentative conclusions to the criticisms of others whilst refraining from exhibiting intolerant behaviour. All discussants should acknowledge their uncertainty, admit their fallibility and be prepared to consider new ideas, especially when these are supported by strong arguments.

Focus on tolerance as dependent on personal ethical orientation

Humans will always have reason to live differently. A *modus vivendi* seems to be one of the more ideal ethical orientations

through which we can work towards a more tolerant society. Learners should be taught and educated that permitting, allowing, complying and forbearing all constitute acceptable forms of tolerance because everyone has a right to live their own lives and because it makes practical sense to do so.

Focus on tolerance as dependent on understanding difference

As argued, the essence of *tolerance* or *intolerance* seems to derive its intelligibility from the onticity *difference*. Tolerance only seems to come into play when we are confronted with *differences* of whatever nature. If teacher-educators and caregivers can lead learners to understand this, it should make it easier for them to teach their learners what tolerance means in the context of the rich diversity of our world's cultures.

Focus on tolerance as exhibiting a spectrum or continuum of behaviour

Teacher-educators and caregivers should teach their learners that tolerant behaviour may be exhibited that ranges – depending on time, circumstance and context – from a permissive, *laissez-faire* (inclusivist) attitude, on the one end of an imaginary spectrum, to an attitude that reflects (in the middle of the continuum) freedom from bigotry or an individual ability to treat someone or something with indulgence or forbearance, a fair, objective attitude or a kind of sustained behaviour of resilient endurance, to an exclusivist, discriminatory and stereotypical stance at the other end of the spectrum. This spectrum or continuum differs from person to person, and from community to community and may include various stances. In order to teach learners that tolerance and intolerance are not only or even invariably forms of acceptance and rejection respectively, educationists should be well-informed about the many variations along the continuum.

Conclusion

We hope to have contributed somewhat to recent scholarly attempts at understanding the concept 'tolerance', respectively 'intolerance'. Our semantic study showed that the term 'tolerance' has a certain width of meaning of which (religion) educationists should take cognisance. Our ontological study contributed a series of essential features of tolerance of which (religion) educators and educationists also should be aware. In view of our findings, educators should problematise intolerant views and help the younger generation to work through them, think about them and thus arrive at a more balanced life and worldview, including a view of others and the differences they display. Educators who understand all these niceties will be able to guide the children in their care towards better peaceful coexistence as future adults.

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Authors' contributions

C.C.W. (North-West University) was responsible for some of the literature scooping and for drafting the paragraphs on modern liberal views of tolerance and the semantic exploration of the term 'tolerance'. J.L.v.d.W. (North-West University) and F.J.P. (North-West University) were co-responsible for everything else. F.J.P. wrote the manuscript, whilst J.L.v.d.W. edited the final draft.

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